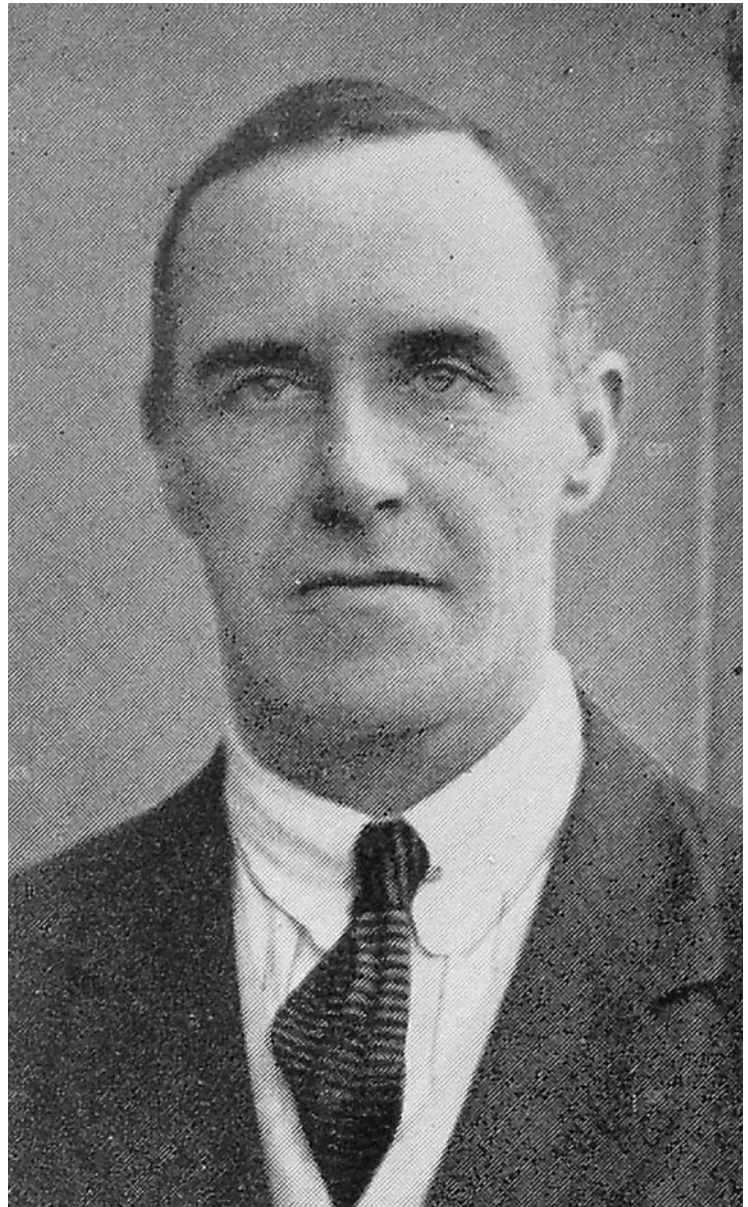


# INDIVIDUALIST THOUGHT JOSIAH C. WEDGWOOD'S BATTLE AGAINST

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 Wedgwood in his battle against the collectivists.



# FIGHT AND RADICALISM AGAINST THE COLLECTIVISTS, 1906 – 1914

**W**E 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 Potters' 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,<sup>1</sup> 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*.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> While such collectivist sentiment ran counter to traditional Liberal philosophy,<sup>7</sup> 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.

In the economic sphere Wedgwood advocated (loudly

Colonel Josiah  
C. Wedgwood in  
1919



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.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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 than any consequential enhancement of material well-being.<sup>10</sup>

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.<sup>11</sup> Wedgwood summed his theory up with two oft-repeated Latin mottoes. *Fiat justitia ruat cælum* ('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').<sup>12</sup> In other words, there were individual rights which the state had no right to contravene, in peacetime at least.<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup> Unlike his future Cabinet colleagues, Ramsay MacDonald and Sidney Webb, who were also influenced by Spencer's views on social evolution,<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup>

By Wedgwood's time, such individualism was generally more identified with Tories than with Liberals.<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup>

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.<sup>20</sup> 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'.<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup> *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.<sup>23</sup> And these newspapers were, as Pat Thane has demonstrated, only reflecting a genuine level of working-class objection to state intervention on their behalf.<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> 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.

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.<sup>26</sup>

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,<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup> 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

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

Wedgwood and Morrell were criticised by their own constituency parties for supporting Crowsley,<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup>

The White Slavers Bill, however, was only a minor threat to liberty compared with the sinister paternalism of the 1912 Mental Deficiency Bill.<sup>33</sup> Inspired in part by eugenic concerns that an increase in the number of mental defectives was undermining the strength of the race,<sup>34</sup> 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.<sup>35</sup> Surprisingly perhaps, Wedgwood was the only Liberal MP who opposed the Bill from the start in the name of liberty,<sup>36</sup> along with a handful of individualist Conservatives, including Lord Robert Cecil,<sup>37</sup> although as the legislation progressed, a few Radicals

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usually fought with him.<sup>38</sup> Outside Parliament, Wedgwood's individualist allies,<sup>39</sup> 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.<sup>40</sup>

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,<sup>41</sup> 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.<sup>42</sup> It was reintroduced in the next session, with references to eugenics removed and with more safeguards to protect individual liberty.<sup>43</sup> 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.<sup>44</sup> 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.<sup>45</sup>

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.<sup>46</sup> 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.<sup>47</sup> 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.<sup>48</sup>

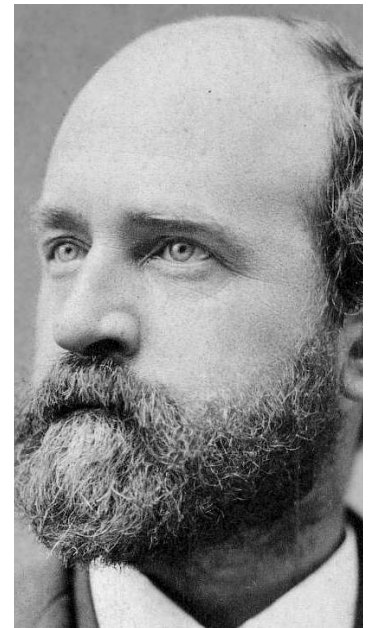
The Mental Deficiency Act and similar legislation illustrated an argument about the nature of government in Britain that went beyond, or perhaps across, the traditional left–right nature of political debate. The constitutional theorist, A. V. Dicey, in 1914, saw the Act as highlighting the tension between 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’.<sup>49</sup> 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.<sup>50</sup> 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.<sup>51</sup>

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’.<sup>52</sup> But while the PRA was philosophically close to Wedgwood’s heart,<sup>53</sup> 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’.<sup>54</sup> 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;

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



3. To work for popular control of the legislative, executive and judiciary.<sup>55</sup>

They also issued a manifesto, signed by the inaugural members and, amongst others, G. K. Chesterton and H. G. Wells,<sup>56</sup> 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.<sup>57</sup> 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.<sup>58</sup> It was

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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.

### 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.

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- 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*, 5<sup>th</sup> 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 Freedon, *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 Freedon, *The New Liberalism*, pp. 191–92.
- 41 *Hansard*, 5<sup>th</sup> 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.
- 51 See Paul Mulvey, 'From Liberalism to Labour: Josiah C. Wedgwood and English Liberalism during the First World War', in Pierre Purseigle (ed.), *Warfare and Belligerence: Perspectives in First World War Studies* (Leiden, Brill, 2005), pp. 189–214.
- 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 Minister.

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*