

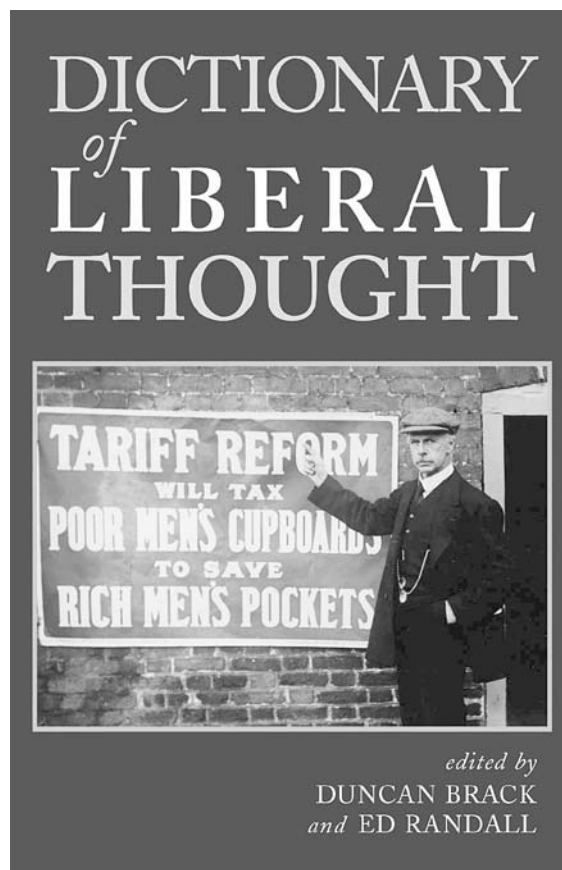
Association and was its first Chairman, and played a leading role in marking the sites of the main battlefields of the Civil War and in commemorating the three-hundredth anniversaries of various events associated with Cromwell's rise to power.

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

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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.

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