

Mr Ian Hunter of his edition of the correspondence which passed between Churchill and Lloyd George, more than 1,000 communications in all, dating from 1904 to 1945. It will undoubtedly be an admirable

companion volume to the present tome.

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Liberalism in Germany and the Netherlands

Patrick van Schie and Gerrit Voerman (eds.) *The Dividing Line between Success and Failure* (Lit Verlag, 2006)

Reviewed by Saeed Rahman

MY FIRST encounter with continental liberalism was a happy one, some time in the mid 1970s. Steve Atack, then Chair of the National League of Young Liberals, brought a delegation from the Youth Wing of D66 down to Maldon to meet a Young Liberal branch. The meeting over, we all went to the pub, returned home and we, as hosts, skinned up. 'Ahhh, ze Eenglich joint' said one of our Dutch *fraters* (we didn't even have joint-sized Rizlas). They then produced their stash ...

This book bears an unpromising title, and when it goes on to explain that it is 'a comparison of liberalism in the Netherlands and Germany in the 19th and 20th centuries', are we greatly encouraged? Mark Smulian, reviewing the anthology for *Liberator*, wasn't, but as I pointed out, he was wrong.

It was not only in Britain that liberalism suffered a decline after the First World War, and whilst there are generalisations that can be gleaned from the study of our sister liberal movements, it is evident that local factors played a part in both decline and recovery. There was little interplay between the liberal movements of Germany and the Netherlands until relatively recently. On the Liberal International (LI) stage nowadays

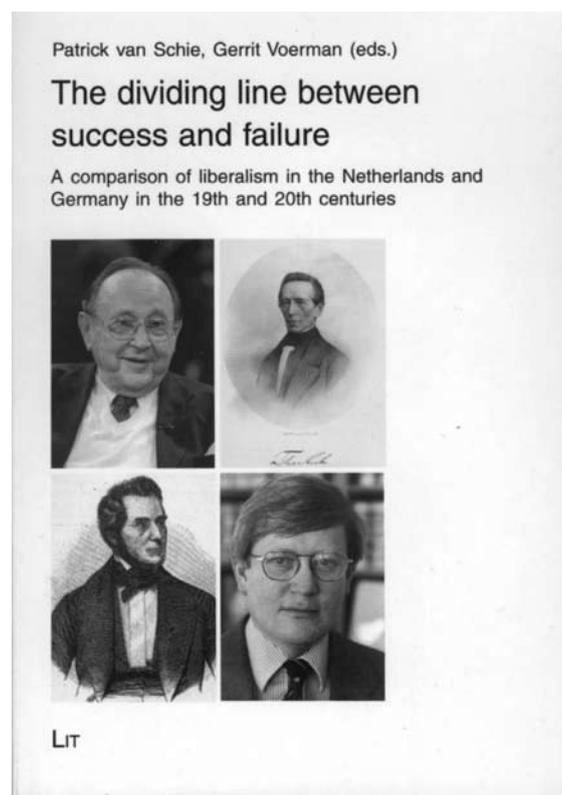
one tends to see a synergy between the Dutch Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie – VVD (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy) and the German Freie Demokratische Partei – FDP (Free Democratic Party) on the right or economic wing. The Dutch Democraten 66 – D66 (Democrats 66) on the other hand represents the left or social wing of LI and is more commonly allied with the British Liberals.

This split between economic and social liberals is common in Europe and was also the case in Germany before the shameful capitulation to Hitler. It is unfortunate that the contributors to this anthology do not touch on this matter – why not is perhaps the most pressing question we would put to them. Both the Deutsche Demokratische Partei – DDP (German Democratic Party) on the left and the Deutsche Volkspartei – DVP (German People's Party) were important, if declining, players in the Weimar Republic, but signed away constitutional powers to Hitler in the belief that he was a politician whom they would be able to moderate.

German liberalism has a proud intellectual heritage, counting Kant and Hegel among its ranks, though Humboldt (through John Stuart Mill) is its main influence on British

liberalism. It was heavily associated with the 1848 revolutions and things went downhill from there on. Despite being the main voice for German unification, its regionalism stifled its development – always looking towards the state instead of the people, whom it might be said to fear. Not only the National-liberale Partei (National Liberal Party) on the right but also the Deutsche Volkspartei and Fortschrittliche Volkspartei (Progressive People's Party) on the left (in particular) had a chequered history under Bismarck and the Kaiser; while they had some successes, they were increasingly marginalised on the national stage. However, the *Kulturkampf* was as much their policy as Bismarck's, reflecting the anti-clericalism that characterises much continental liberalism (and the fact that Roman Catholicism was a major force for the darkest forms of Conservatism for many years to come).

The precursors of D66 and the VVD in the Netherlands enjoyed a less traumatic history. Despite what one might expect



A Liberal Democrat History Group fringe meeting

WORKING WITH OTHERS: THE LIB-LAB PACT

From March 1977 to October 1978, the Liberal Party kept Jim Callaghan's Labour government in power through the Lib-Lab Pact. Labour ministers consulted systematically with Liberal spokespeople across a wide range of policy areas. Arguably, the Pact restored a degree of political and economic stability to the country, but its achievements from a Liberal point of view were highly limited and it did not appear to be popular with the country at large.

Yet, in the longer term, the Pact can be seen to have paved the way for the concept of different political parties working together – which led in the following decade to the Liberal–SDP Alliance and may – ultimately – lead to coalition government at Westminster.

Twenty years on from the Pact, key participants from both sides discuss its history and impact.

Speakers: **David Steel** (Leader of the Liberal Party 1976–88); **Tom McNally** (Head of the Prime Minister's Political Office 1976–79); **Michal Steed** (President of the Liberal Party 1978–79, and academic psephologist). Chair: **Geoff Tordoff** (Chairman of the Liberal Party 1976–79).

7.00pm, Monday 14 July

National Liberal Club, 1 Whitehall Place, London SW1

given the character of the Dutch, a liberal party did not emerge until 1885 – the *Liberal Union* – and then only as a rather loose coalition. Its decline in the 1930s was associated with economic policies which could not endure in the times in which they were implemented – the dislocation of the free trade system in the wake of the First World War is certainly one of the reasons for the weakness of liberal movements in that period.

After the Second World War, Germany was again fragmented and its liberalism at first reflected this,

but amazingly, the liberals went on to form a single party – the aforementioned FDP – which, in view of the nature of the country's political system, has enjoyed considerable success, albeit as a junior coalition partner. The book's contributors agree that the FDP lacks a sound electoral base, which I suspect mainly reflects that old lack of faith in the people. The VVD, on the other hand, has gone from strength to strength, whilst D66 has played a significant role in Dutch politics. The authors speculate on merger, then dismiss the idea, though it has since

re-emerged within the current rounds of internal squabbling in the VVD and D66. In particular there is the danger of populism which the successes of Pim Fortuyn exposed them to.

There is little on Dutch liberalism available in English, so this is a welcome volume from that aspect alone. Frölich's piece on German liberalism in *Journal of Liberal History* 41 (Winter 2003–04) left many questions unanswered on the FDP and Detmar Doering's contribution in this book meets some of these. Overall, the anthology makes a good starting-point for studying the liberal

movements of Germany and the Netherlands, though, alas, one cannot go much further with the Dutch without a knowledge of that language. Given the ascendancy that they enjoy within LI and their greater grasp of the balances between social and economic liberalism, a closer examination of these parties might serve the Liberal Democrats well.

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