For the study of Liberal, SDP and Liberal Democrat history

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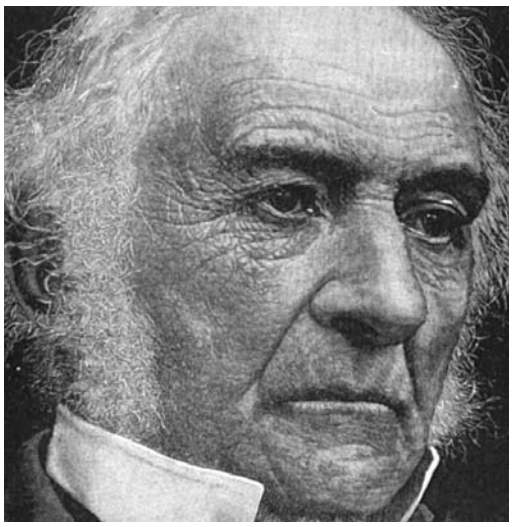
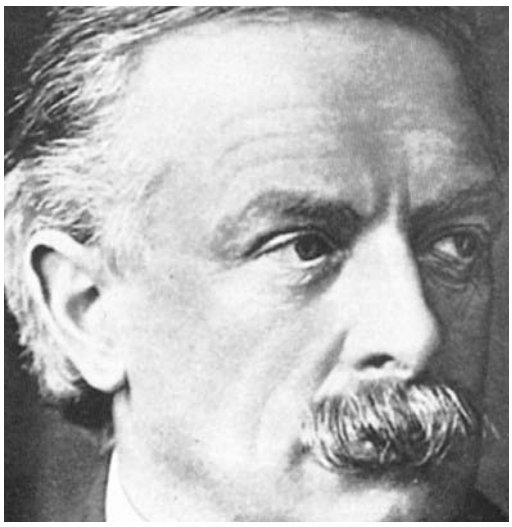
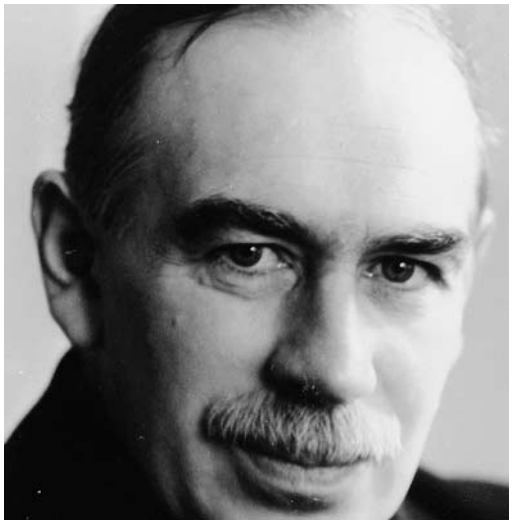
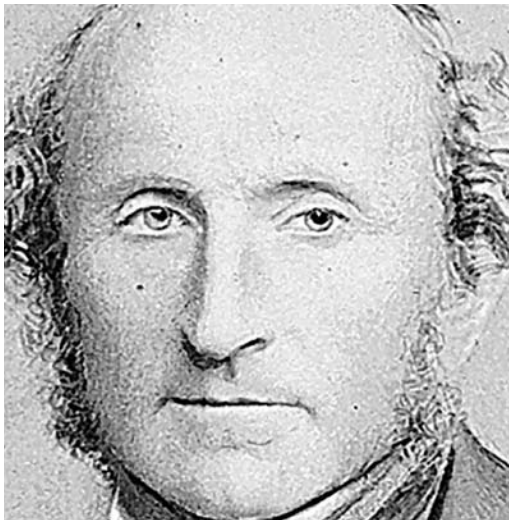
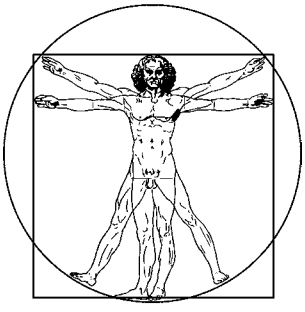
Journal of Liberal HISTORY

Great Liberals: the final four



Liberal Democrat History Group

Joint British Liberal Political Studies Group Conference, 19–21 January 2007

The BLPSG held its second conference between 19–21 January 2007, at Birmingham University Conference Centre. Once again the conference was in a former stately home and offered the delegates a comfortable and rather grand setting. Dr Alistair Clarke (who has now gone to Queen's University, Belfast) and Dr Colin Copus (Birmingham) were the local organisers, while Dr Russell Deacon (University of Wales Institute, Cardiff) acted once more as the overall facilitator for the running of the conference.

Delegates came from eleven universities, including one from France; there were nineteen in total. It was sponsored mainly be the Political Studies Association, for whom the group are most grateful. It was once again the largest gathering of historians, political scientists and politicians, from across the UK and Europe, who study the Liberal Democrats in the UK for the academic year. The conference also helped enable the most in-depth study of the Liberal Democrats to occur at an academic level in the UK. Nevertheless the figure was down on the first year of those attending.

The Saturday evening dinner was addressed by John Hemming, MP for Birmingham Yardley, who spoke on the topic of 'How to deal with issues of constitutional law and the privileges of parliament'. Many readers will know that Hemming is a controversial politician who specialises in the use of judicial review. He spent much of his talk explaining exactly how and why this was done.

Elsewhere in the conference the situation regarding the party's leadership, just one year on from Charles Kennedy's departure, was amongst one of the many papers presented. Other conference topics included Liberal Democrat tax policies; the state of the party in 2007; campaigning, gender and candidate selection; the European Liberals; the Liberal Democrats in the forthcoming Scottish and Welsh elections; and Prime Ministers, leaders and other important Liberal figures.

The next BLPSG conference is planned for the winter of 2008–09. Political history papers will be particularly welcome; look out for further details in future issues of the *Journal of Liberal History*. In the mean time, the Group will be organising panels at conferences of the Political Studies Association and its Elections, Parties and Opinion Polls sub-group

Anyone interested in the work of the BLPSG should contact:

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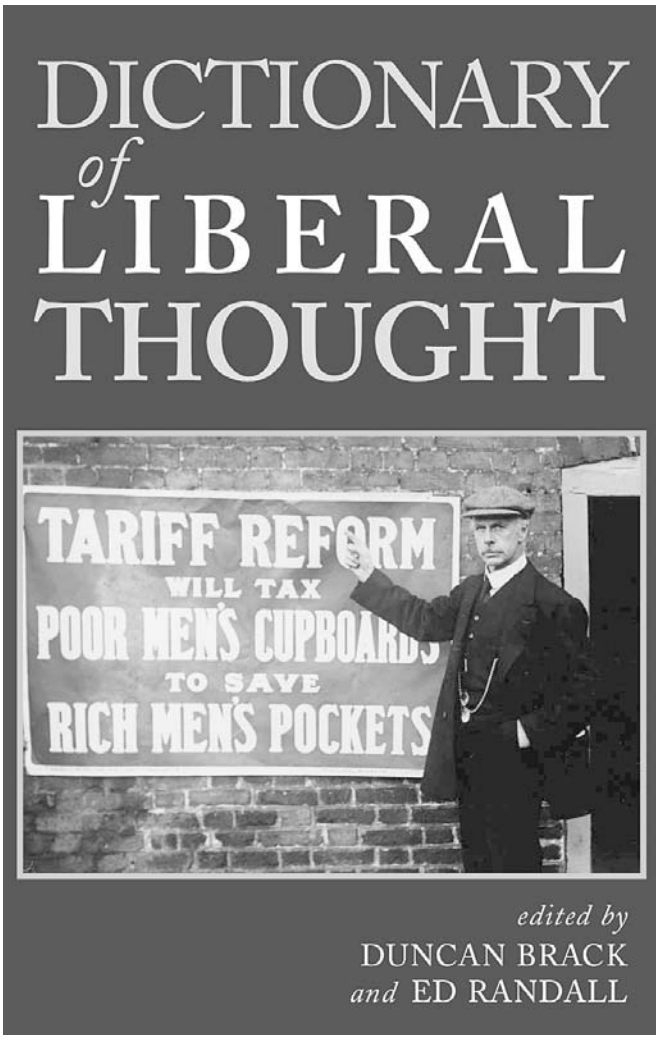
The Dictionary of Liberal Thought

'If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants'. Locke, Bentham, Mill, Hobhouse, Keynes, Rawls … Liberalism has been built on more than three centuries' work of political thinkers and writers, and the aspirations of countless human beings who have fought for freedom, democracy, the rule of law and open and tolerant societies.

In the first-ever such publication, the History Group's *Dictionary of Liberal Thought* provides an accessible guide to the key thinkers, groups and concepts associated with liberalism –not only British but also European and American. The essential reference book for every thinking Liberal.

Copies are available from the **Westminster Bookshop**, at its stand at Liberal Democrat conference, or at 8 Artillery Row, London SW1; www.westminsterbookshop.co.uk; price: £35.

Copies are also available from the **History Group stand** at Lib Dem conference: special price £28 for *Journal* subscribers.



Journal of Liberal History

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Liberal Democrat History Group

The Liberal Democrat History Group promotes the discussion and research of 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 historical commentaries, details of publications, back issues of the *Journal*, and archive and other research sources, see our website at: **www.liberalhistory.org.uk**.

Chair: **Tony Little** Honorary President: **Lord Wallace of Saltaire**

THE SEAR
GREATES

William Ewart Gladstone, David Lloyd George, John Maynard Keynes, John Stuart Mill – who is the greatest Liberal of all time? The Liberal Democrat History Group's poll for the greatest British Liberal in history is now entering its final stage. In July, *Journal* readers voted between fifteen potential candidates (plus an eclectic collection of write-ins). The result is given in summary below; the final four to emerge were Gladstone, Lloyd George, Keynes and Mill, with Asquith as a fairly close runner-up. In the next three pages you will find concise biographies of the four contenders in the final stage, put together by **Duncan Brack** and **York Membery**. *Journal* readers, together with all Liberal Democrats attending the party's autumn conference, now have to make the final decision – which of the four is the greatest?

THE CASE for each of the top four will be presented at the History Group's fringe meeting at the autumn Liberal Democrat conference in Brighton (see back page for details). Leading politicians and historians will make the case for each one of the four.

Enclosed with this *Journal* is a ballot paper, which if posted, must reach us no later than Tuesday 18 September (it can also be emailed – see the paper for details). If you are attending Liberal Democrat conference, you can hand in your paper to the History Group stand in the exhibition, by the end of Wednesday 19 September, or at the fringe meeting that evening.

The exercise has generated a surprising amount of interest from the media (surprising to us, anyway), with BBC Radio (*Today, Westminster Hour*), *The Guardian, The Sunday Times* and the *New Statesman* all mentioning it. Look out for more coverage in the run-up to the final result!

The first-stage ballot

Just under a hundred *Journal* readers voted in the first-stage ballot, over a fifth of our circulation – not bad considering we didn't provide reply-paid envelopes. The count extended to fourteen stages. The summary result is given in the table; STV aficionados can be sent a copy of the full count by emailing journal@liberalhistory.org.uk.

Journal readers were highly inventive in coming up with write-in candidates, including some highly obscure characters (mostly Whigs), and some we were going to rule out for being alive, or for not being even remotely Liberal; but perhaps less smart when it came to voting for them – the vast majority were listed as lower preferences than number 1, so of course were all eliminated, with zero first preferences, when we started knocking candidates off the bottom.

Below are summary biographies for the final four candidates.

RCH FOR THE ST LIBERAL

W. E. Gladstone (1809–98)

William Ewart Gladstone was the political giant of Victorian politics. He defined the Liberal Party of the second half of the nineteenth century: the party of peace, retrenchment, reform and – above all – trust in the people.

A minister by the age of twenty-five, he left office for the last time at eighty-five. He served as Prime Minister on no less than four occasions, three of them after his 'retirement' in 1875. He was the leading orator of his age, not only in Parliament but outside, regularly addressing audiences of 20,000 or more.

Originally a Tory, he was converted to the cause of free trade under Sir Robert Peel. As Chancellor of the Exchequer in the 1850s and 1860s, he abolished tariffs, simplified taxation, ended paper duties to facilitate the growth of the press and established the Post Office Savings Bank. With other Peelites, in 1859 he joined with Whigs and Radicals to create the Liberal Party, and nine years later became its leader. Under his four premierships, the Irish Church was disestablished, the secret ballot introduced, the purchase of army commissions abolished, state primary education established and the franchise reformed and extended. He pursued a foreign policy guided by the 'love of freedom' and action through a 'concert of nations'.

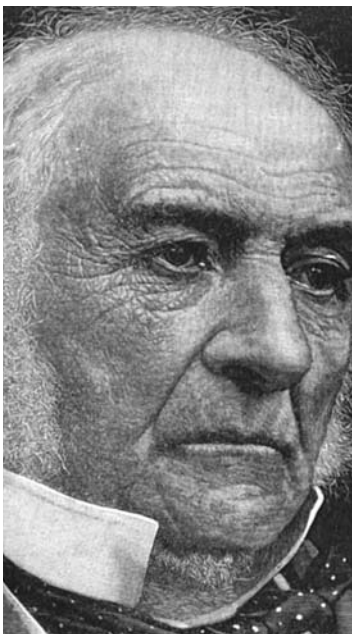
For Gladstone, politics was, above all else, about great moral issues rather than selfish interests. Hence his conversion to Irish Home Rule – which, despite two attempts, he never achieved, splitting his party in the process. His preoccupation with moral issues also explains his opposition to radical 'constructionist' legislation, which could too easily destroy incentives for self-help and voluntaryism. Yet he was always a government activist willing to expand the role of the state, as a regulator (for example, in railway regulation, or Irish land reform), or as a provider where voluntary means were inadequate, such as in education.

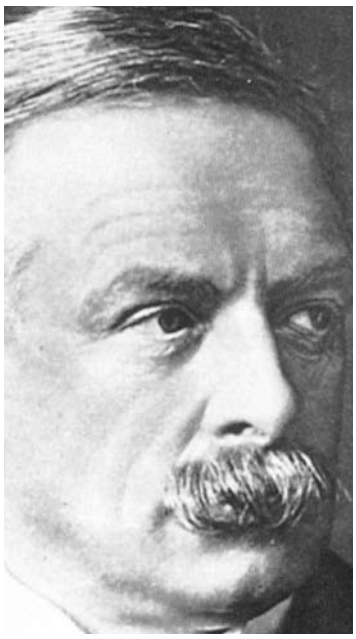
In the time left over from office, Gladstone collected china, wrote on Homer and participated in the religious controversies of his time. He was a man of immense physical and mental energy, chopping down trees and reading books (20,000 of them, according to Roy Jenkins) for relaxation. He moulded and embodied Victorian Liberalism. He was not only a great Liberal; he was a great human being.

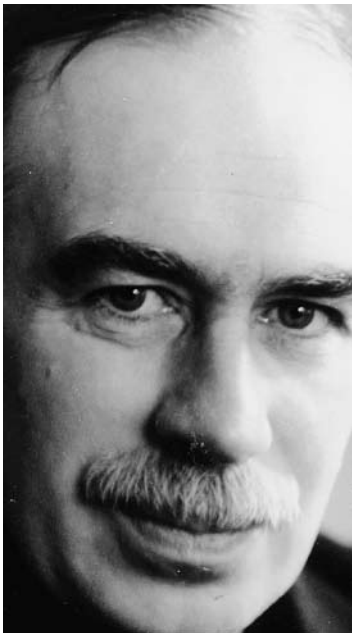
John Maynard Keynes (1883–1946)

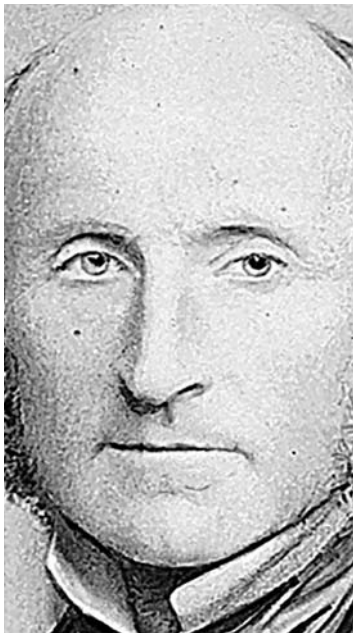
As well as Liberal politicians, Liberal thinkers have helped to shape government in twentieth-century Britain. Greatest among them was Keynes, the most influential and important economic thinker of the century, whose ideas came to underpin Western governments' post-war economic strategy.

Primarily a Cambridge academic, John Maynard









Far left: Gladstone, Keynes

Left: Lloyd George, Mill

Keynes worked for the government in both wars. During the First World War he advised Lloyd George on war finance and the Versailles peace settlement, resigning over its punitive terms. In the Second, he was the leading economic adviser to the Treasury (1940–46), and headed the British delegation to the Bretton Woods talks in 1944, which laid the foundations for the post-war international financial and trading system.

His economic works include his *Tract on Monetary Reform* (1923) and *On Money* (1930), still regarded as his major works by many monetary economists. His most famous work, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (1936), effectively invented macroeconomics. He showed that the price system could not be relied upon to achieve an equilibrium that made full use of human resources, and argued that governments should manage the economy to eliminate unemployment, especially by running budget deficits. The book reads like a summary of all economics written subsequently, though, like the Bible and the works of Karl Marx, its very richness has led to thousands of articles and books disputing its meaning.

Keynes was also an active Liberal. He was a pioneer of the Liberal Summer School movement, a member of the Liberal Industrial Inquiry, which produced *Britain's Industrial Future*, the famous 'Yellow Book' (1928), and part-author of the 1929 Liberal manifesto and of the accompanying *Can Lloyd George Do It?*, which explained the Liberal Party's plans to cure unemployment.

Like all great Liberals, Keynes was essentially an optimist. Through his brilliant insights he showed how economics could be used to help create and maintain the conditions in which human beings could live civilised, creative and passionate lives.

David Lloyd George (1863–1945)

David Lloyd George is one of the greatest and at the same time one of the most controversial politicians in the history of the Liberal Party. He played a central role in the great reformist administrations of 1905–16. As party leader (1926–31), he introduced Keynesian economics to the Liberal programme and to British politics. But his period as Prime Minister, from 1916–22, split the party into rival factions, presaging its catastrophic decline.

Lloyd George grew up in North Wales in humble circumstances, and qualified as a solicitor before winning election as MP for Caernarfon Boroughs in 1890. He rapidly earned a reputation as a radical, and was prominent in the opposition to the Boer War. He entered the cabinet first as President of the Board of Trade and then as Chancellor of the Exchequer. He established himself as a dynamic, radical force in the government, introducing the major Liberal social reforms, including old age pensions, National Insurance and the 'People's Budget' of 1909.

He served as Minister of Munitions and then Secretary of State for War in the first

wartime coalition. In December 1916, after mounting concern over Asquith's ineffectual leadership, he found himself facing irresistible pressure to take office as Prime Minister. He proved an exceptionally able war leader, but the split of 1916 gravely wounded the Liberal Party and eventually led to its eclipse by Labour.

Succeeding Asquith as leader in July 1926, Lloyd George used his famous Fund (accumulated from the sale of honours) to finance a series of policy committees. These produced, most famously, the 'Yellow Book', *Britain's Industrial Future*, which proposed a radical programme of state intervention in the economy to reduce unemployment. Under his inspirational leadership, the party enjoyed a newfound energy and vitality – but was by then too firmly established in third place to be able to break through the barriers of the electoral system.

One of the most dynamic and brilliant politicians ever to lead the Liberal Party and become premier, Lloyd George remains a figure of controversy; but his achievements, first in implementing the New Liberal programme of social reform, and then in ensuring that the Liberal Party remained committed to social liberalism, are real and lasting.

Great Liberals: first-stage result

Candidate	*First preference votes*	*Eliminated / **elected** at stage*
H. H. Asquith	4	Runner-up
William Beveridge	3	6
Violet Bonham-Carter	2	4
Henry Campbell-Bannerman	5	11
Richard Cobden	3	9
Millicent Garrett Fawcett	2	5
Charles James Fox	2	4
W. E. Gladstone	**37**	**1**
Jo Grimond	4	12
Roy Jenkins	4	10
John Maynard Keynes	**6**	**14**
David Lloyd George	**6**	**13**
John Locke	3	7
John Stuart Mill	**9**	**8**
Lord John Russell	1	3
Write-ins		
John Bright	1	3
Winston Churchill	1	3
Stephen College	1	3
T. H. Green	1	3
L. T. Hobhouse	1	3
Viscount Palmerston	1	3
Herbert Samuel	0	2
Adam Smith	1	3
Quota	*= 19.61*	

John Stuart Mill (1806–73)

Philosopher, economist, journalist, political writer, social reformer, and, briefly, Liberal MP, John Stuart Mill is one of the most famous figures in the pantheon of Liberal theorists, and the greatest of the Victorian Liberal thinkers.

Eldest son of the Scottish utilitarian philosopher James Mill, John Stuart's works have had far more lasting interest. In *Principles of Political Economy* (1848) he voiced his unease concerning the excessive power and influence of the state; people understood their own business better than government did. However, he acknowledged a clear role for the state, for example in regulating natural monopolies.

He is best known for his masterpiece, *On Liberty* (1859), which emphatically vindicated individual moral autonomy, and celebrated the importance of originality and dissent. Although generations of Liberals have used his arguments to oppose state authoritarianism, in fact Mill devoted most of the work to arguing against middle-class conformism, which stultified opposition and a critical cast of mind.

In *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861) Mill expounded his doctrine of democracy, emphasising the importance of local government. Putting his beliefs into practice, he served as Liberal MP for Westminster from 1865 to 1868, where he argued for proportional representation and the extension of suffrage to women householders – a stance he developed in *The Subjection of Women* (1869), which remains the only feminist classic written by a man. He maintained that social reform, rather than repression, was the cure for civil unrest in Ireland, and argued for the impeachment of the brutal Governor Eyre of Jamaica. Mill's defence of civil rights and racial equality helped to lose him his seat in 1868.

Mill's intellectual achievements were unmatched in Victorian England. His defence of individual liberty can still set the terms of debate today, for example over freedom of speech. This helps to explain why *On Liberty* is the symbol of office of the President of the Liberal Democrats – and, what is more, the symbol of liberalism itself.

LIBERAL C

DENBIGH, OLDHAM AN

Following the 1931 general election, the Liberal Party soon disintegrated into three rival factions: the mainstream party under Herbert Samuel; the Liberal Nationals led by John Simon; and a small family group surrounding David Lloyd George. Though the last named ultimately rejoined the party, the majority of Liberal Nationals never did. **David Dutton** tells the story of two constituencies where Liberals and Liberal Nationals fought each other at the polls in 1935.

One of the most striking features of the Liberal–Liberal National split was the reluctance of the mainstream party to challenge the Simonite heretics in those constituencies where the sitting MP, the local party organisation, or both, had defected to the rebel cause. There were superficial justifications for this approach. It allowed Liberals to maintain the pretence that the breach of 1931, like many before it, was no more than a passing quarrel and that the Liberal Nationals would one day repent and return to the fold. 'With one or two exceptions', declared the *Liberal Magazine* as late as 1934, 'the Liberal Nationals are bound in the course of time to reunite with the normal Liberal Party'.[1] In addition, it was clear that clashes between the two groups would inevitably split the Liberal vote to the probable electoral advantage of Labour or Conservative opponents. Furthermore, if Liberals challenged Liberal Nationals and then failed to defeat them, the impact would be worse than if the Liberal Nationals had been left undisturbed in their seats.

The experience of a by-election in East Fife in February 1933 provided a salutary warning. After a period of uncertainty, the Liberal National candidate, James Henderson Stewart, was opposed by an independent free-trade Liberal, David Keir. The latter was not authorised by Liberal headquarters, but enjoyed the backing of several prominent Liberals. But Keir came a disappointing fourth out of five candidates and the clash between Liberal and Liberal National inevitably put back hopes of eventual reunion. As late as 1937 Archibald Sinclair, by then leader of the Liberal Party, warned of the consequences of clashes in the constituencies in terms of initiating full-scale warfare between the two factions:

> We at Headquarters cannot – at any rate yet – countenance attacks upon seats held by Liberal National members of Parliament. They have not yet done it to us openly, and we should have to consider very carefully before we took the initiative against them.[2]

CIVIL WAR
ND THE 1935 ELECTION

But the policy of peaceful co-existence with the Liberal Nationals also had its downside, as Sinclair himself had been quick to recognise. Writing as early as November 1932, he had drawn attention to the Liberals' need to stress their claim to be *the* Liberal Party rather than merely one representation of the Liberal creed. 'If you will forgive me for saying so … we don't want to be called Samuelite Liberals as opposed to Simonite Liberals, we want to emphasise the fact that we are the Liberal Party.'[3] By leaving Liberal Nationals in place and unchallenged in constituencies where there was a significant Liberal tradition, the mainstream party could only encourage the perception that the breakaway group was the authentic voice of the Liberal creed. This was an image which the Liberal Nationals themselves were understandably keen to foster. 'It must be noted', suggested their house journal, 'that the Liberal Nationals had not split off from the rest of the Liberal Party. The Party as a whole formed part of the First National Government [August – November 1931] and the small section which now forms the Opposition Liberal Group subsequently split off from the Party.'[4]

On balance, however, it was the arguments against confrontation which prevailed. As a result, formal clashes between Liberals and Liberal Nationals remained very rare. This makes the two inter-Liberal contests which did take place at the 1935 general election of particular interest and significance. In the North Wales constituency of Denbighshire West (usually referred to simply as Denbigh) Dr Henry Morris-Jones, first elected as a Liberal MP in 1929, was a natural recruit to the ranks of the Liberal Nationals. He was appalled by the performance of the Labour government of 1929–31 and especially by its management of the economy. 'I have seen what a Labour majority would be like', he recorded: 'They are crude and insufferable and bring into the atmosphere of debate in this old House some of the manners of our town councils in big industrial areas.'[5]

But he was equally disappointed by the conduct of his own party, including Lloyd George's attempts to negotiate a pact to keep the government in office. 'Find Liberal party going down the abyss', he noted in May 1930.[6] It was clear to him that the party was disintegrating and equally clear on which side of the divide Morris-Jones would place himself:

> Our party has inherent difficulties. A portion of it is pro-Labour and a portion (much smaller) anti-Labour. Party organisation is going to pieces: federations are closing for lack of funds, and no-one knows how much there is in the LlG fund and what use is being made of it or to what purpose it is being kept.[7]

Though not attracted by John Simon in terms of character, Morris-Jones did concede that the leader of what became the Liberal National faction had 'seen the rocks ahead some time ago'.[8] Not surprisingly, he was among those who joined Simon in a memorial to the Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, after the formation of the National Government in

Henry Morris-Jones, Liberal National MP for Denbigh

August 1931, pledging support for any steps judged necessary to deal with the economic crisis – a clear indication of his willingness to contemplate tariffs. By the time of the general election in November, Morris-Jones had become a fully-fledged member of the Liberal National group.

But the member for Denbigh was only partially successful in carrying the local Liberal party with him. A number of local activists, particularly in the Colwyn Bay area, refused to be reconciled to the MP's change of allegiance. The annual meeting of the Denbigh Liberal Association in October 1931 saw Morris-Jones 'severely questioned … and also criticised' before he secured a vote of confidence by forty-six votes to twenty-two and was adopted as the Liberal candidate for the forthcoming election.[9] The departure of the Samuelite ministers from the National Government in September 1932 served to highlight the Denbigh MP's anomalous position and, when he accepted office as a junior whip, the Denbigh Liberal Association passed a resolution expressing disapproval. The following April a further resolution was passed urging the divisional executive committee to secure a Liberal free trade candidate for the next general election.

Thomas Waterhouse, senior vice-president of the North Wales Liberal Federation, emerged as Morris-Jones's severest critic. The important thing, he stressed, was for the Liberal Party to put its house in order at the earliest possible moment. But 'how can this be done when we have men like Dr Morris-Jones, who is holding office in a Tory administration, acting as a good Tory should, and coming down to his constituents at Denbigh and telling them that he was "as good a Liberal as ever"?'[10] A well-attended meeting of the Colwyn Bay Liberal Association in early November 1933 passed a unanimous vote of no confidence in the sitting member and, in pointed terms, called upon the county association to select a *Liberal* candidate at the earliest opportunity.[11] This, of course, is precisely what Morris-Jones claimed to be.

An 'eagerly anticipated' meeting of the divisional association was held later in the month. Morris-Jones declined to attend, but a letter from him was read out to the meeting. The MP reminded the delegates that more than half the members of the parliamentary Liberal Party, elected in 1931, were still supporting the National Government and had behind them the support of their local associations. 'I trust the Denbigh Division Liberals will take the same view.' By a vote of sixty-seven to fifty-nine Morris-Jones was re-elected president of the association, but he then faced a vote of no confidence moved by Dr Vaughan Jones of Colwyn Bay. According to Vaughan Jones, the MP had become a wholehearted supporter of what was effectively a Conservative government and of all the measures it had brought forward. He had even spoken on Conservative platforms and had supported a Conservative candidate in a recent by-election. Liberals, Vaughan Jones suggested, had now come to the parting of the ways – 'we cannot ride two horses; we must get in or get out'. By a vote of seventy-one to fifty-eight and to the cheers of the Liberal National section of the meeting, Morris-Jones survived the hostile motion.[12]

But the narrowness of the MP's victory ensured that his troubles would continue. The very fact that Morris-Jones enjoyed the continuing, and increasingly unqualified, backing of the local Conservative Association only confirmed the misgivings of his Liberal critics. According to the annual report of the Central Council of the West Denbighshire Conservatives, 'another year's experience has further emphasised his loyalty and devoted efforts in support of the National Government and we would assure Dr Morris-Jones of our utmost satisfaction and co-operation'.[13] At the Liberals' annual meeting in December 1934 the tone was very different. Morris-Jones did his best to rebut the charge that he was supporting what was, in practice, a Conservative administration. With some justice he pointed out that many right-wing Tories were critical of the government for not enacting Conservative measures. 'The fact was', he suggested, 'that the Conservative Party was going through the process of transition which was inevitable to every party facing the complex problems of the modern world.' But criticism came from Thomas Roberts, chairman of the Colwyn Bay Association, who described the MP's defence of the government as tantamount to 'whitewashing Judas Iscariot'. It was such a government as this, he added, that had lost the American colonies. 'If we judge Dr Morris-Jones by the company he keeps, he is not a good Liberal. I have no personal objection to the Doctor', stressed Roberts, 'and I would like to see him break clean away

from them. I am sure there is the making of a good Liberal in him yet.'[14]

The approach of another general election brought Denbigh's internecine Liberal dispute to a head. Nationally, the position remained that Liberals would not challenge sitting Liberal National MPs in their constituencies. Indeed, in most instances the local Liberal organisation was in no position to do so. But much depended on the initiative of the local Liberal party. Morris-Jones had behind him the full and unanimous backing of the West Denbighshire Conservative Association, but his position in relation to the corresponding Liberal Association remained as problematic as it had been since 1931.[15] The reporter of the *Denbigh Free Press* chose his words with care:

> As a rule the [annual] meeting [of the West Denbighshire Liberal Association] is a formal affair, confined mainly to the appointment of officers for the ensuing year, but we are given to understand it is not at all unlikely that advantage will be taken of the opportunity of selecting and adopting a candidate to represent the Association. Dr J. H. Morris-Jones, the Liberal National member, entered Parliament as the nominee of the Association and, having given a good account of himself during his stewardship, would no doubt have the solid backing of the great majority of his constituents.[16]

The crucial meeting was duly held on 24 October 1935. As Morris-Jones later recalled:

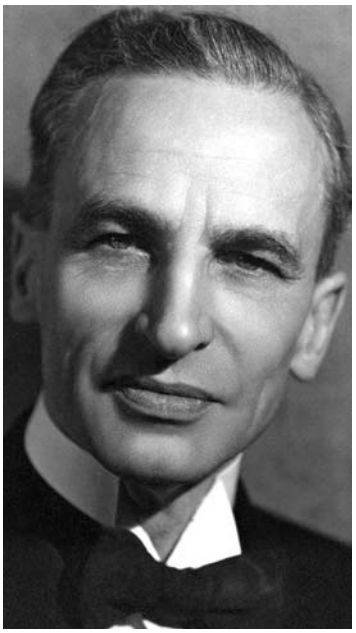
> I faced a crowd of excited delegates. In the entrance hall I met a friend who it had been whispered to me, on my way in, was likely to be adopted in my place. He assured me that he was not in the field … After a boisterous two hours' meeting my friend was adopted as the Liberal candidate by sixty-six against forty-two.[17]

The second name before the meeting was that of J. C. Davies, Director of Education for Denbighshire and a former MP for the division (1922–23), who insisted that he had only put himself forward because of pressure from local Liberals. 'I was found by those whom I sought not. I never asked a soul to support me. As a matter of fact it was the constituency that courted me, and not I the constituency.' Proposing Davies's nomination, W. G. Dodd from Llangollen said that Morris-Jones's conduct had caused division in the constituency and 'today is the day of reckoning'. Seconding the nomination, A. J. Costain from Colwyn Bay emphasised his belief that 'there should be a Liberal Member for the Division at the present time'. But there was no question of Morris-Jones standing aside gracefully. As his own proposer pointed out, there was 'a possibility that if Dr Morris-Jones was not adopted, he would come out as a National Liberal candidate', to which the MP responded, 'that is what I will do'. In practice, of course, this is what Morris-Jones already was. Only the majority backing of the local Liberal Association up to this point had enabled him to claim that he was a Liberal *tout court*. When the vote was declared, Morris-Jones remained defiant. 'This is the result here. I shall fight the seat … I shall carry my appeal to the electors of the West Denbigh Division', he declared to conflicting cries of 'Hear, hear!' and 'as a Tory'.[18] The vote, insisted Morris-Jones, had been determined by a caucus from Colwyn Bay, and there is certainly evidence that many of the MP's supporters had stayed away in unfounded confidence that he would again be adopted as the Liberal candidate.[19]

In what became a lively campaign, both Morris-Jones and Davies sought to lay claim to the mantle of true Liberalism.

At all events, Morris-Jones's supporters now decided to adopt him as the Liberal National candidate for the forthcoming election and it was significant that the sitting member retained the backing of the key officers of the West Denbighshire Liberal Association. Meanwhile his opponents rejoiced that they had finally secured the opportunity to return an authentic Liberal for a seat that had been 'one of the greatest strongholds of Liberalism'.[20] The MP 'could not have been ignorant of the strong feeling that has existed for some time among a great number of his Liberal supporters against his support of the so-called National Government. It is useless for him saying that no other government was possible.'[21]

In what became a lively campaign, both Morris-Jones and Davies sought to lay claim to the mantle of true Liberalism. Taking his case to his critics' stronghold, Morris-Jones addressed a crowded meeting in Colwyn Bay. Here, supported by Oswald Jones, chairman of the Divisional Liberal Association, he explained his position on what remained the central point of division between the two Liberal factions. He was, he stressed, as much a free trader as anyone at the meeting and he wanted to see all tariff barriers removed. But the realities of the world situation could not be ignored. 'It is quite clear that a small country like ourselves could not be allowed to become the dumping ground of the world. It was a situation which could not be tolerated. The tariffs that the Government imposed have given new life to many industries.'[22] Nor was this mere sophistry on Morris-Jones's part. None other than David Lloyd George had decided that new circumstances demanded new remedies. Speaking at Bangor on his seventy-second birthday, the still-vigorous former Prime Minister made an important contribution to the ongoing debate between



Liberal leaders: Herbert Samuel, John Simon, Archibald Sinclair

free trade and protection. His 'New Deal' proposals included a call for 'the implementation of a policy of Protection, the use of tariffs "ruthlessly and to the full" to effect the reduction, and ultimately the elimination, of tariffs in the USA.'[23] If this was the opinion of Welsh Liberalism's most famous son, it would take a brave man indeed to declare that the same sentiment expressed by Morris-Jones did not constitute true Liberalism. Furthermore, there were still in 1935 many whole-hearted Liberal voters who believed that Britain's situation, domestic and foreign, required united action by all the parties. As one newspaper correspondent put it:

> There is a substantial moderate Liberal view which considers that much of the Government's legislation has been progressive and fair to the country as a whole and that it has sought peace and given firm support to the League [of Nations]. This Liberal opinion considers that a solid body of Liberals within the administration can exert more influence for causes that are dear to Liberalism than a small handful of Liberals in opposition who do not appear to know their own mind.[24]

The former MP, Lord Clwyd, who as Sir Herbert Roberts had represented the constituency for upwards of a quarter of a century in the Liberal interest, was of the same mind. While regretting the Liberal split within the division, Clwyd assured Morris-Jones that, under existing international conditions, he was in favour of a National Government and his desire was to strengthen the influence of Liberalism in the interests of peace. 'I am, therefore, a supporter of your candidature.'[25]

For all that, it was a central point of Davies's campaign to assert that he was the only Liberal candidate – without prefix or suffix – in the field. The issue, he suggested, was clear. It was a case of Liberalism versus Toryism masquerading as Liberalism. But Davies did something to undermine his own case by following the line of Lloyd George – whose endorsement he enjoyed – on the question of tariffs. 'I am and always have been a free trader, but I quite recognise that under present circumstances free trade is not practical politics.'[26] The last days of the contest were 'very bitter' and local observers sensed a remarkable late swing to Davies.[27] But when the result was announced Morris-Jones had held on. Polling 17,372 votes, he had a majority in excess of 5,000 over Davies.[28] The latter had not been helped by the intervention of a Labour candidate who probably deprived him of a considerable number of anti-government votes. Across the country as a whole the National Government enjoyed another overwhelming victory. *The Times* drew attention to Morris-Jones's triumph and hailed him as 'the only Government Liberal who fought a Liberal'.[29]

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This, however, was not strictly true. The very different two-member constituency of Oldham, to the east of Manchester, had returned two Conservative MPs in 1931, with the Liberals standing down at the last minute as a gesture of solidarity with the recently-formed National Government, which at that point enjoyed the support of both the Simonite and Samuelite factions. But this predominantly working-class constituency, in which textile manufacture and in particular cotton-spinning was the leading industry, had been solidly Liberal in the early years of the century before that working-class allegiance began to transfer to Labour.[30] Indeed, one Liberal MP had still been elected for Oldham in each of the general elections of 1918, 1922, 1923 and 1924. Moreover, the experience

of 1929, when both seats had been taken by Labour, indicated that, in normal times, this was not natural Conservative territory. Thus, despite the fact that in 1931, each of the successful Tories polled over 20,000 more votes than their nearest Labour opponent, there was considerable doubt, as the election of 1935 approached, as to whether both seats could be held by the Conservatives. By July such thinking persuaded the executive of the local Conservative Party to adopt just one candidate for the forthcoming contest and, for the second seat, to throw its weight behind a Liberal National, 'both being supporters of the National Government'.[31]

The question now was whether the Liberal National candidate would be the sole standard-bearer of the Liberal creed by the time the country went to the polls. The debate was fully engaged by the town's press, with the Conservative-inclined *Oldham Standard* championing the cause of the Liberal Nationals, while the *Oldham Chronicle* urged local Liberals to resist the seductive embrace of the Simonite heresy. With no sign that the Liberals themselves were going to enter the contest, and with Liberal Nationals actively seeking support among the ward Liberal parties, the *Chronicle* was only too conscious of the danger which existed. 'Our object', it stressed,

> is to urge all Liberals to stand firm, to look beyond the next election, and to ensure that there shall remain Liberals and a Liberal Party in Oldham that have not sunk by absorption into the Conservative Party and become indissolubly a part of the array of the 'Haves' against the 'Have Nots'.[32]

N. A. Beechman, who had been the prospective Liberal candidate for Oldham in 1931 before withdrawing in favour of the Conservatives, added to the voters' confusion by throwing his weight behind the Liberal Nationals. He argued that the great creed of Liberalism, despite its historic achievement in removing restrictions on individual freedom, had largely stagnated since the end of the First World War. Its reputation now was for ineffectiveness, the result of its over-concentration on the removal of abuses at the expense of positive policies of construction and progress. By contrast, the Liberal Nationals:

> have had the courage to break away from the Liberal prepossession of negation and to re-establish what is the first of all Liberal principles, namely that every problem should be considered on its merits. They have refused to confound ends with means and have shown themselves capable of distinguishing expedients from principles. This has been particularly manifest in the arena of the antique controversy between Protection and Free Trade.

The blind commitment of the mainstream party to free trade, he suggested, 'does not denote honesty; on the contrary, it prevents integrity of thought'. The future function of true Liberalism would be to reconcile conscious organisation with individual liberty; its ultimate end, securing for every man and woman the power to derive enjoyment from the multifarious and enthralling possibilities of modern life. Only the Liberal Nationals, insisted Beechman, were capable of doing this.[33]

The credibility of the Liberal National challenge and, in particular, of its claim to represent the authentic voice of Liberalism in Oldham, was boosted by the party's selection of J. S. Dodd as their candidate. Dodd had contested the seat, unsuccessfully, for the mainstream Liberal Party in the general election of 1929. As soon as the election was called for 14 November, the Liberal

The blind commitment of the mainstream party to free trade, he suggested, 'does not denote honesty; on the contrary, it prevents integrity of thought'.

National machine was up and running in Oldham, working in close co-operation with local Conservatives. The agent, Robert Leitch, gathered together an enthusiastic band of workers, many of whom had helped Dodd in his earlier incarnation as a Liberal. A co-ordinating committee was set up with the Conservatives to organise the campaign and plans were drawn up to invite senior government ministers to visit the constituency. Only in mid-October did the Samuelite Liberals decide to contest the seat, though no candidate was yet chosen. The *Standard* was dismissive of their prospects:

> It is generally recognised that the Samuelite Liberals, whoever their candidate, can have little if any chance of success. They are weak numerically and there is little enthusiasm for their cause. The majority of the Liberals in the constituency will undoubtedly give their support to Mr Dodd, recognising the need in these critical days for a National Government.[34]

By contrast, the *Chronicle* insisted that the Liberals' decision was 'most important' and would mean a 'real blow' for the Liberal Nationals who had hoped that 'the rightful heirs of the Oldham radical tradition would this time allow the contest to go by default'.[35] By the end of October W. Gretton Ward had been chosen as the Liberal candidate for the election, now only a fortnight away. But the fact that the party had only put forward one candidate for the two-member constituency raised interesting questions about how Liberal supporters would distribute their second votes.

Liberal and Liberal National candidates presented the electorate's choice in strikingly different ways. Dodd argued that it would be 'supreme folly' to split the anti-socialist vote as, he suggested, had happened when he

had contested the seat in 1929. The real struggle was between 'socialist' and 'anti-socialist' forces and 'the sooner this is recognised also by those [Liberal voters] who supported him six years ago, the better it will be for the country'.[36] At the same time he was keen to emphasise his Liberal credentials and refused to accept any blame for splitting the forces of Liberalism in Oldham. 'We have not changed our opinions in the slightest degree', he insisted. 'I am still just the same Liberal I was in 1929 when 20,000 people voted for me. I had not changed my opinions by 1931 and I have not changed them by 1935.' The first plank of Liberal politics, he claimed, was personal liberty. As this was the absolute and direct antithesis of socialism, a Liberal must in the first instance be an anti-socialist. And the only guaranteed way to thwart the socialists was to go over to the National Government camp. 'There is', Dodd declared,

> a majority of Oldham Liberals who believe in the policy which we have adopted. They believe and have believed during the past year or two that, if the official Oldham Liberal Association would not co-operate, then it was up to them to work out some basis of co-operation themselves and, at any rate, to come down on one side of the fence … and for that reason the Oldham Liberal National Association was formed.[37]

Gretton Ward and his supporters entirely rejected such arguments. The *Chronicle* warned that Dodd, though calling himself a Liberal, was entangling himself with the Conservatives and, if elected, would be compelled to back measures which no true Liberal could honestly support. At the heart of the Conservative-Liberal National deception, it claimed, lay the nature of the government itself.[38] It was not a National Government in any meaningful sense, but a Conservative government and, if re-elected, the least Liberal element within its ranks would control its policies and direction even more than in the previous parliament.[39] Like Davies in Denbigh, Gretton Ward strove to present himself as the only real Liberal in the campaign and revealed that he had received 'one or two rather tempting offers if only I would join a certain other party'.[40] But, while Gretton Ward continued to stress his commitment to free trade – the issue which above all others had driven a wedge between the two wings of Liberalism – his claim to be the sole representative of the true creed was not helped by the mainstream party's growing reconciliation with Lloyd George at a time when the Welshman himself was calling for the imposition of tariffs.[41] Speaking at the King's Cinema on 6 November, Alfred Duff Cooper, Financial Secretary to the Treasury in the National Government, did his best to shake the conviction of Gretton Ward's Liberal supporters. It was, he argued, a confession of failure that nationally the 'rump' of the Liberal Party had had to coalesce with Lloyd George, despite the latter's call for the 'ruthless application' of tariffs. 'These Liberal purists', said Duff Cooper, 'who would not have tariffs from the National Government are accepting tariffs and anything else if poured down their throats with the gold from Mr Lloyd George's moneybags.'[42] Sensing that Dodd was having the better of the argument, and aware that there was no possibility of the election resulting in a Liberal government, the *Chronicle* tried to convince Oldham Liberals that upon them rested a special responsibility:

> To Liberals who seek neither occasion nor excuse for leaving their party this election brings a fine opportunity. They can oppose the National Government and its candidates, which is a protest worth a great deal. Better still, they can vote for that sound Liberalism so urgently needed in Parliament.[43]

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But however successful the Liberal candidate might be, Dodd had the considerable advantage in a two-member constituency of being the likely recipient of Liberal electors' second votes. Conservatives and Liberal Nationals were being encouraged to vote for the Conservative candidate, H. W. Kerr, and for Dodd. And with only one candidate from the Samuelite Liberals, Dodd could reasonably expect that at least some, and perhaps even a majority of, Liberals would cast their second votes in his favour. In the event of a close contest, such support might be sufficient to deny the Oldham Labour Party representation at Westminster. Sensing this opportunity, Dodd reminded Liberals of their historic role in extending the franchise. It would be quite wrong, he argued, for Liberals to vote only for the Liberal candidate:

> Do you think … the people of Oldham are going to be so misled in a moment of crisis in the nation's affairs as to waste the one great right for which the Liberal Party has fought and struggled generation by generation during the last century? I am going to say to you, whether you be Liberals or Conservatives, whatever you do you must use those two votes to which you are entitled.[44]

The declaration of the result saw both Oldham seats held by the National Government. The Conservative H. W. Kerr topped the poll with over 36,000 votes. Dodd, for the Liberal Nationals, was second, 2,000 votes behind, narrowly holding off the challenge of the Rev. G. Lang, the first of the two Labour

candidates. Gretton Ward with just 8,534 votes was bottom of the poll and lost his deposit.[45] The vast majority of those who had voted for the Conservatives had also backed the Liberal Nationals. But the result's most interesting feature lay in the distribution of Liberal second votes. It was some indication of the confusion which now lay at the heart of British Liberalism that these were well spread between all the other candidates. Some 3,000 followed the advice of Liberal Party headquarters and Lloyd George's Council of Action and backed a Labour candidate; others used only one of their votes. But enough (1,138) went to Dodd to ensure the latter's election. The *Chronicle* was predictably disappointed:

> It is certain that the Liberal vote has decided the result in Oldham and that although Mr. Lang got the larger proportion of the second votes cast by Liberals, those among them who gave their second vote to Mr Dodd gave him the seat.[46]

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Thus, in both the contests between Liberals and Liberal Nationals the latter emerged victorious. Over the country as a whole, the general election of 1935 saw a further reduction in the size of the parliamentary Liberal Party, down now to just twenty-one MPs. The Liberal Nationals had thirty-three members elected, a slight reduction from the figure for 1931.[47] At the time, and ever since, those whose loyalty lies with the mainstream party have sought to dismiss the significance of the Liberal Nationals and, in particular, to deny their right to use the name 'Liberal' to describe themselves. In Oldham, the *Chronicle* was in no doubt:

> One thing is certain and it is that the Liberal Nationals have committed themselves irretrievably to the Tories. It was their inevitable destiny … Before the next General Election Mr Hore-Belisha and his lot will have been completely swallowed, including title, by the Tories. They will have no separate organisation.[48]

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The timing of this prediction was somewhat awry, but the forecast was essentially fulfilled. In the post-war world the Liberal Nationals found it increasingly difficult to sustain an independent identity and, especially after the Woolton–Teviot Agreement of 1947, were progressively swallowed up by their Conservative allies, before finally vanishing without trace in the mid-1960s.

The 'Liberal interpretation' of the Liberal–Liberal National division therefore has the greatest of assets on its side; it is the history of the victors. The Liberal Nationals disappeared; mainstream Liberalism did not. Indeed, after reaching its electoral nadir in the early 1950s, the Liberal Party began a slow recovery which eventually saw it restored as a major player on the political stage. But this outcome looked improbable in the years leading up to the Second World War. Then, mainstream Liberalism seemed to have entered an irreversible spiral of decline. The Liberal Nationals, by contrast, were comparatively vibrant. Across the country dozens of local Liberal parties all but disappeared and their institutional organisation became moribund. But new Liberal National groups were forming in many areas, boosted by the mounting conviction that the worsening international situation demanded the continuation of the National Government.[49] In Oldham a Liberal National Club opened in November 1937:

> The Club possesses excellent facilities for both Social functions and Propaganda purposes. It has a large room upstairs that can be used for lectures and meetings, and it is the intention of the Committee to commence in the near future a series of educational talks upon political subjects. The Club has provided a special room for the Women's Section, and they are looking forward to a large increase in membership as a result of the opening of the Club.[50]

Despite what the Liberals themselves claimed, the Liberal Nationals did offer an alternative vision of the Liberal creed which, coupled with the prospect of exercising influence within government, succeeded in attracting a sizeable number of former Liberal voters. The electoral returns in Oldham reveal with precision that 1,138 Liberal voters gave their second votes to the Liberal National candidate. But what can only be guessed is the number of erstwhile Liberals who accepted the full logic of the Liberal National case and divided their two votes between Dodd and his Conservative partner, Kerr. In Denbigh, Morris-Jones estimated that he had captured in excess of 7,000 Liberal votes.[51] The impact of these defections was decisive in what was, Morris-Jones conceded, 'really a Liberal seat' and one which 'would – had it not been divided – be the last to fall in the Liberal decline which has come and is coming more'.[52]

In Oldham the *Chronicle* correspondent 'Passer-by' bemoaned the Liberal Party's failure to confront the Liberal Nationals in more of their constituencies, 'in order that the Liberals in the different divisions might be given an opportunity to express their views on the pseudo-Liberals'. Had such a course been taken, 'Sir John Simon and others of his group would not now be in parliament'.[53] But in determining their electoral strategy, the Liberals' dilemma was never

this straightforward, for an open conflict between the two factions might also have led to the loss of further Liberal seats, many of which were retained in 1935 by extremely narrow majorities. As it was, Liberals in Oldham and Denbigh were left to take comfort from their gallant but futile challenge. In Denbigh supporters of J. C. Davies gathered at the Empire Ballroom, Colwyn Bay, to discuss their party's future. 'To have a true Liberal in the field again', enthused one activist, 'has been like a breeze from the hills.'[54] Perhaps so, but in both Oldham and Denbigh Liberalism was the long-term loser. Denbigh had been Liberal for sixty years, but never was again before the seat disappeared as a result of boundary changes in the 1980s. In Oldham the Liberal tradition was less strong, but the two Oldham seats fell to Labour's landslide in 1945, with Kerr and Dodd in third and fourth places and two Liberal candidates bringing up the rear.

By the time of the 1935 general election the long-term decline of the British Liberal Party was already well advanced. But the defection of the Liberal Nationals posed a potentially mortal, if largely underestimated, challenge to its continued survival as a major political party.

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The elections on 3 May this year were probably the most important annual round of spring elections in this Westminster Parliament. **John Curtice** analyses the outcome.

ELECTIONS 2007

A new Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly were elected. Local elections were held in nearly the whole of England outside London, with voting taking place in no less than 312 councils overall. Meanwhile, as well as its parliamentary election, Scotland had local elections for all of its thirty-two local councils too – using, for the first time, the Single Transferable Vote system that the Liberal Democrats have long advocated. Professor John Curtice, of Strathclyde University, analyses the results of the May 2007 elections.

Real power was at stake in these elections. In Scotland, the devolved election marked the end of a period of eight years during which the Liberal Democrats had been in power as a junior coalition partner, a role they might have hoped to continue. In Wales, Labour entered the election as a minority government and if they had failed to restore their majority, the Liberal Democrats might have had the opportunity to be part of a coalition government, just as they had been between 2000 and 2003. Meanwhile the party was defending overall control of twenty-seven councils in England and one in Scotland, as well as a share of power in many other local authorities.

Important as they may have been in their own right, these elections also provide some important clues and pointers about the future of Westminster politics. Their results give us a guide to the Liberal Democrats' chances of securing at least a share of power at the next UK general election, while the outcome of the post-election bargaining in Scotland and Wales has important lessons should similar negotiations take place at Westminster. Meanwhile the party's performance under the proportional systems used in the elections in Scotland and Wales provides some important pointers to its prospects should it ever succeed in securing electoral reform for the House of Commons. It is on these clues and pointers that this article focuses.

The outcome of the elections in terms of seats did not make easy reading for the Liberal Democrats. In England, the party suffered a net loss of four councils and nearly 250 councillors – over 10 per cent of the seats it was defending. In Scotland, the party emerged with one less seat in the Scottish Parliament and nine fewer seats in Scotland's local councils, and it lost control of the one council it had previously held. Only in Wales did the party emerge with as many seats as it was defending – but although Labour fell well short of securing a majority, the Liberal Democrats remain on the opposition benches following the Labour – Plaid Cymru deal agreed in July.

Of course, outcomes in terms of seats can be deceptive, especially where the first-past-the-post system is in use, and in view of the complexities of the local election cycle in England. But a look at votes cast confirms that support for the Liberal Democrats ebbed in these elections. Perhaps the most telling statistics come from England, where the BBC collected the detailed voting results in over 800 wards from fifty councils across the country. In each case the results could be compared directly, ward by ward, with the outcome of last year's local elections. On average the party's support in this BBC sample fell by 1.4 points. In contrast both Labour and the Conservatives managed to hold their own, with average

increases in support of 0.3 and 0.4 points respectively.

True, such a drop is far from pronounced. However, it does confirm the message of the opinion polls that the party has taken at least one step back electorally after its first full year with Sir Menzies Campbell in charge. Moreover, if we look back a little further the decline is even more marked. Compared directly with what happened in the same wards in the 2004 local elections, the party's vote in the BBC sample was on average 2.5 points lower, while in those wards (which constitute around half the total) where the same ward boundaries were also in force in 2003, the fall since that date was no less than three points. There can be little doubt that in England, at least, the party is currently in a weaker position than it was at this stage in the last Westminster Parliament.

Given this record in England, it was perhaps remarkable that the party did not lose more ground than it did in either Scotland or Wales. Nevertheless, the party did fall back. In Scotland, the party's share of the list vote under the two-vote Additional Member System in use in the parliamentary election was half a point lower than what it achieved at the last election. Preliminary estimates suggest that, in a majority of Scotland's councils, the party's share of the STV first-preference vote was less than its share of the vote four years ago. Meanwhile, in Wales, the party's share of the list vote was also down a point on four years previously.

Of course, in England at least, the party can argue that some losses were always likely. Most of the seats being contested this year were last fought over in 2003 and 2004, both high-water marks for the Liberal Democrats. The party's local election performance was estimated by the BBC still to be worth the equivalent of winning 26 per cent of the vote across Britain in a general election – on a par with its performance in local elections in the 1997–2001 Parliament. Moreover, that 26 per cent estimate is three points up on its actual vote three years ago – and the party can point to its success in topping the poll in a number of parliamentary constituencies, such as Derby North, Hull East and Manchester Gorton, which it currently does not hold.

However, the Liberal Democrats always do better in local elections than they do in parliamentary elections – even when they are held on the same day. When, as has been the case at the last three general elections, county council elections have been held on the same day, the party's local election performance has been between five and nine points better. Any estimate of what the party's local election performance means in terms of a national share of the vote has to be adjusted by that kind of amount in order to ascertain how well the party might have done in a general election held the same day. So however one looks at the results, the party currently seems on course to fall back to the 19 per cent or so of the vote that it won in 2001 rather than to maintain the 23 per cent it secured in 2005.

Even if the party currently seems on course to suffer some losses at the next general election, it may still end up in a more powerful position in the next Parliament.

Moreover, there are some signs that the party may now be losing some of the ground it gained in territory previously held by Labour – one of its particular successes in the 2005 election. In the BBC sample, Liberal Democrat support fell most heavily in wards where Labour was previously strong (that is, had over 40 per cent of the vote last time around). The Liberal Democrat vote fell on average compared with last year by 2.7 points in such wards – twice the national average. Meanwhile, there was confirmation that the party has also lost some of the support it had previously secured amongst Muslim voters in particular, the signs of which were already evident in last year's local elections. Compared with 2004, the party's vote was down by twice as much in wards where 5 per cent or more of the population say they are Muslim than it was elsewhere.

Nevertheless, even if the party currently seems on course to suffer some losses at the next general election, it may still end up in a more powerful position in the next Parliament than it holds in this one. True, when extrapolated into a possible outcome in terms of seats in the House of Commons, the local and devolved elections together point to a narrow Conservative overall majority of some ten seats or so – just enough for David Cameron to run the country without any help from anyone else. However, just as we have to bear in mind that the Liberal Democrats always perform better in local elections than they do in national contests, the opposite is true for Labour in particular. In practice, if there had been a general election in May this year, the outcome would almost undoubtedly have been some kind of 'hung' Parliament in which no party had an overall majority.

If that does happen, the Liberal Democrats could well be courted by other parties in the hope of securing Liberal Democrat support for and perhaps participation in a new government. In that event, the party will have crucial decisions to take about whom it will talk to and what its bottom lines for any possible deal will be – not least on electoral reform. Yet the fall-out from the elections in Scotland and Wales – both of which produced 'hung' outcomes – raises serious questions about how well prepared the party is for such negotiations.

This is most obviously true in Wales, where indecision at a crucial moment resulted in the party throwing away the very real prospect of both ministerial office and electoral reform. With the twenty-eight day deadline by which the National Assembly was required to elect a First

Minister looming, and having already pulled out of talks with Labour, the party negotiated a deal to form a 'rainbow alliance' with both Plaid Cymru and the Conservatives, a deal that reportedly included electoral reform for Welsh local elections. However, a crucial meeting of the Welsh party's executive failed to endorse the deal, allegedly because of discomfort at going into government with the Conservatives. The rainbow was shattered.

Two days later Rhodri Morgan was re-elected First Minister at the head of a minority Labour administration. Then, the day after that, a Liberal Democrat conference overturned the executive's failure to back the deal and the rainbow looked as though it might yet be put together again. But clearly aware that he faced the prospect of losing office, Rhodri Morgan used the second chance he had been given to try to save his skin – and eventually struck a deal with Plaid Cymru, which was in due course endorsed by conferences of both parties. The Liberal Democrats were kept out of power, and the Labour – Plaid 'One Wales' programme makes no provision for electoral reform.

There are two crucial lessons for the party to learn from this experience. First, internal division and disagreement about coalition negotiations can fatally undermine the party's negotiating position. Second, the party has to be clear whether it is willing to strike a deal with the Conservatives at Westminster should Mr Cameron's party ever be willing to come to some accommodation on electoral reform – as they were in Wales. This may be thought highly unlikely, but the trajectory taken by the Conservative Party in Wales shows that a leopard may eventually change its spots. One wonders how ready the Liberal Democrats are at UK level to confront these issues.

In Scotland, meanwhile, the party also finds itself out of office – but in this case this was an outcome largely of its own choosing. Alex Salmond's SNP, who emerged from the election with one seat more than Labour but eighteen short of a majority, wanted to discuss the possibility of forming a coalition, but the Liberal Democrats said no – on the grounds that the SNP would not drop its demand for a referendum on independence in advance of any negotiations. At least this stance had the merit of being firm and decisive. But it has probably come at the cost not only of scuppering the SNP's hopes for any kind of referendum on independence, but also of the Liberal Democrats' hopes of progressing an increase in the powers of the Scottish Parliament within the UK. Arguably in Scotland too, reluctance to do a deal with a particular party has set back the Liberal Democrats' hopes for constitutional reform.

Meanwhile, what happened in Scotland and Wales not only raises questions about the party's ability to use its bargaining power in any future hung parliament at Westminster in order to secure electoral reform, but also raises doubts about how much the party is likely to profit from any such reform. For a long time, the party has claimed that voters are reluctant to support it because under first past the post they feel a Liberal Democrat vote is a wasted vote. That claim has now to be consigned to the dustbin.

One of the striking features of the party's performance in the first three Scottish and Welsh elections has been that in each case it has secured a higher share of the vote in the first-past-the-post constituency contests that form part of the Additional Member System than it did on the list vote to which seats are allocated proportionately. Moreover the gap between the two votes has been growing. In both countries in 2003 the party's vote increased in the constituency contests, but fell back on the list. The same happened again this year. As a result, in Scotland the party won no less than five per cent more of the constituency vote than it did of the list vote. In Wales the gap was three points.

Yet the fall-out from the elections in Scotland and Wales – both of which produced 'hung' outcomes – raises serious questions about how well prepared the party is for such negotiations.

In both cases much of the difference is accounted for by what happens in those constituencies the party wins or at least comes close to winning; in these constituencies the party's constituency vote often far outstrips its list vote. It seems that, far from suffering from first past the post in Scotland and Wales, at least the party's fortunes are heavily reliant on the ability of individual candidates in particular constituencies to win support on the basis of a personal vote, a trick that the party is unable to repeat on any party list vote.

Of course, under STV all votes are for candidates rather than parties. So if that reform were to be introduced for Westminster, the party could still hope to profit from the popularity of individual candidates. Moreover, initial examination of the pattern of transfers in the STV local elections in Scotland suggests that expectations that the party would profit from transfers from other parties' candidates are indeed likely to be fulfilled. The party often won a large chunk of transfers when the last candidate of another party was eliminated from the count, and especially so when it was a Conservative candidate who was eliminated.

On the other hand, as we have already noted, the party's share of the first preference vote was often less than the vote it had achieved under first past the post in 2003. Once again, the introduction of proportional representation has done little or nothing to encourage voters to back the party. For that to happen, the Liberal Democrats have to appear an attractive option in the first place. And at the moment, at least on that score, the party is not making much progress at all.

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RADICALISM AND LIBERALISM IN DENMARK

In May 2005, *Det Radikale Venstre* – the Danish Social Liberal Party – celebrated its one-hundredth birthday. Throughout the twentieth century and beyond, the party has played a central role in Danish political history, a story well known to Danish readers, but probably not to a British audience. Hence this article, which is intended to provide a comprehensive insight into one of the Liberal Democrats' European sister parties. By **Tomas Bech Madsen**.

First, a word about the party's name: *Det Radikale Venstre*. Literally translated, it means 'The Radical Left'. That, however, sends the wrong signal, as we're not talking about some loony left Trotskyite fringe party, but instead about a social liberal centre party which for a good deal of its history has led, participated in or cooperated with Danish governments. This confusing name originates from the great political struggle of the last three decades of the nineteenth century between the power-holding *Højre* (which means 'right') based on the King, the nobility, the military, conservative civil servants, and – in short – all the reactionary forces of the society of the time.

Opposing *Højre* was *Venstre* (meaning 'left'), which was a broad and loose alliance of the opposition, mainly based on farmers and smallholders (in a country which was predominantly agricultural), but which also appealed to many other, more urban-based, groups. This opposition reached a majority in the lower chamber of the Danish Parliament from the 1870s, but the King had both a loyal upper chamber (partly filled with members appointed by himself) and the constitutional right to appoint Prime Ministers and governments of his own preference, which he continued to do right up until 1901, when the first *Venstre* government was allowed.

Within *Venstre*, divisions began as early as the 1870s and they quickly developed into more or less firmly-structured party factions. The main controversies were whether to cooperate with or to oppose (by peaceful means) the reactionary government, whether to be understanding or critical towards conservative institutions like the state church and the military, and whether to see the gradually advancing Social Democrats as potential friends or foes. To the public and to many liberals, the main ground for disagreement within *Venstre* was the defence question, i.e. whether the economic and political price for a militarily fortified Copenhagen was worth paying.

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RADIKALE VENSTRE

Det Radikale Venstre leader Margrethe Vestager

The left wing of *Venstre* consisted mainly of a rather strange alliance of anti-conservative rural smallholders and urban professionals and intellectuals, who were above all inspired by the French Radicals. These people favoured a *radical* approach towards a more thorough but parliamentary-based break with the reactionary traditions. Within *Venstre,* the radicals were bitterly opposed by a vehemently anti-socialist and authoritarian right wing. Between these two was a large, more undecided group.

In 1901 the King finally gave in to the people's wish for a democratically-elected government led by *Venstre*. In this government all three party factions participated, but tensions grew, and in early 1905 this culminated in a bitter split resulting in the formation of two new parties. The centre and right-wing factions together kept the old name and formed the new *Venstre* (or Liberal Party), while the left wing constituted *Det Radikale Venstre* (or Social Liberal Party). In addition to the acrimony of the split, the personal chemistry between the leaders of the two parties was very bad. Ideologically, *Det Radikale Venstre* was more or less equidistant between *Venstre* and the Social Democrats.

The first, successful years of *Det Radikale Venstre*

In the first years of its existence *Det Radikale Venstre*, holding an average of around 15 per cent of the vote, actually came to form a minority government twice. The first one, in 1909–10, was short-lived and only came to power because of new internal turmoil in *Venstre*. The second Radical government, however, proved to be a long-lasting success.

The 1913 general election for the Parliament's lower chamber gave a majority for the Social Democrats and *Det Radikale Venstre*, with the former as the bigger party. At this time, however, it was official Social Democrat policy not to enter government before the party had gained 50 per cent of the vote (not as unrealistic a target as it might seem today, when the party languishes at around 25 per cent of the vote. In the first half of the twentieth century, the Social Democrat share of the vote grew substantially at each election). And so opportunity knocked for *Det Radikale Venstre*, which formed a government led by Carl Theodor Zahle and which included strong personalities such as Finance Minister Brandes, Defence Minister Munch, Interior Minister Rode, and Foreign Minister Scavenius. This government immediately embarked on a far-reaching reform programme, one of the main elements of which was the new constitution passed in 1915, which included, among many other things, voting rights for women and the poor. This constitution was irrefutably the greatest progress for democracy in Denmark since the first semi-democratic constitution in 1849.

The government, of course, was severely affected by the First World War. Denmark was fortunate to escape direct involvement, not least because of the masterly diplomacy of the Radical Foreign Minister Scavenius, but the economy was seriously affected. Until then subject to

little regulation, the economy had to become much more rigidly controlled by the state in order to prevent corruption and over-pricing in securing food and other goods for the population. The efficient Interior Minister Rode played a significant role in the successful implementation of this state control.

The Social Liberal minority government managed to run the country for almost seven years thanks to the high calibre of its cabinet ministers and good cooperation with the Social Democrats, who even joined the government with one ministerial post from 1916. *Det Radikale Venstre* achieved its best election result ever in April 1918, when the party gained no less than 20 per cent of the vote.

The opposition consisted of *Venstre* and the Conservative party (the democratic heir of the former power-holding *Højre*). There were some parliamentarian clashes between the centre-left government alliance and the right-wing opposition during the war, but on a civilised scale. Nobody wanted internal turmoil to descend into chaos or anarchy, as was the case in so many other countries, especially from 1917. But in 1919–20 circumstances changed.

After the German capitulation in November 1918 the possibility emerged of reunification between Denmark and the Danish-inhabited areas of Schleswig. Denmark had lost the Duchies of Schleswig and Holstein to Germany in 1864, but with Imperial Germany's defeat everything changed. In Denmark this led to discussion about how far to the south the new border should be drawn. Should it be decided by a free, secret referendum or according to historical-ideological sentiment?

While the parties behind the government strongly supported the international rule of law and the 'nationality principle', i.e. the belief that the political border should be set after a referendum in which all inhabitants of Schleswig could participate, forces in the right-wing opposition wished to annex substantial areas with a clear German majority. The King supported the opposition, and it all ended with the dramatic 'Easter crisis' in 1920, when the King sacked the Radical government led by Prime Minister Zahle even though it still retained a majority in the lower chamber of the Parliament. The Social Democrats called for a general strike in protest, and many also called for the abdication of the King and the establishment of a republic.

After some days of intense negotiation, the crisis was solved with a promise from the King never again to go against a parliamentary majority, and an agreement between the parties hold a quick general election. This was won by *Venstre* and the Conservative party, and so *Det Radikale Venstre* spent the years that followed in opposition.

The Social Liberal minority government managed to run the country for almost seven years thanks to the high calibre of its cabinet ministers and good cooperation with the Social Democrats.

A new role

The May 1920 general election was a disaster to the party, whose share of the vote slumped from 20 to 12 per cent. From then on, the Social Democrats were clearly the bigger brother on the centre-left. From this point on in Danish politics, *Det Radikale Venstre* has had to cooperate with one or more of the bigger parties in order to gain influence. The party has played its role cleverly, however, under the possibilities of the proportional election system.

In the first half of the 1920s, relations between *Det Radikale Venstre* and *Venstre* improved, but *Venstre* took a sharp turn to the right from 1926, with the result that Social Liberals and Social Democrats were thrown into each other's arms again. After the 1929 election a majority coalition government was formed by Social Democrats and *Det Radikale Venstre*, its leading personalities being Social Democratic Prime Minister Stauning and Radical Foreign Minister Munch. The Stauning-Munch government turned out to be the longest lasting in the twentieth century, as it held power for eleven years until the German occupation of Denmark changed the status quo.

During the 1930s the government introduced many far-reaching social reforms and made many economic investments to eradicate poverty, reduce unemployment, and keep the country in safe democratic hands in an internationally perilous era of Nazism, Fascism and Communism. These tactics worked, and the extremist parties of Denmark remained small and uninfluential. It also helped that the opposition parties *Venstre* and the Conservatives stayed on a wholly democratic course, unlike many other right-wing parties in Europe.

Foreign Minister Munch continued the traditional support of *Det Radikale Venstre* for an international system based on the rule of law, and he was therefore very active in the League of Nations. However, the failure of the League and the growing threat from Nazi Germany meant that it was impossible for a small county like Denmark to adopt a conspicuous stance against dictatorship. In international power politics, many Radical principles unfortunately had to be dropped.

Denmark's extremely cautious (and frightened) dealings with Germany ended both in failure and success. In one sense they were a failure, because in the end Hitler decided to occupy Denmark, along with Norway, on 9 April 1940. Yet in another sense they were a success, because the first couple of years of German occupation were quite peaceful, there were no waves of arrests or terror, the Danish Nazi Party was kept out of power, and the Germans did not annex the territories lost to Denmark in 1920.

A coalition government based on all the democratic parties functioned under increasing difficulties from July 1940 to August 1943, when it finally resigned over German wishes to introduce legislation amounting to war crimes, including anti-Jewish laws and the death penalty for saboteurs. From then until the liberation in May 1945 Denmark was without a government.

Changing times

After 1945, *Det Radikale Venstre* experienced difficult times, when it was under strain for different reasons, mainly because it lacked a clear profile in a changed world, but also because some voters believed that the party had been too closely connected with – or at least not hostile enough to – the German occupiers.

Notably, though, it was the only democratic party to oppose Denmark's membership of NATO in 1949. The reason for this was the party's neutralist and anti-militarist tradition. The party's share of the vote decreased slowly to around 6 per cent due to the falling number of agricultural smallholders, a group which had traditionally favoured the Radicals. Fortunately, however, due to the expert dual leadership of former ministers and political veterans Bertel Dahlgaard and Jørgen Jørgensen, the Social Liberal Party retained political influence. Ideologically, *Det Radikale Venstre* stuck to most of its original beliefs as described at the beginning of this article, but times were changing under the pressure from both the Cold War and the difficult post-war struggle for economic recovery.

After some years of political equidistance between the Social Democrats and *Venstre* and the Conservatives, *Det Radikale Venstre* entered government once more in 1957. Once again, the Radicals' main partner was the Social Democrats, and this alliance lasted for seven years, a period of economic growth, domestic reforms and enlargement of the welfare state. In other words, these were good years for the country, but it was the Social Democrats who reaped the reward, with over 40 per cent of the vote. The Social Liberal share of the vote continued to fall, and after another disappointing election result in 1964, it left the government in order to be in a freer position politically.

This peaceful break from the Social Democrats marked the beginning of the reign of Hilmar Baunsgaard, one of the more prominent liberal, anti-socialist party members. He sought a closer cooperation with first *Venstre*, then the Conservatives, and appealed to the new urban white-collar workers and functionaries. Suddenly voters started to come back to *Det Radikale Venstre*. After an increase from 6 to 8 per cent of the vote in 1966, the great, historic breakthrough came in the general election of January 1968, where *Det Radikale Venstre* received almost 15 per cent of the vote, its highest share since 1918.

With the centre-right government, *Det Radikale Venstre* marked its ability to work together with both political blocs, not just to be a poor relation of the Social Democrats.

Zenith and nadir

With this election victory, Hilmar Baunsgaard became the first Radical Prime Minister since Zahle in 1920, forming a majority government together with the Conservatives and *Venstre*. This step to the right was popular with the new types of voters, not least urban functionaries. But in *Det Radikale Venstre* many party members remained sceptical towards the Baunsgaard 'deviation'. In fact their scepticism turned out to be groundless, given that the government generally followed a very modern, undogmatic and progressive Social Liberal line, which could not be said to be much to the right of centre.

With the centre-right government, *Det Radikale Venstre* marked its ability to work together with both political blocs, not just to be a poor relation of the Social Democrats. The government remained in power until the election of September 1971, when it very narrowly lost its majority. *Det Radikale Venstre*, however, kept its share of almost 15 per cent of the vote, a remarkable result.

In the years that followed, however, the party – surprisingly – quickly declined. In each of the elections of 1973, 1975, and 1977 (in the unruly seventies, elections kept coming every other year without really producing any workable majorities), *Det Radikale Venstre* lost between 3 and 4 per cent, and were eventually left with an all-time low of just 3.5 per cent of the vote and six members of the 179-seat Parliament.

New political topics came on to the agenda in the 1970s and *Det Radikale Venstre* was one of the most outspoken environmentalist parties. The party also had a high profile on human rights, civil liberties, asylum, and immigration. All these new political topics are still core radical values today.

Luckily things started to improve at the end of the decade. Under the leadership of Niels Helveg Petersen, the Radical vote grew, not to the Baunsgaard heights, but to an acceptable 5 to 6 per cent of the vote – a level which stayed more or less constant for ten years. From 1979, *Det Radikale Venstre* cooperated with the Social Democratic minority government, but as this government resigned in the summer of 1982, *Det Radikale Venstre's* Helveg Petersen chose to change sides to support a new centre-right coalition government (without the Social Liberals) under the first Conservative Prime Minister for eighty-one years, Poul Schlüter. This turned out to be a wise choice.

Focus on economic reform

The Schlüter-Helveg Petersen axis showed itself very effective

in reshaping and reforming the crisis- and inflation-ridden Danish economy. It generally took a more right-of-centre line than Baunsgaard, but at the same time *Det Radikale Venstre* leaned to the left in foreign and defence policy, where many party members still had a very pro-UN, but simultaneously fairly Eurosceptic and neutralist outlook. Eventually this contradiction – working both for and against the government – could not last, and after the election of May 1988 a new three-party government of Conservatives, *Venstre* and *Det Radikale Venstre* was created.

This was the beginning of a more pro-EU and pro-NATO line for the Radicals, but their participation in government never became a success. *Venstre* and, to a certain extent, the Conservatives, started drifting further to the right, and among Social Liberals the government became more and more unpopular. After a very bad election result in December 1990, *Det Radikale Venstre* left the government to be independent again, as in 1964. And Niels Helveg Petersen resigned as political leader to be replaced by Marianne Jelved.

In the beginning of 1993 the right-wing government was forced to resign over an asylum scandal. *Det Radikale Venstre* decided to support the recently elected 'new Labourite' Social Democrat leader Poul Nyrup Rasmussen as Prime Minister of a new centre-left government, in which the Social Liberals took part together with two other small centre parties. Unlike the unhappy 1988–90 experience, the Nyrup-Jelved cabinet became a success, especially in the years from 1993 to 1998. Many reform bills were passed, including ones concerning tax and investment in lifelong education. In the first election under the new government, *Det Radikale Venstre* made gains, reaching its 1980s level again. Both Economy Minister Jelved and Foreign Minister Helveg Petersen played important roles in the government.

After some good years, problems between the Social Democrats and the Radicals started to emerge. The main grounds of disagreement were asylum and immigration, where Social Democrats increasingly drifted away from an earlier humanitarian-liberal line, and the attractive, but costly, pre-pension package, where Radicals were much more supportive of bold, but unpopular, reforms than traditionalist Social Democrats.

The Social Democrats had a very good election result in March 1998, and *Det Radikale Venstre* a very bad one, revisiting their 1977 nadir. At the end of that year, however, the Social Democrats broke an election promise over the pre-pension package and immediately slumped in the opinion polls from 36 to around 20 per cent. In December 1998, Prime Minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen's position was so precarious that he had to take the highly unusual step of apologising to the voters on national television.

For *Det Radikale Venstre* things started to brighten from 1999. In fact, this was the beginning of a golden era, with both voters and members streaming into the party.

More votes, less influence

The Social Democrats never overcame this crisis and lost the subsequent general elections in 2001 and 2005, but for *Det Radikale Venstre* things started to brighten from 1999. In fact, this was the beginning of a golden era, with both voters and members streaming into the party. A couple of figures should illustrate this. In 1999 the Danish Social Liberal Party had less than 6,000 members and around 4 per cent in the opinion polls. By August 2007 the party had grown to around 8,500 members and around 8 per cent in the opinion polls (having gained 9.2 per cent in the 2005 general election).

So what happened? In short, the three biggest parties – *Venstre*, the Social Democrats, and the anti-immigrant and anti-EU Danish People's Party – have all steered a course that tends to appease the majority (around 65 per cent) of the voters who dislike reforms that would benefit the country but could mean change for themselves, and are very mistrustful of groups such as foreigners (especially Muslims) and suspicious of the old progressive cultural, educational and political elite. Among the people who dislike this populist trend (the remaining 35 per cent) *Det Radikale Venstre* has been able to attract many new supporters. To a certain extent this is a disadvantage because, as the Social Liberals have grown in size, their political influence has diminished, as the party lies in fundamental opposition to the majority on a large number of issues. Another area in which *Det Radikale Venstre* is opposed to the right-wing government is local government. During the big local and regional council reform of 2004–05, *Det Radikale Venstre* advocated decentralisation, while the government adopted a very centralist position.

After the general election in November 2001, a new right-wing government with a very anti-Radical and anti-left-wing outlook took over, under the leadership of Anders Fogh Rasmussen, and since then *Det Radikale Venstre* has played a marginal role. The government was re-elected in February 2005, and until the spring of 2007, Danish politics continued in the same pattern.

However, in May 2007 two leading Radicals and one leading Conservative left their parties to form a new moderate liberal-conservative party: New Alliance. This new party enjoyed a good start in the opinion polls and in enrolment of members, but over the summer New Alliance quickly dropped in the polls because of its lack of political substance. After the initial confusion *Det Radikale Venstre* regained its ground. In June 2007 former Minister Margrethe

Vestager was elected as the party's new leader, and she has had a very good and positive start.

Finally, it should, of course, be stated that the system of proportional representation has been vital to the great role a relatively small party like *Det Radikale Venstre* has been able to play over the past hundred years. The outcome of each Danish general election since 1906 has been a hung parliament, where at least two parties (if not more) have had to work together to obtain a majority. By comparison, the British Liberal Democrats are in a completely different and more difficult position, notwithstanding a good share of the popular vote. Nonetheless, I hope that this article has given an impression of how much influence the British Liberals could have had under a fairer election system.

Tomas Bech Madsen is an organisational consultant for the Danish Social Liberal Party and holds an MA in Contemporary History.

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

If you can help any of the individuals listed below with sources, contacts, or any other information — or if you know anyone who can — please pass on details to them. Details of other research projects in progress should be sent to the Editor (see page 3) for inclusion here.

Hubert Beaumont MP. After pursuing candidatures in his native Northumberland southward, Beaumont finally fought and won Eastbourne in 1906 as a 'Radical' (not a Liberal). How many Liberals in the election fought under this label and did they work as a group afterwards? *Lord Beaumont of Whitley, House of Lords, London SW1A 0PW; beaumontt@parliament.uk.*

Letters of Richard Cobden (1804–65). Knowledge of the whereabouts of any letters written by Cobden in private hands, autograph collections, and obscure locations in the UK and abroad for a complete edition of his letters. (For further details of the Cobden Letters Project, please see www.uea.ac.uk/his/research/projects/cobden). *Dr Anthony Howe, School of History, University of East Anglia, Norwich NR4 7TJ; a.c.howe@uea.ac.uk.*

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

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

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

The Liberal revival 1959–64. Focusing on both political and social factors. Any personal views, relevant information or original material from Liberal voters, councillors or activists of the time would be very gratefully received. *Holly Towell, 52a Cardigan Road, Headingley, Leeds LS6 3BJ; his3ht@leeds.ac.uk.*

The rise of the Liberals in Richmond (Surrey) 1964–2002. Interested in hearing from former councillors, activists, supporters, opponents, with memories and insights concerning one of the most successful local organisations. What factors helped the Liberal Party rise from having no councillors in 1964 to 49 out of 52 seats in 1986? Any literature or news cuttings from the period welcome. *Ian Hunter, 9 Defoe Avenue, Kew, Richmond TW9 4DL; 07771 785 795; ianhunter@kew2.com.*

Liberal politics in Sussex, Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight 1900–14. The study of electoral progress and subsequent disappointment. Research includes comparisons of localised political trends, issues and preferred interests as aganst national trends. Any information, specifically on Liberal candidates in the area in the two general elections of 1910, would be most welcome. Family papers especially appreciated. *Ian Ivatt, 84 High Street, Steyning, West Sussex BN44 3JT; ianjivatt@tinyonline.co.uk.*

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

The Liberal Party in the West Midlands from December 1916 to the 1923 general election. Focusing on the fortunes of the party in Birmingham, Coventry, Walsall and Wolverhampton. Looking to explore the effects of the party split at local level. Also looking to uncover the steps towards temporary reunification for the 1923 general election. *Neil Fisher, 42 Bowden Way, Binley, Coventry CV3 2HU ; neil.fisher81@ntlworld.com.*

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

Life of Wilfrid Roberts (1900–91). Roberts was Liberal MP for Cumberland North (now Penrith and the Border) from 1935 until 1950 and came from a wealthy and prominent local Liberal family; his father had been an MP. Roberts was a passionate internationalist, and was a powerful advocate for refugee children in the Spanish civil war. His parliamentary career is coterminous with the nadir of the Liberal Party. Roberts joined the Labour Party in 1956, becoming a local councillor in Carlisle and the party's candidate for the Hexham constituency in the 1959 general election. I am currently in the process of collating information on the different strands of Roberts' life and political career. Any assistance at all would be much appreciated. *John Reardon; jbreardon75@hotmail.com.*

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

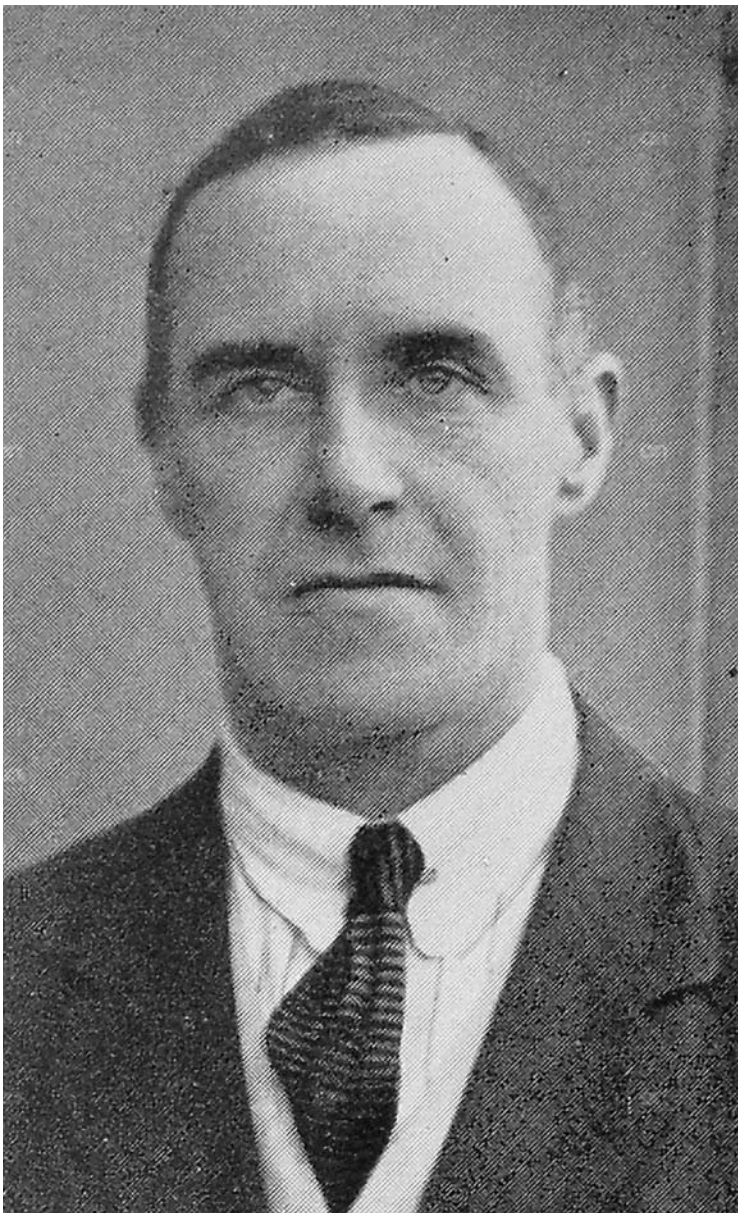
Welsh Liberal Tradition – A History of the Liberal Party in Wales 1868–2003. Research spans thirteen decades of Liberal history in Wales but concentrates on the post-1966 formation of the Welsh Federal Party. Any memories and information concerning the post-1966 era or even before welcomed. The research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

Aneurin Williams and Liberal internationalism and pacificism, 1900–22. A study of this radical and pacificist MP (Plymouth 1910; North West Durham/Consett 1914–22) who was actively involved in League of Nations Movement, Armenian nationalism, international co-operation, pro-Boer etc. Any information relating to him and location of any papers/correspondence welcome. *Barry Dackombe. 32 Ashburnham Road, Ampthill, Beds, MK45 2RH; dackombe@tesco.net.*

INDIVIDUALIST THOU

JOSIAH C. WEDGWOOD'S BATTLE AGA

The years 1906 to 1914 – the era of the last peacetime Liberal government of Britain – are widely viewed as the time when modern social democracy in the form of collectivist and redistributive government policies – often called 'New Liberalism' – set the pattern of British government which has been more or less adhered to since. They were certainly years which saw an extension of the state's rights to control, and of its duties to assist, the individual via such expedients as national insurance contributions and old-age pensions. But there were exceptions. **Paul Mulvey** examines the beliefs and achievements of the Liberal MP Josiah Wedgood in his battle against the collectivists.



GHT AND RADICALISM
INST THE COLLECTIVISTS, 1906 – 1914

We should certainly not conclude that Edwardian Liberalism was wholly in favour of 'big-state' government or that, without the collectivising effect of the First World War, we should have seen British politics tending towards a Bismarckian social collectivism rather than, say, the more individualist progressivism of the American Democrats. There was, in fact, a multi-faceted and hotly-fought debate within Liberalism and the wider Edwardian left about the role of government and the individual,

In this debate there was no keener or more passionate participant than the newly-elected Liberal MP for Newcastle-under-Lyme and scion of the Potteries' best known family, Josiah Clement Wedgwood. Wedgwood, although he later served briefly as a Labour Cabinet Minister, was always more of an agitator than an administrator. As a fiery campaigner with a marked talent for publicity, he soon became one of Parliament's best known back-benchers, making his name as a trenchant advocate of the land-taxing ideas of the American political philosopher Henry George,[1] and as a firm defender of the rights of the individual against the state.

In 1910, Wedgwood and his wife and fellow campaigner, Ethel, outlined their political philosophy in a series of articles for the magazine *The Open Road*.[2] The articles were their contribution to the debate between individualists and collectivists in which, inspired by the Utopian land-taxing ideas of Henry George, they argued for a return to a society of hardy and self-reliant cultivators of the soil, who would be independent of landlord, capitalist and government.[3] Such bucolic fantasising was common across the Edwardian political spectrum for a variety of reasons, not least of which, particularly for the left, was the belief that a return to the land would reduce unemployment, and so relieve poverty, but that even if it did not do that, it would somehow improve the quality of the workers' lives.[4]

Where the Wedgwoods and other progressive land reform advocates, such as Labour's Philip Snowden, differed was in the role they envisaged for the state in bringing about such social improvement. The Wedgwoods remained avowedly in the Liberal Cobdenite tradition of maintaining that the removal of all monopolies and privileges, of which land ownership was the greatest, would allow the free market to effect its beneficent magic.[5] For Labour thinkers on the whole, on the other hand, the market could only provide justice and opportunity for all if it was tempered by collective organisations – the chief of which would inevitably be the state.[6] While such collectivist sentiment ran counter to traditional Liberal philosophy,[7] it followed closely the 'New Liberalism', inspired by the philosophy of T. H. Green, and advocated by J. A. Hobson, Leonard Hobhouse, Charles Masterman and others, which purported to solve this problem by portraying strong government as the means of enhancing the totality of personal choice, and by assuming that a more egalitarian society, brought about by state redistribution of wealth – not just land – would be a happier society. The Wedgwoods did not disagree that a more egalitarian society was desirable – they simply did not believe that bigger government would bring it about.

Colonel Josiah C. Wedgwood in 1919

In the economic sphere Wedgwood advocated (loudly

The Wedgwood family, 1908: Josiah jr, Rosamund, Mrs Wedgwood, Charles, Colonel Wedgwood (Josiah snr), Camilla, Julia, Helen

and frequently) Henry George's ideas, for in them he saw a way of reconciling the strong proprietorial rights of individualism with the need to redistribute wealth to achieve social justice.[8] George, by denying that landlords had a right to the land in the first place, squared that particular circle, justifying the taking of rents for the general benefit of the community. Wedgwood conceded that the single tax could not raise enough revenue to pay the expenses of a modern state, but considered that a virtue rather than a vice in that it would oblige the state, *per se*, to shrink.[9] Even if, however, he was wrong and the single tax did not make the workers better off, it was, he thought, still worth implementing, for the increase in freedom and justice it would bring was an even greater benefit that any consequential enhancement of material well-being.[10]

More than anything else in Wedgwood's long political career (he sat in the House of Commons until 1942), it was this concept of justice that he continued to emphasise – a sort of innate constitutionalism or natural law which he felt was the proper basis of government. He never explained the origins of this idea, or sought to justify it by philosophical argument, but its roots clearly lay in the line of liberal thinking that had led to Herbert Spencer's concept of social evolution and anti-statist individualism.[11] Wedgwood summed his theory up with two oft-repeated Latin mottoes. *Fiat justitia ruat cœlum* ('do justice though the heavens should fall') should always, he argued, take precedence over *salus populi suprema lex* ('the safety of the state is the supreme law').[12] In other words, there were individual rights which the state had no right to contravene, in peacetime at least.[13] This was more than a matter of what we would now call human rights, for Wedgwood, following Spencer, believed in the moral perfectibility of man, but only if he were left alone by the state in order to exercise his individual responsibility. With responsibility would come wisdom, and so society would become ever more civilised, making government and formal laws ever less necessary.[14] Unlike his future Cabinet colleagues, Ramsay MacDonald and Sidney Webb, who were also influenced by Spencer's views on social evolution,[15] Wedgwood believed that the way to move towards such perfection was by constantly removing the 'scaffolding of law', even though this involved risks. Essentially, people would mature morally if they were trusted to do so. Thus, the 'do justice' doctrine would eventually lead to anarchy, but not until the individual was fitted for it. On the other hand, he thought the ultimate result of the 'safety of the state' argument was the creation of a complete bureaucratic tyranny.[16]

By Wedgwood's time, such individualism was generally more identified with Tories than with Liberals.[17] Certainly, the leading individualist organisation of the time, the Liberty and Property Defence League (founded in part, ironically, as a reaction against

Henry George), had close Tory connections and often acted for employers' groups against trade unions.[18] Not all individualists, however, were reactionary right-wingers. The single-taxers, for example, were seen as anything but reactionary and were attacked by the Tory press (and often by Liberals) as being dangerously radical, yet their philosophy was individualist and anti-collectivist. Most of them disliked socialism and they strongly supported the maintenance of existing social responsibilities – advocating, in particular, that the state should not enforce provision for the care and education of children, as they believed that this undermined the responsibilities of parents and so weakened society. It was a form of 'moral hazard' argument that could be inferred directly from Spencer's views on social evolution. Where the progressive individualists parted company with their right-wing counterparts was that they did not oppose social reform as such, believing that reforms were needed to enhance existing rights.

Nor were they opposed to trade unions. Indeed, far from attacking organised labour as a restriction on personal liberty, Wedgwood and his allies came to be strong supporters of trade unionism, and even syndicalism, because of the opportunity it gave the working man to overcome the oppression of the privileged classes and so increase overall individual freedom. Not wishing to be outflanked from the left (especially coming from a constituency with a large mining element where, from 1910, the miners were no longer officially Liberal supporters), he argued that, if anything, the workers were not militant enough, in part because, unlike the middle classes, whose public-school education taught them to think for themselves (or so he claimed), the workers were the victims of the enervating effects of too much care and supervision from on high – from church, state, schoolmasters, even Labour MPs, who taught them to 'endure injustice in patience' rather than fight for their rights.[19]

Wedgwood's anti-statism gradually strengthened in the years before the war, to the extent that by 1911 he condemned all proposed social reforms that contained elements of compulsion. In 1913, he asserted his complete agreement with his friend Hilaire Belloc's views, as outlined in *The Servile State*, that such legislation should be reviled for destroying liberty.[20] He saw the National Insurance Bill of 1911, for instance, as an upper-class plot to exploit the lower classes by keeping them 'properly groomed, stalled, and looked after'.[21] Such a view of New Liberal legislation was not restricted to a few strong individualists or eccentric writers – it also found champions in the Labour Party, where George Lansbury, a close friend of the Wedgwoods, argued through his newspaper, the *Daily Herald*, that reforms such as national insurance were moves by the state to enslave the workers at their own expense.[22] *Reynold's News*, which was, according to Patrick Joyce, the voice of populist radicalism, took a similar stance with its distrust of the state and promotion of voluntary activity.[23] And these newspapers were, as Pat Thane has demonstrated, only reflecting a genuine level of working-class objection to state intervention on their behalf.[24] Basically, many people simply did not like having to pay for benefits they might receive in the future, they did not like to lose earnings – as in the case where older children were obliged to go to school rather than to work – and they resented being inspected and judged by officials.[25] Wedgwood, therefore, was not only making an ideological point when he argued for individual rather than collective rights, but was also speaking up for a large, if undetermined, number of those at whom the reforms were aimed, and from whom he could therefore expect a return in electoral or more general political support.

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The same could not be said for the battles which Wedgwood fought against legislation which was aimed directly at groups that were generally unpopular with the wider community. In such cases, the political dividend for supporting an unpopular cause came not from constituents' sympathy for the cause itself – indeed, Wedgwood often received letters criticising his stance on such issues – but rather from the respect he hoped to gain, and believed he got, for being a man who was prepared to make a stand on matters of principle.

Wedgwood's position on the liberty of the individual was firmly grounded in what he took to be old English tradition. In 1911, advising Churchill – then Home Secretary – not to introduce exceptional measures against anarchists, he wrote,

> You know as well as I do that human life does not matter a rap in comparison with the death of ideas and the betrayal of English traditions … so let us have English rule and not Bourbon.[26]

When, in 1912, Fred Crowsley and others were charged with incitement to mutiny for urging troops not to fire on strikers, Wedgwood, with George Lansbury, immediately championed the accused,[27] attacking the prosecutions as impractical and unjust, particularly as no action had been taken against Sir Edward Carson and others who had incited violence in Ulster.[28] The Wedgwoods joined with a group of mostly Labour MPs, although the group also included the Liberal Philip Morrell, to found the Free Speech Defence League to campaign on the defendants' behalf via a series of public meetings, the largest of which took place

at the Kingsway Opera House in April 1912, where a packed hall was addressed by Wedgwood, Keir Hardie and George Bernard Shaw.[29]

Wedgwood and Morrell were criticised by their own constituency parties for supporting Crowsley,[30] but at least that eccentric activist had some influential political friends, which was more than could be said for the other potential victims of state power that Wedgwood defended, such as the prostitutes who were to be harassed by the police as the result of a government bill of 1912 in reaction to a 'white slavery' scare in the press. Wedgwood, using what would become a formula for him, attacked the proposed legislation as unnecessary, ineffective, counter-productive, illiberal and biased in terms of sex and class.[31] His tactic for fighting such a bill was to propose multiple amendments at every opportunity, with the aim both of mitigating its worst aspects and of scuppering the whole thing. In this instance, he failed, as the government, who according to Wedgwood were fearful lest white slavers wreaked havoc amongst female Christmas shoppers, forced it through.[32]

The White Slavers Bill, however, was only a minor threat to liberty compared with the sinister paternalism of the 1912 Mental Deficiency Bill.[33] Inspired in part by eugenic concerns that an increase in the number of mental defectives was undermining the strength of the race,[34] the Bill proposed to incarcerate indefinitely an indeterminate – but large – number of ill-defined 'mentally defective' people, both for their own good, and for the good of society, essentially by preventing them from breeding.[35] Surprisingly perhaps, Wedgwood was the only Liberal MP who opposed the Bill from the start in the name of liberty,[36] along with a handful of individualist Conservatives, including Lord Robert Cecil,[37] although as the legislation progressed, a few Radicals usually fought with him.[38] Outside Parliament, Wedgwood's individualist allies,[39] Hilaire Belloc and the Chesterton brothers, campaigned against the Bill, while the Liberal press was not quite as ready as Liberal MPs were to accept without question the assumption that it was in the public interest to resist racial degeneracy by confining the mentally unfit. *The Nation* warned of the totalitarian implications of such legislation, while Leonard Hobhouse, in the *Manchester Guardian*, cautioned against using unproven science as a basis of compulsion.[40]

Wedgwood received letters praising him for his stand and the press were sympathetic, admiring him at least as much for his fortitude as for his principles. According to the *Daily Mail*, he had set a new record for parliamentary obstruction.

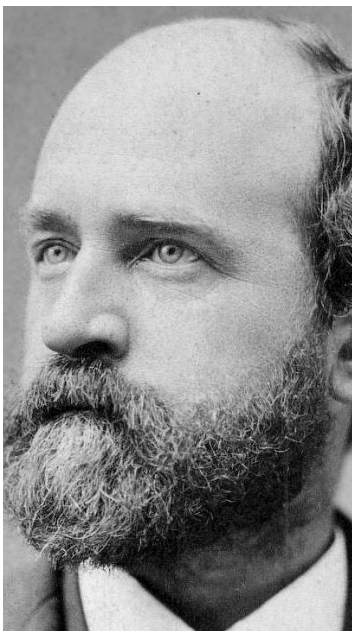
The Bill could not have been better designed to arouse Wedgwood's opposition. It proposed to restrict the liberty of a large number of people on the basis of a contentious scientific theory – though one that was being held up by its supporters as a definitive statement of fact. The definition of those affected was wide and uncertain, 'experts' were to decide who should be detained, and the whole thing seemed to be particularly aimed at the working classes and women. Although Wedgwood's motion, in July 1912, to have the Bill postponed failed by 242 votes to nineteen,[41] he won some concessions from the Home Office. In the face of such persistent opposition, with growing concerns at the eugenic overtones of the legislation and, even more so, at the cost of the new bureaucracy needed to implement it, the Bill was dropped.[42] It was reintroduced in the next session, with references to eugenics removed and with more safeguards to protect individual liberty.[43] The changes narrowed the overall number of people affected from perhaps 150,000 to about 20,000 or 30,000. Wedgwood, however, was not satisfied, and with his band of fellow objectors now down to about a dozen, he continued to try to obstruct the Bill at every opportunity. His last-ditch stand came on 28 and 29 July 1913, when he spent two nights single-handedly proposing dozens of amendments in an attempt to talk the Bill out.[44] The third reading was eventually carried by 180 votes to three. Wedgwood received letters praising him for his stand and the press were sympathetic, admiring him at least as much for his fortitude as for his principles. According to the *Daily Mail*, he had set a new record for parliamentary obstruction.[45]

His efforts were not entirely without reward – the government conceded that parents would have the right to refuse to send their mentally-handicapped children to residential schools under the Elementary Education (Defective & Epileptic Children) Bill, a companion piece of legislation to the main Bill and, in the House of Lords, Lord Salisbury proposed several successful amendments which provided additional safeguards to individual liberty in the Mental Deficiency Bill itself.[46] As Wedgwood had feared, however, the idea that socially undesirable people could be treated by long periods of compulsory detention was applied to groups other than the feeble-minded. In July 1914, he tried unsuccessfully to persuade the House of Commons to drop the clause in the Criminal Justice Administration Bill that gave magistrates the power to send young recidivists to borstal for two years of training.[47] On similar lines, he opposed the Inebriates Bill, which sought to establish special institutions to treat drunkards. Wedgwood particularly disliked the wide definition of 'inebriate', which would allow the incarceration of people for three years for offences that up until then would incur only a five-shilling fine. The government, this time, appeared to have learnt a lesson, and the Home Secretary agreed to meet Wedgwood to consider his objections. As it transpired, nothing further happened, as Austria had declared war on Serbia the previous day.[48]

The Mental Deficiency Act and similar legislation illustrated an argument about the nature of government in Britain that went beyond, or perhaps across, the traditional left–right nature of political debate. The constitutional theorist, A. V. Dicey, in 1914, saw the Act as highlighting the tension between democracy and collectivism, the former of which he defined as 'government for the people by the people', and the latter as 'government for the people by experts'.[49] And both Wedgwood in the Commons and Salisbury in the Lords attacked the Bills for limiting parliamentary power by delegating so much authority to 'experts' – in this case doctors – and by leaving the determination of many of the actual rules to ministers via secondary legislation.[50] This was also part of a far older debate than the one about collectivism – with a few parliamentary traditionalists like Wedgwood and the Cecils representing Parliament on the one side, and the ranks of 'experts', including health-care professionals, the Eugenics Education Society and the Fabian Society, representing the 'King's men' on the other. This debate concerned the marginalisation of Parliament in the running of government, 'efficiency' versus 'representation'. It was not a party political debate. The Fabian Webbs, the arch-imperialist Lord Milner, and Liberal Imperialists such as Asquith and Haldane, could, for example, all be included amongst those who favoured a greater rather than a lesser degree of 'expertise' in the governing of the country. It was a debate that was to recur with unexampled ferocity during the First World War and which would, in the process, contribute largely to the destruction of the Liberal Party. Interestingly, when that debate – which centred first on conscription and then on the formation of the Lloyd George coalition – did occur, Wedgwood initially took the view that the German threat to Britain was so severe that pragmatism and executive efficiency could override representation and individual rights. However, the slaughter of the Somme and Passchendaele, the first (liberal) Russian revolution, and the advent of Wilsonian idealism brought him back to a less authoritarian and more traditionally Radical approach to matters of war and peace.[51]

As well as opposing the government's attacks on the liberty of the individual in Parliament, Wedgwood also hoped to establish an organisation to defend individual liberty in general. The Personal Rights Association, which published *The Individualist*, had existed since 1871 to check 'overmuch and overhasty legislation'.[52] But while the PRA was philosophically close to Wedgwood's heart,[53] it was small and, as Ethel Wedgwood noted, the membership was made up of 'elderly gentlemen of weirdest countenance – mostly rather deaf", or 'ladies [who] either wore short hair or were not quite English'.[54] Wedgwood therefore decided to form a group with a rather higher profile, and in December 1912, he invited some twenty or so likely sympathisers to a meeting at the Westminster Palace Hotel. They included Cecil Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc, Leonard Hall, George Lansbury, Russell Smart of the British Socialist Party, and the progressive clergyman, Egerton Swann. They had little in common politically, except opposition to the Home Office's intrusions on personal liberty. Calling themselves the Freedom Defence League, they came up with a short programme, which explicitly connected the issues of personal freedom and representative government:

> 1. Defence of freedom of individual life, speech and propaganda;
> 2. Resistance to the encroachments of the bureaucracy;



Inspirers and allies of Wedgwood: Henry George, Hilaire Belloc, G.K. Chesterton

3. To work for popular control of the legislative, executive and judiciary.[55]

They also issued a manifesto, signed by the inaugural members and, amongst others, G. K. Chesterton and H. G. Wells,[56] which expressed concern over the recent, 'great increase of State interference with every department of life, involving more and more police control'. The League would fight the bureaucrats in meetings, press and Parliament, perhaps even with organised passive resistance. It did not get very far, however, lasting only two months.[57] The political views of the members were just too disparate – even at the first meeting a row broke out between Belloc's followers and the supporters of the BSP.

Wedgwood's literary efforts to reach a wider public also had, at best, a mixed reception. His speeches, articles and letters were widely published in the national and local press, but *The Road to Freedom* did not sell well and was soon forgotten. This was in marked contrast to Belloc's *The Servile State*, which came out at about the same time, sold well and went to several editions, although its hypothesis had much in common with that of the Wedgwoods and certainly looked no less far-fetched. *The Road to Freedom's* mixed reviews and lack of sales, and the stillbirth of the Freedom Defence League highlighted Wedgwood's essential problem in advancing the cause of 'Georgeite individualism', for outside a narrow core of single-taxers, few land reformers looked beyond the economic or 'class-envy' aspects of their doctrine, while few individualists had more than a passing sympathy with the economics of Henry George – at least as Wedgwood interpreted them. *The Individualist*, for instance, reviewing *The Road to Freedom*, disliked its advocacy of anarchy and thought any meaningful return to the land wholly impractical.[58] It was another example of the dilemma that Wedgwood, as a progressive individualist, always faced. For while he could not subscribe to a *laissez-faire* approach that maintained what he considered to be an unjust status quo, he did not support the use of coercive state power to remove social inequality, not least because he did not believe it would work. For Wedgwood, the economics of Henry George resolved the dilemma. They did not convincingly do so for many others.

While he could not subscribe to a *laissez-faire* approach that maintained what he considered to be an unjust status quo, he did not support the use of coercive state power to remove social inequality, not least because he did not believe it would work.

Postscript

In the aftermath of the collapse of the Liberal Party, and despite the threatened collectivism of 'clause Four', which neither he nor the party's leaders seem to have taken very seriously, Wedgwood joined the Labour Party in 1919. He had close ties with many senior Labour men – most notably Philip Snowden and George Lansbury – from the days of the pre-war Progressive Alliance; the Labour Party advocated a tax on the value of land; and, not least, Wedgwood wanted to keep his seat in a constituency where Labour strength was growing rapidly. Despite being a prominent Labour front-bencher for several years, and a member – as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster – of the first Labour Cabinet, he was never spiritually at home in the Labour Party and increasingly pursued his own particular interests, such as the founding of the *History of Parliament* project and campaigns on behalf of Zionism and, after 1933, Jewish refugees. He sat in the House of Commons until 1942, when he was ennobled by his friend from Edwardian Liberal days, Winston Churchill. He died the following year, aged seventy-one.

Dr. Paul Mulvey is an occassional lecturer in modern history at King's College London and the LSE, who never quite gets round to finishing his biography of Josiah Clement Wedgwood.

1 See Paul Mulvey, 'The Single-Taxers and the Future of Liberalism', *Journal of Liberal Democrat History* 35 (Summer 2002), pp. 11–14.
2 Later published as Ethel and Josiah Wedgwood, *The Road to Freedom* (London: Daniel, 1913).
3 Ibid.. pp. 131–32.
4 Frank Trentmann, 'Wealth versus Welfare: The British Left between Free Trade and National Political Economy before the First World War', *Historical Research*, 70 (171), (1997), pp. 79–81.
5 See J. C. Wedgwood, *Essays and Adventures of a Labour MP* (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1924), p. 182.
6 Trentmann, 'Wealth versus Welfare', p. 83.
7 Kenneth D. Brown (ed.), *Essays in Anti-Labour History: Responses to the Rise of Labour in Britain* (London, Macmillan, 1974), p. 6.
8 Wedgwood, *Essays*, p. 182.
9 Ibid., p. 185.
10 Ibid., p. 214.
11 See Michael Taylor (ed.), *Herbert Spencer and the Limits of the State: The Nineteenth Century Debate Between Individualism and Collectivism* (Bristol, Thoemmes Press, 1996), p. xx.
12 Wedgwood's translations, see *Essays*, pp. 233–34.
13 He made an exception if the state was under a dire and immediate threat, hence he was an early supporter of military conscription during the Great War.
14 *Hansard*, 5th Series, vol.108, 972, 16 July 1918.
15 Noel W. Thompson, *Political Economy and the Labour Party: the economics of democratic socialism, 1884–1995* (London, UCL Press, 1996), pp. 55-56.
16 Wedgwood, *Essays*, p. 235.
17 See Taylor, *Herbert Spencer* p. x. and Michael Taylor, *Man Versus the State: Herbert Spencer and Late Victorian Individualists,* (Oxford: OUP, 1992), p. ix.
18 Brown, *Essays in Anti-Labour History*, p. 13.
19 *Daily Citizen*, 30 September 1913.
20 Hilaire Belloc, *The Servile State* (London, Constable & Co., 1912); *Staffordshire Sentinel*, report of an interview with JCW in *The Young Man*, 8 September 1913.

21 *Hansard*, 5th series, vol.27, 1218–19, 5 July 1911.
22 Pat Thane, 'The working class and state "welfare" in Britain, 1880–1914', *Historical Journal*, vol .27 (4), (1984), pp. 877–900, p. 897.
23 Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1848–1914* (Cambridge, CUP, 1991), p. 68.
24 Thane, 'The working class and state "welfare" in Britain', p. 877.
25 Ibid., p. 895.
26 Churchill Papers, Char 12/9/5, JCW to Winston Churchill, 5 January 1911.
27 Wedgwood, *Essays*, p. 154.
28 *The Times*, 26 March 1912, p. 12, col. E.
29 Keele University, Wedgwood Letters, 1910–12, Ethel Wedgwood to Helen Wedgwood, 28 March 1912 and 5 April 1912; JCW to Helen Wedgwood, 5 April 1912.
30 Mitchell Library, Glasgow, Kinloch Papers 1/31, Wedgwood Correspondence, JCW to J. L. Kinloch, 27 March 1912.
31 *Hansard*, 5th series, vol.39, 601–05, 10 June 1912.
32 *Hansard*, 5th series, vol.39, 699–733, 11 December 1912.
33 For the background to the Bill, see Mark Jackson, *The Borderland of Imbecility: Medicine, Society and the Fabrication of the Feeble Mind in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000), esp. ch. 7 and Matthew Thomson, *The Problem of Mental Deficiency: Eugenics, Democracy and Social Policy in Britain, c.1870–1959* (Oxford, 1998).
34 The 1908 Report of the Royal Commission on Care and Control of the Feeble-Minded found an apparently large increase in the number of mentally defective people – up by 21.44 per cent in the ten years to 1901. As mental deficiency was thought by most to be hereditary, the implication for the health of society seemed serious. See Samuel Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 32.
35 José Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: A Social History of Britain 1870–1914* (Oxford, OUP, 1993), p. 245; Jackson, p. 207.
36 Michael Freeden, *The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform* (Oxford, OUP, 1978), p. 189.
37 H. V. Emy, *Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics, 1892–1914*, (Cambridge, CUP, 1973), p. 275.
38 Including fellow single-taxers Leonard Outhwaite and Francis Neilson, and the more traditionally Cobdenite Radical, W. R. Pringle; see Thomson, *The Problem of Mental Deficiency*, p. 47.
39 Jackson, *The Borderland of Imbecility*, p. 204.
40 Freeden, *The New Liberalism*, pp. 191–92.
41 *Hansard*, 5th Series, vol.41, 710 and 714, 19 July 1912.
42 Jayne Woodhouse, 'Eugenics and the Feeble-Minded: The *Hansard* of 1912–14', *History of Education*, (1982), vol. 11 (2), p. 134.
43 *Hansard*, 5th series, vol.53, 221–23, 28 May 1913; Thomson, p. 47.
44 *Hansard*, 5th series, vol.56, 65–256, 28 July 1913 and 421–98, 29 July 1913.
45 Hanley Library, Wedgwood cuttings, vol. 1, *Daily Mail*, July 1913.
46 *Hansard*, 5th series, vol.56, 1717, 6 August 1913 and 2580, 13 August 1913.
47 Ibid., vol. 65, 139–40, 20 July 1914.
48 Ibid., 1520–23, 29 July 1914.
49 See A. V. Dicey, *Law and Opinion in England*, 2nd ed. (London, Macmillan, 1914), p. lxxii, quoted in Thomson, *The Problem of Mental Deficiency*, p. 46.
50 Ibid., p. 45.
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52 Edward Bristow, 'The Liberty and Property Defence League and Individualism', *Historical Journal*, (1975), vol. 18 (4), p. 772.
53 *The Individualist*, July–August 1912, p. 41; Emy, *Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics*, p. 284.
54 Keele, JCW Letters 1910–12, Ethel Wedgwood to Rosamund Wedgwood, 26 October 1912.
55 Ibid., 12 December 1912.
56 Keele, JCW, letters and papers 1906–1914, *Manifesto of the Freedom Defence League*, 1913.
57 J. C. Wedgwood, *Memoirs of a Fighting Life* (London, Hutchinson, 1940), p. 82.
58 R.K.W., *The Individualist*, March–April 1913, pp. 26–28.

LETTERS

Injustice to Asquith

I write to point out the injustice of the potted biography of Mr Asquith ('In search of the great Liberals', *Journal of Liberal History* 55). You rightly observe that as Chancellor of the Exchequer when old age pensions began, in January 1909, Mr Lloyd George got all the credit, both then and subsequently.

It was, however, the budget of 1908 which provided the first funding for pensions, and that budget was prepared by Mr Asquith and presented to Parliament by him, even though he had by that time become Prime Minster.

Of course the problem was that the 1908 budget funded only three months of payments, from January 1909, and Lloyd George had to find the cost of a full year, hence the People's Budget. This was indeed an impressive achievement, but it was Mr Asquith who really started the pensions!

John R. Howe

Watkin, Yarmouth and Exeter

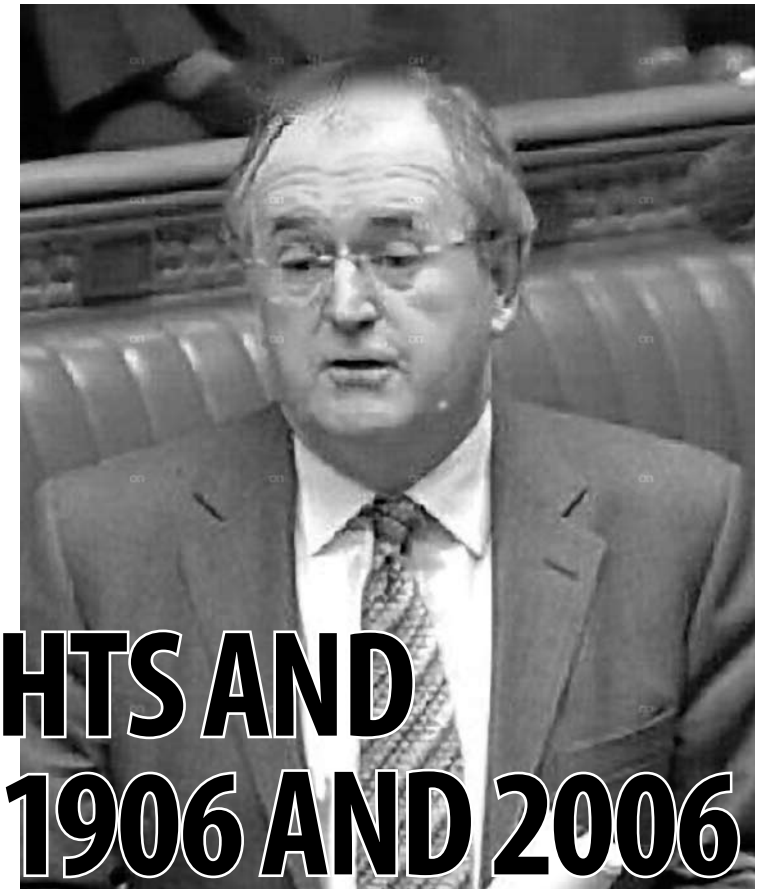
May I correct a couple of psephological errors in John Greaves' account of the life of Sir Edward Watkin (*Journal of Liberal History* 55, summer 2007)?

He states that in '1859, Watkin refused nomination to represent his native seat, Salford, half hoping that he would be asked to stand again for Great Yarmouth, but in the event he was not'. Actually he was, polling 568 votes in Yarmouth in 1859, 32 more than his Liberal running mate, but 91 behind the second victorious Conservative.

Referring to Watkin's failure to win the Exeter by-election in 1873, Greaves claims that this had been 'until 1868 a Conservative stronghold'. Not at all so: at general elections between 1835 and 1865, Exeter invariably returned one Conservative and one Liberal MP, sometimes unopposed and sometimes chosen by split-ticket voting. Only twice did both seats fall to one party: Whig in 1832 and Liberal in 1868.

Michael Steed

Rt Hon Alan Beith MP delivered the keynote address at the Cambridge seminar on 'The 1906 General Election – from the old to the new politics?' in October 2006. We are pleased to reproduce it in the *Journal of Liberal History*.



RELIGION, HUMAN RIGHTS AND POLITICS IN 1906 AND 2006

In Fielding's novel *Tom Jones*, parson Thwackum said,

> When I mention religion I mean the Christian religion; and not only the Christian religion but the Protestant religion; and not only the Protestant religion but the Church of England.

On this occasion, I am being similarly selective: looking at 1906, I will be referring to the Free Church element in the Liberal Party, whose landslide victory we commemorate. There were, of course, plenty of other religious views within the party, including Catholics, Jews and the occasional atheist, as well as those for whom the established Church of either England or Scotland was their spiritual home, whether or not they often visited it. As a Free Churchman (Methodist/UMFC), I can identify with this group.

The 1906 Liberal government also drew significantly on my Berwick-upon-Tweed constituency: many members of the 1906 government or of Asquith's 1908 government had links with my constituency. Edward Grey was Foreign Secretary, Lord Tweedmouth, former Berwick MP, was Lord President. Walter Runciman, whose country home was at Doxford, was President of the Board of Education. The foundation stone he laid still greets you as you enter the Methodist Chapel in Seahouses.

It must have been exciting to come as a Liberal MP to Westminster in February 1906 – like 1997 for Labour MPs or 2005, on a smaller scale, for Liberal Democrats. Colin Cross writes:

> Parliament met on February 20 with some 300 new members surging through the Westminster corridors, astonished that they had no need to prove their identity to the policemen. The place was alive with newly purchased top hats.[1]

Amongst this throng were Free Church members estimated at between 175 and 200. Many gathered at the Hotel Cecil on 2 March to meet an assembly of 350 Free Church representatives. The loyal toast was drunk 'mainly in Apollinaris', and R. F. Horton, Minister of the famous Lyndhurst Road Congregational Church, Hampstead, urged them to 'carry into the House of Commons the nonconformist conscience'. The Free Church MPs appointed a committee whose leaders sat ominously with the overspill of Liberal MPs who occupied the lower benches on the opposition side of the House. (Much of this detail has been helpfully unearthed by D. W. Bebbington in his essay 'Parliament and Dissent', sponsored by *Parliamentary History*.) It was a potentially powerful group. But two warnings are necessary.

As Bebbington points out, the nonconformists did not form a majority of Liberals in the Commons – indeed, so great had been the Liberal landslide that they represented a smaller proportion than their predecessors had done in 1906, and only a small core held together for regular consultations. And there were only two practising nonconformists in the 1906 Cabinet, one of those being Lloyd George.

Secondly, there were – and this is relevant to human rights issues – some significant differences among them. Wesleyans tended to a more authoritarian view than that of the other Free Churches, and of the other Methodists who had broken with the Wesleyans, mainly over issues of authority. Wesleyans had been divided over Bradlaugh's case. Robert Perks, one of the most prominent Wesleyans in the parliamentary party, was fairly right-wing, extremely difficult, and intermittent in his attention to nonconformist interests and, indeed to parliamentary business.

Rev. Charles Sylvester Horne said the 'army of puritans turned out to be no triumphant host'. But nonconformists could draw on a large section of the active public and had significant backing in the denominational press and sections of the national press, as well as a ready platform in church conferences and rallies. And they had major causes of their own, especially education, Welsh disestablishment and the temperance and licensing issue. They were, of course, also interested in social improvement and in imperial and international issues.

There is no certain synergy between religion and concern for human rights. Many national churches have been authoritarian partners of the state. Many religious groups – Islamic as well as Christian – regard the state as a legitimate means of enforcing religious observance or prohibitions. However, Protestant nonconformity in England has a long record of support for human rights arising from two things. One was the Protestant perception of the individual and his or her worth in the eyes of God, which means that the individual has a recognition above that of the state. The second was that nonconformists had experienced a shared struggle for their own rights to practice their religion, to break down the barriers of exclusion and discrimination, and to escape the educational and social dominance of the Church of England.

Quakers had stood firm in their refusal to fight (or in the early days, even to take off their hats); independents claimed their right to organise congregations; and all nonconformists fought against exclusion from universities. They fought alongside Jews and Catholics to be admitted to public office; now they were fighting not to have their children sent to Church of England faith schools and to disestablish the Church in Wales. They had a culture of challenging authority. This is very different from the United States experience of Protestantism, a large part of which has been drawn to the right in politics.

So what did this mean for the 1906 government? We remember that government and its 1910 successor primarily for their social reforms. They had a framework of ideas around social justice and individual freedoms in such areas as workmen's compensation, unemployment insurance, housing and town planning, old age pensions, the beginnings of workhouse reform, trade union rights, the regulation of mine-working conditions, and, above all, the 'People's Budget'. In 1911 Lloyd George said,

> Four spectres haunt the poor: old age, accident, sickness and unemployment. We are going to exorcise them. We are going to drive hunger from the hearth. We mean to banish the workhouse from the horizon of every workman in the land.

Protestant nonconformity in England has a long record of support for human rights.

There was plenty of nonconformist fervour behind all this. The main questioning of it, on grounds of its extension of state power, came not from nonconformists but from old radicals.[2]

The 1906–16 government also had some successes in human rights and democracy, including the Parliament Act (which remained unfinished business) and the introduction of payment of MPs. Nonconformist rights were asserted in the disestablishment of the Welsh Church. In international affairs the government had a stance of opposition to oppression and achieved the ending of Chinese slave labour in South Africa.

But there were failures, most notably the failure to achieve the enfranchisement of women, despite the support of two-thirds of Liberal MPs; and there was a dismal failure in the poor treatment of suffragettes. Nonconformists did not achieve the reduction in the Church of England's role in education which had been a central issue in many constituencies in 1906. For nonconformists, the temperance and licensing issue was a paradox – they did not see it as a 'liberty' issue as some do today in lobbying for unrestricted pub opening hours. They turned the issue round, and used the rhetoric of 'enslavement' of the working man by the brewers and the drink trade to seek restriction or prohibition, but with little success.

A lot has changed. Religion in 2006 is a much less powerful force, and nonconformity correspondingly less powerful. On the other hand, many of the old issues of division have disappeared. The Church of England is not the Tory Party at prayer; nonconformists send children to Church of England or Catholic faith schools out of choice, and are much less supportive of disestablishment. Churches work

together in their campaigns against world poverty. Islam is the new religious dimension in UK politics; it, too, is divided. The Liberal Party is not the government, although the Liberal Democrats are in their strongest position since the 1920s.

Human rights are better safeguarded through the European Convention on Human Rights, yet at the same time more threatened through terrorism legislation. We have new dilemmas.

Has there been a continuing Free Church and Christian contribution on human rights? The churches have been a major source of pressure, and Christian MPs have been in the forefront in fighting oppression. Churches and church-based groups have campaigned on minority rights – especially those of immigrants and asylum seekers, and in opposition to racism. They have shown a concern for democracy – the churches in Scotland were closely involved in the devolution campaign and the Covenant process. There is significant interest in electoral reform in the churches.

Paradoxes remain on issues such as gambling, licensing laws and Sunday trading, where social concern cuts across personal freedom. In a sense, the nonconformists got what they did not bargain for. Their fight for religious freedom was not a fight for a secularised state or for a nation without religion. It is profoundly discomforting to them, and to other groups like black Christians, Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus, to find themselves used as an excuse for purging religion from our society under the pretext of diversity or of integration. But perhaps the most important Free Church contribution has been to prevent the emergence of a US-style 'moral majority' or right-wing Christian challenge. Nonconformity kept much of Protestantism aligned with the cause of freedom. It is only on the more extreme fundamentalist fringes that moral authoritarianism holds sway, and that is very different from the US experience of recent decades.

That is why you need Liberalism as a political force, and that is why the infusion of Protestant nonconformity in the party has helped to mould its values.

Perhaps the most important contribution of the Liberal Party and Liberal Democrats has been to assert the primacy of freedom and to challenge the aggregation of power – to regard freedom as more important than, and not subsidiary to, the individual objectives which might more easily have been accomplished without it. British politics has seen too many of those for whom freedom, due process and the decentralisation of power are only acceptable so long as they deliver the decisions political leaders want. Liberalism is about accepting that others can and will disagree with you; and, so long as they are not taking away the liberty of their fellow human beings, it is our business to defend their right to do so. No other party exists to promote and defend that principle, so it is as well that we do, and everything we propose must be tested against it. That becomes even more important given the new authoritarian rhetoric in which the government's thinking is framed. The cry of Labour Home Secretaries introducing repressive measures has been, 'If you've nothing to hide, you have nothing to fear', which is palpable nonsense. Ministers claim that, 'The rights of the people are more important than the rights of terrorists', a deliberate confusion which was the same argument that was used against Catholic emancipation two hundred years earlier.

That is why you need Liberalism as a political force, and that is why the infusion of Protestant nonconformity in the party has helped to mould its values.

Alan Beith has been Liberal and then Liberal Democrat MP for Berwick-upon-Tweed since 1973.

1 Colin Cross, *The Liberals in Power 1906–14* (London: Barrie and Rockliffe, 1963).
2 See H.V. Emy, *Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics 1892–1914* (CUP, 1973).

Help needed!

The Liberal Democrat History Group was formed in 1988. Since then, we have organised meetings, starting at one per year and now usually holding four. We have published the *Journal of Liberal History* quarterly since November 1993. We have published four books, the *Dictionary of Liberal Biography* (1998), *Dictionary of Liberal Quotations* (1999), *Great Liberal Speeches* (2001) and *Dictionary of Liberal Thought* (2007). And we have established the website **www.liberalhistory.org.uk** as the web's premier source for Liberal history.

We have every intention of continuing and developing all these activities – and more! But we need help – with a few exceptions, all the History Group's activities are implemented by a very small group of individuals, most of whom also have busy professional and political lives.

If you are interested in helping with any of the following activities:

- Meetings: coming up with ideas for topics and speakers, and helping to organise them.
- The *Journal of Liberal History:* coming up with ideas for topics and authors, and reviewing articles.
- Publications: helping to produce future books for the History Group.
- The website: expanding, inputting and correcting our *Liberal History Online* pages.

– or with helping to run the Group more broadly, we'd like to hear from you. It is not always necessary to attend meetings; many of our activities can be carried out from your own computer. Please email Tony Little, Chair of the Liberal Democrat History Group, c/o journal@liberalhistory.org.uk.

REPORT

Think Liberal: the *Dictionary of Liberal Thought*

Fringe meeting, 2 March 2007, Harrogate, with David Howarth MP and Michael Meadowcroft: Chair: Steve Webb MP

Report by **Duncan Brack**

Ably chaired by the party's manifesto coordinator, Steve Webb MP, the History Group's packed fringe meeting at the Liberal Democrat spring conference was designed to launch our new publication, the *Dictionary of Liberal Thought* (for review, see p. 40).

Both speakers focused their talks on the extent to which ideas influence politics, and both believed that they were crucial to the process. As John Maynard Keynes had put it:

> The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood … Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slave of some defunct economist.

David Howarth, MP for Cambridge and author of several entries in the *Dictionary*, illustrated his thesis by comparing Liberalism with Marxism and Conservatism. Marxists believe that political ideas are the outcome and the servant of class interests; they have no independent existence. Conservatives, on the other hand, tend to distrust ideas, preferring to set their beliefs in relation to history, habit, interest and emotion; thinking too much would tend to endanger what they value. Both are clearly very different from the approach of Liberals, who believe that ideas lead to action, rather than the other way round.

David identified three types of political party: parties of social, or group, interest; parties of values, or ideas; and parties of manoeuvre, whose main object is to gain and hold power. For most of British political history, these party types have been exemplified by the Labour, Liberal and Conservative parties, respectively. In more recent years, things have changed somewhat: Labour has tended to become more a party of manoeuvre and (authoritarian) ideas, while the Conservative Party under Thatcher became very clearly a party of ideas, and is now struggling to return to its pre-Thatcher mode of manoeuvre. Have the Liberal Democrats changed? The merger between the SDP and the Liberal Party had certainly created tensions – the Liberals were a social liberal party with an instinctive distrust of the state, in contrast to social democrats – but David felt that a bigger difference was caused by the origins of most SDP politicians in the Labour Party, and their difficulty in trying to cooperate with a party that didn't seem to care who its interests were. There certainly is a danger, David warned, that the Liberal Democrats could become a party of interests – for example of rural areas, or as a mobiliser of community grievances.

Why does this matter? What is wrong with the politics of interest, or of manoeuvre? Any concept of democracy which sees politicians competing for votes in the same way as companies compete for customers, which aims to provide to the voters simply what they want, ignores the role of discussion about what people *ought* to want in the first place – the great debate about what is good for society. The 'politics of unreflecting desires' weakens the connections between members of a political community, and disengages politics from thought. In any case, no electoral system can deliver to everyone what they want; there will always be someone on the losing side. What David preferred is a concept of democracy as an idea of how people ought to organise themselves, rather than simply summing up what they want – allowing for deliberation and changing of minds, helping to create, rather than destroy, political communities.

What David preferred is a concept of democracy as an idea of how people ought to organise themselves, rather than simply summing up what they want.

Michael Meadowcroft, Liberal MP for Leeds West 1983–87, and both an author and an entry in the *Dictionary*, aimed to analyse how the pure could become the applied: how could Liberal ideas be translated into manifestos, or into laws? There was a clear need for applied political thinkers capable of carrying out this difficult job. Michael quoted Richard Wainwright, declining an offer to replace Jeremy Thorpe as leader, claiming he was not a 'first thinker', but a 'second thinker'. It was his job to put together what had been broken, he argued, but political leaders needed to be 'first thinkers', to decide for themselves what had gone wrong. That was a clear difference from Jo Grimond, for example, who possessed a tremendous intellectual confidence, perhaps even arrogance. Michael recalled many occasions on which Grimond had demolished, highly effectively, some ill-advised proposal, only for Wainwright to come in with: 'all right; so what do we do about it?'

Another aspect of political thinking could perhaps be labelled by the theological term 'apologetics', where you looked at your faith in terms of others, and other faiths in terms of your own; Michael believed that almost all he had written – for example, *Liberalism and the Left*, or *Liberalism and the Right* – could be so categorised. This exercise helped enable politicians to defend the ideas of their party in any political arena. What had often saddened Michael was the lack of confidence many Liberals had displayed in their own beliefs, when trying to discover 'short-cuts to success'.

Michael felt that there was often a lack of intellectual rigour about what Liberals do. He cited the general statement of opposition to discrimination in the preamble to the Liberal Democrat constitution, while pointing out that clearly we would discriminate against paedophiles; general statements needed to be examined with care. Another example was the mutation of community politics from an ideological exercise into a way of winning elections – and one of its offshoots, the recruitment to the party of people who liked particular local Liberal campaigns, but had no real attachment to liberalism; they tended to drift away after a year or two. The problem was that the party tended not to think that its members actually needed any real grounding in liberalism, or that it needed to make any special effort to recruit the relatively small number of people who were instinctive liberals.

Michael agreed with much of David Howarth's arguments. One conclusion he had drawn from his work in emerging democracies was that elections were not the cause of democracy, but the result of it, and unless a democratic structure already existed, elections by themselves would not deliver democracy, and could often make things worse – a lesson that President Bush, for example, seemed unable to grasp. Parties that were not based on some sort of ideology were too ephemeral. Parties based on tribal loyalties, or on charismatic leaders, could be positively dangerous: 'all leaders are bad, and the best leaders are worse', because they all fall foul of their own self-importance. Parties based on regions were also problematic, as were those on religions. But perhaps even more importantly, parties based on *programmes* do not work: manifestos are simply snapshots of moments in history which almost immediately become obsolescent – unless they are rooted in a political ideology.

Unless there are those amongst us who are prepared to do the thinking and the writing, and to do something about it thereafter, the party will be wafted about by every passing political breeze. We need the anchor of political thought.

So unless there are those amongst us who are prepared to do the thinking and the writing, and to do something about it thereafter, the party will be wafted about by every passing political breeze. We need the anchor of political thought.

Duncan Brack is the Editor of the Journal of Liberal History.

REVIEWS

Political patriarch

Michael Foot and Alison Highet (eds): *Isaac Foot: A Westcountry Boy – Apostle of England* (London: Politico's Publishing, 2006)

Reviewed by **Robert Ingham**

If Isaac Foot is remembered at all today, it is as the patriarch of a political family. Four sons made it to Parliament: Dingle, as first a Liberal and then a Labour MP and a Solicitor General in the 1960s; Michael, as a left-wing firebrand and Leader of the Labour Party; Hugh (known as Mac) was made a peer after a distinguished diplomatic career; and John was a long-serving Liberal peer. In addition, grandson Paul was a distinguished campaigning journalist. But Isaac was a significant figure in his own right. He was Liberal MP for Bodmin from 1922–24 and 1929–35 and was briefly Minister of Mines in the National Government of 1931; a councillor in Plymouth for over twenty years and Lord Mayor of the city in 1945–46; and President of the Liberal Party in 1947. Michael Foot and his niece Alison Highet have, in this volume, set out to illuminate the life of a remarkable man, long eclipsed by the successes of his children.

Isaac Foot is not a conventional biography, however. Rather it is a collection of source materials – reminiscences, letters, broadcasts, even a paper on Foot's vast library – spliced together by the editors to tell the story of Foot's life. The result is highly readable, although there is perhaps too much detail in one or two areas and some frustrating gaps for those interested in Foot the Liberal politician.

Foot's first election campaign was a defeat at Totnes in January 1910 and his last came thirty-five years later when he was unsuccessful at Tavistock. Parts IV and V of the book deal with his political career. Although initially attracted to Lloyd George, he remained loyal to Asquith after 1916 and bitterly opposed Lloyd George's use of the 'coupon' to designate supporters of the coalition in 1918. Foot opposed couponed candidates on three occasions, losing at Bodmin in 1918 and to Lady Astor at Plymouth Sutton in 1919 before winning the Bodmin by-election in 1922. The name of Lloyd George was 'most accursed' in the Foot household at this time and the two men engaged in a hostile correspondence through the newspapers about the extent to which Lloyd George remained true to the principles of his party. Foot was re-elected for Bodmin in the general elections of 1922 and 1923, lost in 1924, regained the seat in 1929, retained it in 1931 and lost again in 1935. In another era, five election victories would have guaranteed twenty years or more service in the House of Commons rather than a mere eight.

There is a detailed account of his by-election victory in 1922, with some wonderful photographs, and a well-structured summary of his parliamentary contributions after he resigned as a minister in 1932. He spoke on legal aid, Malta, the opening of places of entertainment on Sundays, gambling, road safety and electoral reform. He was a Liberal spokesman at the round-table conferences on India's demand for self-government and earned the sobriquet 'the Member for the Depressed Classes' as a result of his interest in the 'untouchables'. He was regarded as the leader of the pro-temperance bloc in the Commons and the brewers crowed with delight at his defeat in 1935.

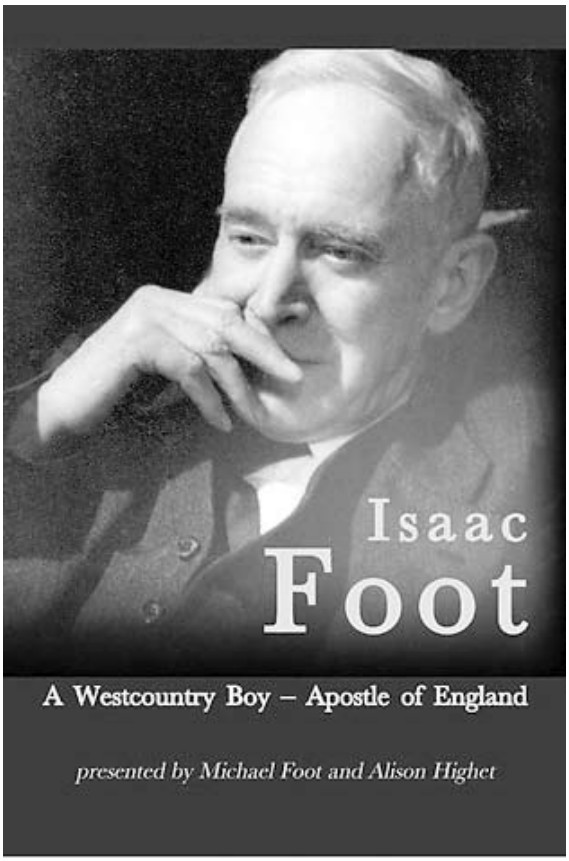
However, Foot's political career continued despite his defeat. He was narrowly beaten in a by-election at St Ives in 1937, occasioned by Walter Runciman's elevation to the peerage. This contest provided an opportunity to settle scores with Runciman, a former protégé of Foot's, who had stayed loyal to the government and had issued an address to the electors of Bodmin in 1935 urging them to vote for the government candidate. Foot campaigned vigorously against appeasement, bravely speaking out against the Munich settlement despite the popular enthusiasm for Chamberlain's foolish claim to have achieved 'peace in our time'. During the Second World War he undertook a strenuous speaking tour of the United States, intended to tackle isolationist elements head-on, and afterwards served as Lord Mayor of Plymouth (on the invitation of the newly-elected Labour council). He remained active as an elder statesman in the Liberal Party into the 1950s.

The Liberal historian is left wanting more about Foot's election campaigns, his period as a minister and his career in the Liberal Party, particularly during the late 1940s and early 1950s when the party was at risk of disappearing altogether. Two of Foot's sons left the Liberals for Labour – what did their father think? Did Isaac support Clement Davies as Liberal Leader? What did he make of the party's increasing reliance on pacts and arrangements with the Conservative Party during this time?

If the details of his political career are sketched only in outline, the bases of Foot's Liberalism are deeply etched throughout the book. Methodism was at the centre of Foot's political career, indeed at the centre of his life. He was a vigorous and popular lay-preacher, and was installed as Vice-President of the Methodist Conference in 1937.

His religious beliefs and the special place in his life held by William Tyndale, the first translator of the New Testament into English, are amply covered. Foot's marriage was based first and foremost on the religious convictions he shared with his wife, Eva. The highlight of *Isaac Foot* is the correspondence between Isaac and his wife during their courtship. They met on 4 April 1901 at a church outing in Cambridge and, for Isaac, it was love at first sight. By the middle of the month he was writing to propose marriage. Eva, a remarkable woman who deserves greater attention for her contribution to the development of such a significant family, was understandably cautious. The letters show how Isaac got his woman. They also do more than any biographer could to demonstrate the warmth and humour in his personality. Isaac Foot emerges as an eminently likeable man.

Foot was also devoted to the institution of Parliament and, as a result, to Oliver Cromwell and the other parliamentarians who had stood up to Charles I. He founded the Cromwell

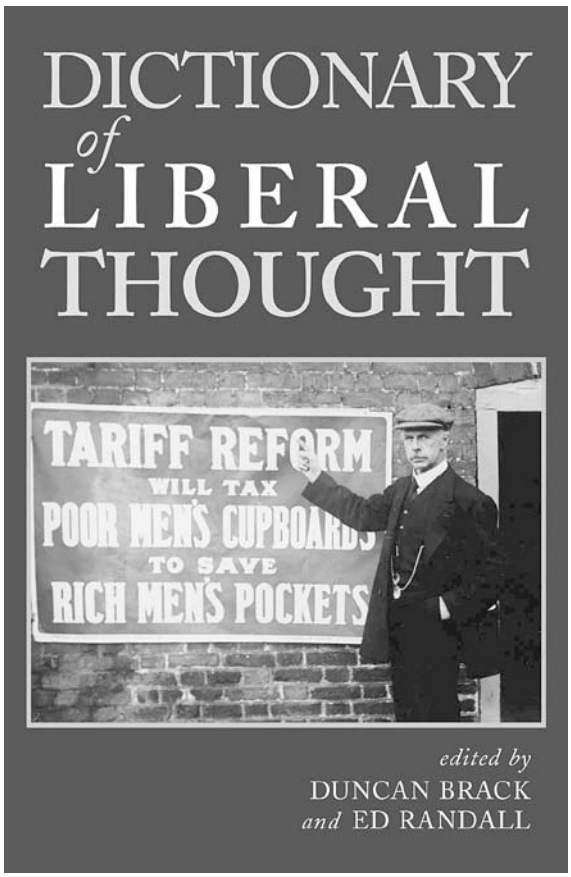


Association and was its first Chairman, and played a leading role in marking the sites of the main battlefields of the Civil War and in commemorating the three-hundredth anniversaries of various events associated with Cromwell's rise to power.

Isaac Foot will also appeal to those interested in the history of Plymouth. There are some excellent accounts of Plymouth in the late nineteenth century and of the devastation wreaked on the city during the Second World War. Foot played a key role in reviving Plymouth during his period as Lord Mayor. The other main theme of the book is Foot's obsession with books. He read for at least four hours every day and amassed an enormous library. In 1959 he paid his grandchildren to count the books – they found almost 60,000: after Foot's death they were sold to the University of California. Foot sought to buy every book by or about the people or causes in which he was interested. He had an impressive collection of early bibles, and 3,000 Civil War tracts; he also collected literature by the likes of Hardy, Wordsworth and Conrad. It is worth bearing in mind that, in addition to his political career, religious activity, and learned interests, Foot was, throughout his life, a Plymouth solicitor who commuted from Cornwall each day – a journey which in his younger days involved a four-mile walk each way to the station. Foot not only had an exceptionally broad range of interests, he excelled across their whole range.

There are a few minor disappointments with *Isaac Foot*: the typesetting is flawed in that there are unusual gaps within words and the contents page is inaccurate. These are minor gripes about an important book on a significant man. Foot deserves a fuller biography, however, or perhaps someone will attempt to write a long-overdue political biography of the Foot family, giving due prominence to Isaac as head of the clan.

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



Think Liberal

Duncan Brack and Ed Randall (eds): *Dictionary of Liberal Thought* (London: Politico's Publishing, 2007)

Reviewed by **Eugenio Biagini**

The *Dictionary of Liberal Thought* is an important reference work which will be much appreciated (and frequently used) both by politicians and scholars. The editors have brought together an impressive team of historians, political scientists and political practitioners to complete – in record time – a highly original publication which will set new standards in its genre.

The *Dictionary* consists of over 170 entries covering the principal thinkers, ideas and organisations which shaped or influenced three centuries of liberal philosophy in Britain. As a reference work this is brilliant and user-friendly. Although the articles are in alphabetical order, a series of indexes (to 'Ideas', 'Organisations' and 'Thinkers') provides readers with a unique table of contents – an intellectual map which maximises the usability of this *Dictionary*.

Each entry is clearly structured. Furthermore, the biographies are more than that: they are quick guides to the overall significance of each of their respective subjects and his or her key ideas. The latter are first introduced in bullet-point format, and then discussed in analytical and detailed sections on the subject's career and political thought. Each article is completed by a short bibliography of primary and secondary sources ('Key Works' and 'Further Reading'). The scope is formidable and includes, besides all the major British figures, also a number of Continental European and American thinkers, ranging from Condorcet and Constant to von Humboldt, Mazzini, Tocqueville and Thoreau. The 'Ideas' discussed range equally widely and comprehensively from 'Anarchism' and the 'Austrian School', to 'Pacifism', the 'Social Market' and 'Whiggism'. As for the 'Organisations', the *Dictionary* covers an amazing variety of associations and leagues – a true reflection of the liberal presence in British society – from the

Anti-Corn Law League in the 1840s to the Institute of Economic Affairs, the Rowntree Trust and the Tawney Society in the twentieth century.

This book is not only a goldmine as a reference work, but also a pleasure to read. Many entries are authored by leading specialists in the field – such as Jon Parry on 'Lord John Russell' and John A. Thompson on 'Woodrow Wilson' – and all are stimulating and sometimes controversial in a thought-provoking and challenging way. 'Hobhouse' and 'Rawls' – spanning, between them, twentieth-century Anglo-American thought on justice and liberty – are discussed by David Howarth, a scholar and a Liberal Democrat MP. He examines clearly both the established and classical priorities of liberalism, and some of its present-day concerns (such as sectarianism, highlighted by Rawls' concept of 'public reason', which excludes 'the use in politics of references to holy texts and religious reasons that not all participants in the debate would recognise as authoritative. [Rawls] wanted political actors to confine themselves to reasons that could count as reasons for all participants in the debate', p. 339).

The entry on 'Freedom' is penned by Ralf Dahrendorf (himself the subject of an elegant entry by Julie Smith), and is an incisive treatment of a highly complex subject in 3,600 words. However, it is also a one-sided view which will leave many Liberal Democrats perplexed. Dahrendorf defines freedom as 'absence of constraints' (in the Hobbesian tradition) and neglects the 'republican' notion of liberty as participatory citizenship and civic obligation. The latter is not only central to British liberal thought – from John Milton to J. S. Mill and the New Liberals – but is also a vital dimension of twentieth and twenty-first century Liberal and Liberal Democrat practice, and one of the differences between Liberal and Thatcherite conceptions of freedom, as Conrad Russell stressed in his *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Liberalism* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co Ltd, 1999, p. 66). Indeed, participatory citizenship was an important component of Lord Russell's strategy regarding 'the use and dispersal of power', as Duncan Brack shows in his *Dictionary* entry on the late Liberal Democrat peer: for, ultimately, there can be no security from state oppression in the private sphere without citizens' active involvement in, and control over, the running of the state.

This book is not only a goldmine as a reference work, but also a pleasure to read.

Unfortunately there is no entry on 'Citizenship'. Neither is there one on 'Religion' – although the latter must be a major concern for the friends of liberty in the present century. But there is a very able article on 'Nonconformity' (by Keith Robbins), which goes a long way towards addressing the Liberal approach in these matters. For, as Robbins points out, '"Nonconformity", in any era, presents itself in opposition to a prevailing "Establishment"' (p. 304), whether religious, economic or political. This comes together with the maxim that 'whatever was morally wrong [can]not be politically right' (p.305) – a maxim certainly difficult to interpret, and yet essential to the integrity and the coherence of British Liberalism since Gladstone.

I can recommend this book wholeheartedly to readers of this *Journal*.

Dr Eugenio F. Biagini is Reviews Editor of the Journal of Liberal History *and a Fellow of Robinson College, Cambridge.*

Things that never happened

Duncan Brack (ed.), *President Gore … and other things that never happened* (London: Politico's Publishing, 2006)

Reviewed by **Robert Ingham**

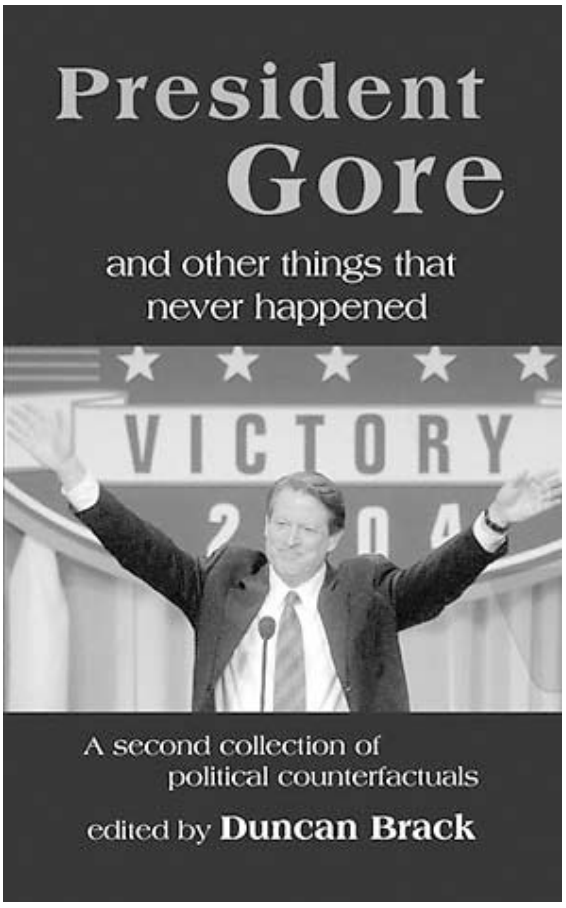
Counterfactual history – the study of 'what ifs?' – is fun; but does it tell us anything about the individual decisions and choices, and wider socio-economic factors, which shape our existence? Historians are divided on this question, as Duncan Brack's excellent introduction to this volume – the successor to *Prime Minister Portillo … and other things that never happened* (Politico's, 2003) – makes clear. Unsurprisingly, Brack is himself convinced of the value of counterfactual history: 'It can reinforce the analysis of what actually happened by identifying the points at which things could have happened differently, and the relevance at each of these key points both of individual choices and of broader socio-economic forces.'

In seeking to explain why things turned out as they did, historians consider the relative importance of different potential causal factors. One aspect of this process is to ponder the circumstances in which different outcomes would have been likely, and to think about the consequences of such differences for the broader sweep of history. For example, if Frank Byers had held his North Dorset seat in 1950 (and subsequently) might he have been elected Liberal Leader in preference to Jo Grimond in 1956? Would the Liberal Party have revived under Byers, or

revived in the same sort of way as it did under Grimond? And would this have made any difference to British politics in the 1960s and beyond?

These sorts of questions should always be at the back of a historian's mind but is it worth bringing such debates to the forefront? Careful consideration of routes not taken can quickly develop into whimsical flights of fancy – the 'parlour games' dismissed by E. H. Carr. Brack argues for the policing of counterfactual history to ensure that its results are analytically useful. His book provides an opportunity to assess whether this is achievable.

Firstly, however, *President Gore* is a highly entertaining read. All of the essays are interesting and there are some excellent jokes intermingled with the weightier points. In discussing what might have happened had the UK joined the Common Market in 1957, Peter Riddell imagines Margaret Thatcher being dispatched to Brussels as a Commissioner and winning the Charlemagne Prize for achieving 'legendary success … in implementing the single market programme'. R. J. Briand, writing about the British political scene in the 1990s, cleverly suggests that the real events of the decade featured in a brilliantly counter-intuitive essay in a volume entitled *Prime Minister Blair … and other things that never happened*. Mark Garnett imagines Michael Howard becoming Tory leader in 1997, using crates of ale from Rotherham to win William Hague's support.



Several authors examine alternatives to the realignment of British politics which marginalised the Liberal Party in the early decades of the twentieth century. David Boyle questions the reasons why the Labour Party emerged committed to the bureaucratic socialism of the Webbs rather than, for example, the co-operative movement, which would have been more congenial to the Liberals. His suggestion that a different outcome could have resulted from Beatrice Potter marrying Joseph Chamberlain, rather than Sidney Webb, seems preposterous at first but is plausibly argued. Robert Waller's look at the 1903 pact between the Liberal and Labour Parties is a succinct analysis of the arguments for and against the inevitability of Labour's rise. The complex political situation of the early 1920s is well suited to counterfactual speculation and Jaime Reynolds and David Hughes do not disappoint. Reynolds, in arguing against the inevitability of a Liberal decline, makes some telling points about the resilience of the established party system. His suggestion that Ramsay MacDonald's election as Labour Leader in 1922 was a key turning-point in the Liberal Party's history deserves further investigation. Hughes uses fictitious diary entries and memoirs to show how Asquith could have taken power in 1924 and thereby revived his party, although it seems a little implausible to suggest that the bulk of the cabinet of 1914 could have returned ten years on.

There are only a handful of nineteenth-century counterfactuals, but these essays are amongst the best in the volume. Tony Little tackles perhaps the greatest 'what if?' in British politics – the failure to secure Home Rule for Ireland in 1886. His account of how things could have gone differently is entirely convincing and raises fresh questions about who was to blame for an outcome the ramifications of which continue to be felt well over one hundred years later. Mark Pack and Matt Cole look at the alignment of parties in the mid-nineteenth century. Pack takes as his starting point the very narrow vote in the Commons in favour of the 1832 Reform Bill and suggests that the Peelites would have been in the ascendant had the vote gone the other way, largely at the expense of the ultra-Tories. In this scenario, the Liberal Party might never have come into existence. Cole suggests that the fortunes of the Liberal Party would have been marred if Robert Peel had lived beyond 1850, leading to the earlier emergence of Labour – 'seeking to preserve the eighteenth century, [Peel] had hastened on the twentieth'.

Some of the chapters on foreign issues are also very strong. Richard Grayson suggests that the premature death of the moderate but popular German politician Gustav Stresemann may have been a crucial moment in the story of Hitler's rise to power. Helen Szamuely makes the case for Czechoslovakia initiating the Second World War by standing up to Hitler in 1938, although her suggestion that this could have exposed weaknesses in Hitler's position seems ambitious given the events of 1939–40. Byron Criddle and John Gittings offer

expert views on developments in French politics since the 1980s and an attempt by Mao Zedong to make contact with President Roosevelt in 1945, respectively.

Two well-written chapters show the limitations of counterfactual history. Simon Buckby and Jon Mendelsohn argue how Yitzhak Rabin's assassination in 1995 might have prevented a peaceful settlement being reached between Israel and the Palestinians but also recognise that peace would only have been possible if Yasser Arafat had displayed a degree of statesmanship otherwise absent throughout his long career. Duncan Brack gives a blow-by-blow account of how the dispute between the Liberal Party and SDP over defence policy in 1986 should have been avoided, but also recognises that the row was to some extent driven by the different personalities and perceptions of the two party leaders. Although that specific dispute could have been avoided, the tensions between Owen and Steel which undermined the performance of the Alliance in the 1987 general election were surely inevitable.

In conclusion, *President Gore* presents an interesting range of essays and will appeal to anyone with an interest in political history. Few of the chapters disappoint or, forgetting that counterfactual history is meant to be a technique for analysing what actually did happen, lapse into pure fiction. Few, however, live up to the aims of the editor's introduction and shed new light on old questions.

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

From Catherine Walpole to Cherie Blair

Mark Hichens, *Prime Ministers' Wives – and One Husband* (London: Peter Owen, 2004)

Reviewed by **Dr J. Graham Jones**

The appearance of this fascinating and unique volume is to be warmly welcomed. The characters and personalities of the 'better halves' of leading politicians constitute an endlessly absorbing theme. Indeed, this highly readable tome is an admirable companion volume to Roger Ellis's and Geoffrey Treasure's *Britain's Prime Ministers* (Shepheard-Walwyn, 2005) (reviewed in *Journal of Liberal History* 53 (Winter 2006–07)), with which it can profitably be read in conjunction. The author is a well-known biographer and historian and a retired history teacher. In this timely study, Mark Hichens examines these thirty-nine wives and one husband (Denis Thatcher) in the light of their own personalities and achievements as well as the roles they have indirectly played in British history.

The volume provides us with biographies of varying detail of each Prime Minister's consort from Catherine Walpole, the ultimately unfaithful wife of Sir Robert Walpole (generally considered to have been the first British Prime Minister) who predeceased her husband by eight years, to Cherie Blair, wife of the just-departed Prime Minister, and notable for pursuing a professional career in her own right as well as bringing up four children. (Previously only Audrey Callaghan and Denis Thatcher had also enjoyed professional careers independent of their partners.) The forty spouses whose lives are summarised in these pages are of necessity a very motley bunch. Some remain well-known and relatively famous. Others have lapsed into obscurity. Many of the earlier individuals, like Anne North, Joan Canning, Catherine Wellington, Georgina Salisbury and Hannah Rosebery, are now largely forgotten figures. Other, more contemporary, ladies like Clemmie Churchill, Mary Wilson, Audrey Callaghan and Norma Major, are widely remembered, even admired, by many readers. Of all these married couples, only the Melbournes (formerly Caroline and William Lamb) formally separated, although Dorothy Macmillan repeatedly pestered Harold to release her from a loveless marriage, and for more than thirty years, as is well known, Lloyd George's lifestyle was close to that of a bigamist – and an unfaithful one at that!

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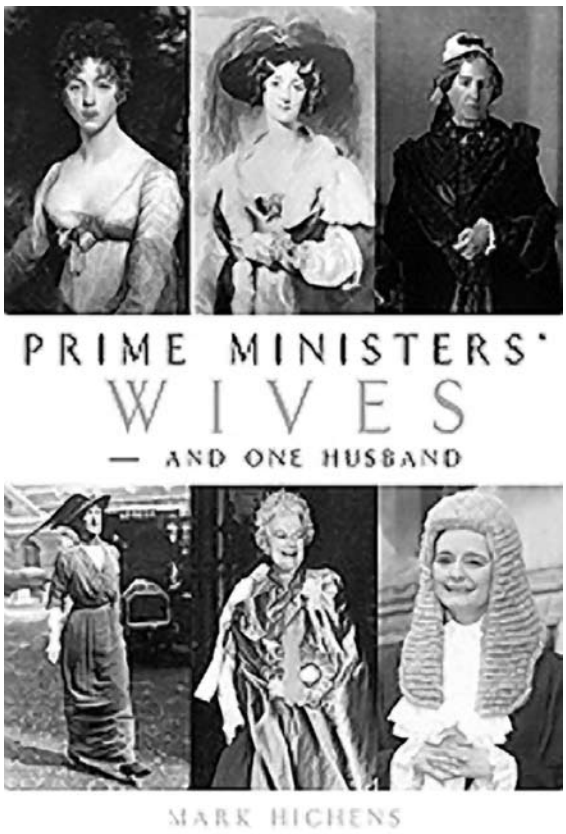
There is a huge variation, however, in the amount of space given to each entry. By far the longest piece in the book is on Clementine Churchill (pp. 159–86), herself the subject of a fine biography published in 1979, two years after her death, by her sole surviving child Mary Soames, but there are also substantial essays on Mary Anne Disraeli, Catherine Gladstone, Margot Asquith, Margaret Lloyd George and Dorothy Macmillan. Some consorts such as Anne Grenville, Julia Peel, Sarah Campbell-Bannerman and Annie Bonar-Law are given notably short shrift in about half a page. It would be interesting to know how the author decided on the allocation of space and detail: do these reflect the available amount of published material on each individual, or simply the personal interest of the compiler in each one?

Readers of this journal would be most attracted by the absorbing accounts of



Catherine Gladstone – 'the aristocrat's daughter, unconventional, disorganised, full of laughter and a touch of the saint' (p. 75); Margot Asquith – 'quick-witted, articulate and sometimes shocking … never long out of the public eye' (p. 103); and Dame Margaret Lloyd George – 'a little darling with all her wits about her' in the words of Margot Asquith (p. 132), although she did not always stick to this opinion! Indeed the portrait of Dame Margaret (in an article carefully vetted by the late lamented Mr John Grigg, the author of a marvellous four-volume biography of Lloyd George), a figure somewhat neglected by historians, is a notably accomplished essay, based on wide and judicious reading and superbly well crafted. But there are also some very fine articles on non-Liberal wives like Lucy Baldwin, Clemmie Churchill (who actually voted Liberal until the end of her long life) and Dorothy Macmillan. Of great fascination, too, is the account of Denis Thatcher who, we are informed, told his daughter Carol when she was researching his biography that he had savoured being married to 'one of the greatest women the world [had] ever produced' (p. 226).

The volume is clearly based on meticulous research and wide-ranging reading extending over no less than ten years. It is impressively comprehensive and up-to-date, judicious and penetrating. Mr Hichens also deals honestly and tactfully with such sensitive issues as the infidelities of Catherine Walpole, the bizarre triangular long-term relationship between Lloyd George, Dame Margaret and 'the eternal mistress', Frances Stevenson, and Dorothy Macmillan's role as mistress to Conservative politician Bob Boothby, a colleague of her husband's, extending over many years.

The volume includes an authoritative, scholarly introduction, numerous fine portraits and photographs – many previously unpublished – of the more well-known individuals discussed in the text (although all of these are to be found gathered together between pp. 128–29 in the middle of the article on Dame Margaret Lloyd George, rather than spaced out through the book), and a full bibliography of the biographies and other volumes found most useful by the author in the course of his reading. The longer pieces also have helpful footnote references.

Readers who have enjoyed this compelling, highly readable tome will also savour the same author's even more recent volume, *Wives of the Kings of England: From Hanover to Windsor*, again published by Peter Owen Publishers in September 2006, another fine study which displays the same meticulous scholarship and lucidity. We eagerly await the author's future volumes.

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

The Liberal Democrats today

Richard S. Grayson (ed.), *Political Quarterly: Special Issue on the Liberal Democrats*, vol. 78, issue 1, 2007 (Blackwell Publishing)

Reviewed by **Jeremy Hargreaves**

This volume is an excellent picture of the Liberal Democrats, and I recommend it to anyone who wants to get a good view of the many different aspects of the party – even those who have been active in it for a while. Its nineteen chapters between them look at a wide range of features of the party – and the detachment of the academic authors of some chapters is well leavened by the fact that several other authors are writing about things they themselves did or were involved in.

Several of the articles tackle head-on different aspects of the question of who the Liberal Democrats are, in terms of positioning and ideology.

Former Lib Dem Director of Policy and editor of this volume, Richard Grayson, himself has an excellent article looking at the party's ideology. Measured against Tony Crosland's definition of a social democratic party he concludes that in its attitude

to freedom, and in the subsidiary importance of ensuring equality as a means of achieving freedom, and also in its attitude towards taxation, the Liberal Democrats have nothing to separate them from a social democratic party. But it is in its relation to the state that the Lib Dems show themselves to be 'social liberals' instead – 'Put simply, Liberals are suspicious of it, while there is little evidence of social democrats fearing it at all.'

Ed Randall (like Grayson, both a politics academic and a Lib Dem politician) looks at this further. In a chapter ostensibly comparing the Yellow Book of 1928 with the Orange Book of 2004, he quickly concludes that an unimaginative and backward-looking attempt to 'reclaim' economic liberalism has little to compare with a groundbreaking and forward-looking programme for Britain's new circumstances, written by a commission including Hobhouse and Keynes. But he goes on to analyse a definition of liberalism written by David Laws in *The Orange Book*, comprising economic, personal and political, and most of all social, liberalism – the latter much more encompassing, it seems to me, than many might expect from Laws. Randall defends Laws' usefully broad definition of social liberalism, quoting Isaiah Berlin pointing out that 'the extent of my social or political freedom consists in the absence of obstacles not merely to my actual, but to my potential, choices'. Randall finishes with a call for Liberal Democrats to reassess radically what liberalism means for the future in changed circumstances, just as the yellow-bookers did – in our case now particularly a new understanding of what liberalism means for man's relationship with his planet.

Academics Andrew Russell, Ed Fieldhouse and David Cutts offer an interesting take on the Liberal Democrats' ideological consistency, noting their striking unity in voting in Parliament, especially in the House of Lords where they are far more cohesive than the other two parties. However, the exception is free votes in the House of Commons, where they note that the Lib Dems often split right down the middle (whereas Labour and Conservatives tend to suffer only quite small splinters). It would have been interesting to know whether it is always the same split, or comprises different groupings on different issues.

A second key theme running through the book is the question of where power does – and should – lie within the party, mostly seen from the perspective of making policy.

Claire Bentham, who worked in the party's Policy Unit during my time on the Federal Policy Committee (FPC), after running through the usual description of the policy-making process, makes the case strongly for much more direct power over policy-making to be handed over to MPs, leaving only a much-diminished role for conference and FPC. There is, at this stage in the party's development, and with the expertise now in our Parliamentary Party, certainly a case to be made for this. However, perhaps understandably for a former Westminster staffer, Bentham finds it very difficult to see any useful role for party members and conference other than simply rolling over and agreeing to whatever policy the lead Westminster spokesperson and staff have researched and come up with. In her view, conference debating a politically bold issue becomes simply an inability to grasp 'political reality' or an over-attachment to 'principle', getting in the way of the serious business of winning votes. (I should say that I think she is quite right that Liberal Democrat policy-making should be faster and less detailed.)

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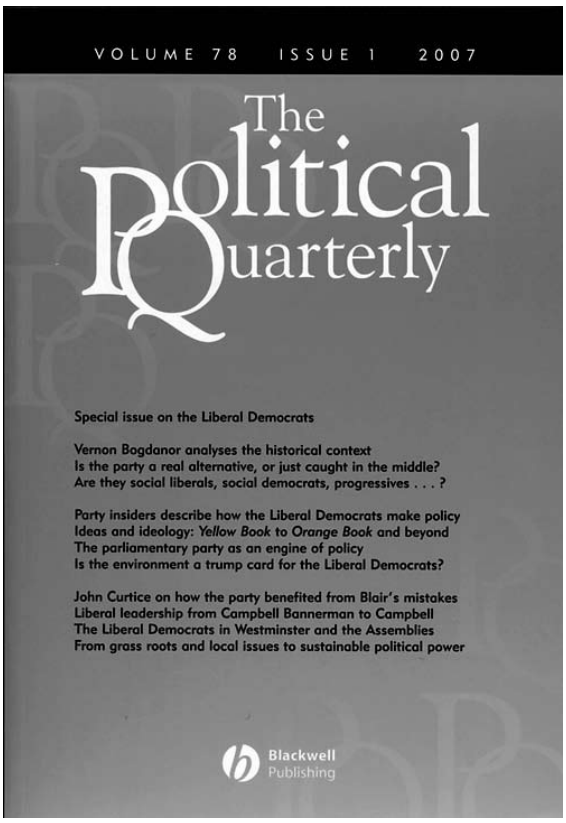
Her run-through of the way that the last two general election manifestos were written is enough to make you weep. She outlines how the criteria for policies to be included were that they were either individually 'important to the public', or 'distinctive' – but not, evidently, because they had any relationship with the general picture that the party wanted to present to voters at the election. This was, it seems, an institutionalisation of the haphazard approach to constructing the party's story. As I write, in preparation for the next manifesto, at least, we have got this right, and will identify our election policy priorities at least partly on the basis of how well they represent the overall picture and narrative for the Liberal Democrats that we want to project.

Russell, Fieldhouse and Cutts take a slightly more subtle view than Bentham of where power over policy lies, crediting an unnamed senior MP with the view that despite the fact that in the party's constitution MPs have no locus whatsoever in policy-making, in practice the MPs have an extra-constitutional 'de facto veto' on new policies. And of course the defenestration of Charles Kennedy as leader by MPs, entirely outside the constitutional procedures of the party (though not in contradiction to them), seems a very strong support for this argument.

However, despite that obvious, and exceptional, case, I don't wholly buy their point. I have myself long argued for a much closer working relationship between party committees and MPs (does actually forbidding MPs to stand for the normal run of seats on the FPC, as we currently do, really help to create an integrated process with wide buy-in?). We have taken some (again non-constitutional but not unconstitutional) steps to address this and I think that there is now a constructive



and balanced relationship – but I would describe it as an active and positive dialogue rather than an actual veto. I can certainly think of times where FPC has over-ruled a spokesman on a proposal they wanted to take to conference. This kind of relationship seems to me much closer to how things ought to be than Bentham's suggestion. Given the public and private energy and wrangling which any attempt at constitutional change would provoke, systems (not only in policy) in which Parliamentarians are notably influential in decision-making, but not solely in control of it, and where party committees engage actively with them, seem to me to be preferable.

To some extent the differences between Russell, Fieldhouse and Cutts and Bentham can be explained by the fact that they obtained under the regimes of different leaders: Campbell (currently) and Kennedy (as Bentham describes). Duncan Brack, who as Director of Policy and later Chair of the Federal Conference Committee, worked closely with both Paddy Ashdown and Charles Kennedy, examines the role of the leader – clearly a major power centre in the party. Brack clearly regards Ashdown as the driving figure of his party, and judges him a great success in the first two phases of his leadership – survival and development – failing only in the third, his attempts to make the party a serious player in government through 'the project' with New Labour (when, as Richard Holme told him at the time 'you must not get carried away with the film script you have written in your head'). This too would have been regarded as a success, Brack says, if Blair had only finally delivered for Ashdown on proportional representation.

Brack is much harsher about Kennedy. In his first two years as leader he gave the party what he wanted, Brack argues, and 'when backed into a position where he could no longer put off a choice, generally displayed good judgement'. But ultimately, he argues, Kennedy had no agenda for the party. He stood for the leadership mainly because he was simply following the line of least resistance and doing what everyone expected him to do; and when he became leader he was not good at managing the party. Ultimately, for Brack, 'the problem with Kennedy was not alcohol; it was that he was not capable of being an effective leader'.

This is all important stuff, but there are some crucial aspects of the question of where power lies in the party which are barely mentioned. Interestingly, none of the chapters looking at the policy process and who controls it devote any attention at all to the Federal Conference Committee and the process by which it decides what gets to the conference agenda – which is a prerequisite for becoming policy. More importantly, it would have been fascinating to see a chapter around the role and power of the party's Chief Executive and campaign guru, Chris Rennard – or perhaps, more accurately, on the approach at whose centre Rennard has sat for the last decade and more. This campaigning style – some of the key elements of which are an almost exclusive focus on the local credentials of a candidate, a relentless focus on one or two key criticisms of the main opponent, and an almost complete absence of a 'political position' on any key questions – is a coherent strategy, almost an ideology, for how the party fights campaigns, selects candidates, and moves forward; and one that indeed has been highly successful. In the grand sweep of the history of the party this approach has been at least as important as the policy choices made by the Federal Policy Committee, with which the campaigning side of the party has often had a less-than-intimate relationship.

A third theme that several chapters examine is the Liberal Democrats' relationship with other parties. Vernon Bogdanor sets this excellently in the long historical context since the Liberals last won a general election. As he shows, both the need for a party to define itself in relation to other parties, and the internal tensions and splits that that causes, were no less acute when the Liberals themselves were actually in government. And I had not realised that the Liberals/Lib Dems were offered either a place in government, or a Parliamentary pact with the government, in every decade since the party left government as a sole party, except the 1960s and 1980s; and that every Liberal/Lib Dem leader other than Grimond has had to respond to such an offer. In fact Bogdanor quotes Grimond's view (from his memoirs) that Liberals needed to recognise that they could not 'by some miracle of parthenogenesis spring from six MPs to a majority in the House of Commons. They would

have to go through a period of coalition', yet 'the prospect of coalition scared Liberals out of their wits … they became as restive as a horse asked to pass a steamroller'.

The academic psephologist John Curtice takes a more recent look at this, examining how it is that the Lib Dems now seem able to take Parliamentary seats from Labour, something they found almost impossible in the half-century to the mid-1990s. From a detailed analysis of voting patterns, he concludes that this is not because of any change in the ideological relationship between Labour and the Lib Dems over that time, agreeing with Grayson that the Lib Dems and Labour remain ideologically close (Grayson argues that any apparent shift in Lib Dem emphasis from 'social democrat' to 'social liberal' over the last ten years is the result of a change of focus of criticism of the government from economic (government under-spending) to rights (terror legislation and ID cards), rather than a political shift rightwards. (Russell, Fieldhouse and Cutts' conclusion that the fact that most of the original Orange Bookers are now in the party's shadow cabinet demonstrates a rightward shift is nonsense – their future prospects determined their invitation to contribute to *The Orange Book*, not the other way round!)

This new ability to take votes off Labour is also not, Curtice shows, because of any change in the 'social base' of Liberal Democrat supporters (other than specifically in the case of Muslims) – it is simply disappointment by Labour supporters at their party's 'performance' in government that has driven them to vote Lib Dem increasingly in 2001 and 2005, most notably (but not only) over Iraq.

Party communications experts Kate Parminter and Olly Grender also conclude that the party's future messaging will depend very largely on the positions of the other parties. Their article is very good on the value of having clarity of message – like others, reflecting on the failure in this regard of the 2005 general election campaign in particular – but it is in defining what a political message is that their article is most useful. They quote Jo Grimond giving a very good picture of what a political message, or narrative, is (even if I don't think he's quite right) with his claim that there are only three general election messages: 'Time for Change' (for the main opposition party), 'Give Us More Time' (for the government), and 'A Plague on Both Your Houses' (for the third party). They also usefully quote Richard Holme (chairman of the 1997 general election campaign) explaining that 'the policy points are exemplifications of our message' – the central point that, as Claire Bentham showed, was forgotten in the preparation of the 2005 and, I would say to a lesser extent, 2001 manifestos.

The most crucial figure in preparing the 2005 manifesto, Matthew Taylor MP, himself contributes an article – not about that, but about the development of the party's message and positioning in the crucial early survival phase of 1988–90. There is quite a bit of the 'how I saved the Liberal Democrats' about this chapter, but Taylor clearly was central to many of the key decisions at that time. As Taylor prepares to leave Parliament at the next election this is clearly the thing that most of all he believes he contributed to the party as an MP – and it certainly is very interesting to read what he did achieve, just as it will be one day to hear something similar from the lords of the last two general elections, Chris Rennard and Tim Razzall.

A range of other articles cover aspects of the party such as its council base and pressure groups within the party, an appeal for the Lib Dems and Labour to forge a progressive consensus to make the twenty-first century theirs (from Neil Sherlock and Neal Lawson), and Lib Dem recent experience in government in Wales and Scotland, where, interestingly, the Lib Dems have managed to buck the normal trend of junior coalition partners and not be squeezed in government (Labour First Minister Henry McLeish noting in his memoirs that 'The Liberal Democrats have probably gained more from devolution than any other party'.)

A few of the articles are fairly well-stocked with mistakes but only in one case does this really render the article seriously misleading, which is academics Peter Dorey's and Andrew Denham's piece on the 'Meeting the Challenge' policy review of 2005–06. Having taken the decision to limit discussion of its policy content to only a small portion of their article, they have focused mainly on the review's process. They get the absolute basics right and are correct that identifying a narrative was one of the exercise's (admittedly confusingly multifarious) key aims. But the chapter is riddled with mistakes – and where they got the idea that its final report, *Trust in People: Make Britain Free, Fair and Green* was simply a synthesis of the submissions made during the consultation exercise, and did not represent the final outcome of the process, I do not know.

But this is a minor gripe: overall this is a great guide to the Liberal Democrats, and I recommend it. If everyone responsible for steering the party's strategy over the next phase reads it over the winter, then we will be well guided in the years to come.

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Jeremy Hargreaves is Vice Chair of the Liberal Democrat Federal Policy Committee.

A Liberal Democrat History Group fringe meeting

THE SEARCH FOR THE GREATEST LIBERAL

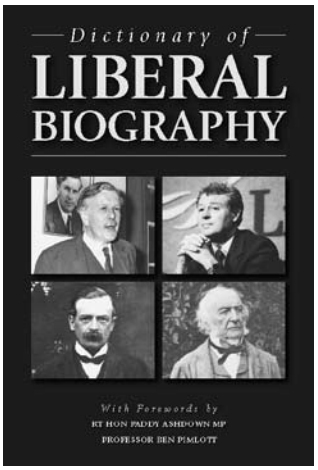
William Ewart Gladstone, John Maynard Keynes, David Lloyd George or John Stuart Mill: who was the greatest British Liberal?

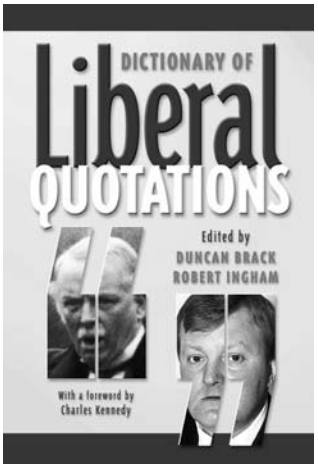
Journal readers voted in the summer to whittle down a long-list of fifteen to these final four (see pages 4–7). Now, in the final stage, leading politicians and historians make the case for each one, and *Journal* readers and conference participants will be able to vote for the final choice of the greatest Liberal.

Paddy Ashdown speaks for Gladstone; **Tom McNally** for Keynes; **Kenneth Morgan** for Lloyd George; and **Richard Reeves** for John Stuart Mill. Chair: **Martin Kettle**, *The Guardian*.

20.00, Wednesday 19 September 2007
Forest Room, Quality Hotel, Brighton

Liberal Democrat History Group at Liberal Democrat conference





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