

RADICAL AND THE LIBERAL PARTY DUR

Radical Action was an influential pressure group within the Liberal Party during the Second World War. It questioned the necessity for the wartime electoral truce, campaigned enthusiastically in support of the Beveridge Report, and urged the party leadership to fight the post-war general election as an independent entity.

Unlike Common Wealth, Radical Action did not break free from the existing party structure, but remained within the Liberal Party. It played a major role in preserving the independence of the party after 1945 and in arguing for social liberalism at a time when economic liberals were in the ascendant. **Mark Egan** tells its story.¹

DURING THE Second World War, the main political parties agreed to suspend the normal contest for seats in Parliament and on local councils. Well observed at first, the truce increasingly came under challenge from independents of various hues and the newly created Common Wealth Party. Radical Action – originally known as the Liberal Action Group – was formed by Liberals who wished to break the truce. Supported by a number of party activists, including a number of sitting MPs and ‘rising stars’, Radical Action also campaigned successfully to keep the Liberals out of a post-war coalition. The group had a significant influence on the Liberal Party’s attitude to the Conservative Party and helped ensure the party’s survival as an

Radical Action

During the Second World War

independent entity in the post-war era.

Radical Action was also a manifestation of the ideological dispute within the party which was not finally resolved until the era of Jo Grimond's leadership after 1956. The Liberal Party of the 1940s was predominantly concerned with free trade, sound money and 'ownership for all', all right-wing themes, particularly in the context of the political debate of the time. Radical Action organised conferences at which different visions of Britain's economic and social development could be discussed and it campaigned vigorously in favour of the Beveridge Report.

Formation

The Liberal Action Group (LAG), the precursor of Radical Action, was formed on 19

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July 1941, following the failure of the Liberal Assembly even to debate a motion calling for the end of the party truce then in operation in both national and local politics. The moving force behind the group was Donald Johnson, then prospective Liberal parliamentary candidate for Bewdley, who had persuaded the Bewdley Liberal Association to sponsor the resolution opposing the truce. The resolution was opposed by the leadership of the party, placed last on the Assembly agenda and was not reached before the Assembly concluded. A small group of mostly young attendees of the Assembly met to discuss what had happened and agreed to form a group 'whose common aim will be to activate and energise the Liberal Party both as regards policy and organisation'.²

Johnson was a rebel who stood against the 'social climate of prestige, family, tradition, subservience, moral cowardice and anything which militated against political independence'.³ He had stood as an independent candidate at Liverpool Wavertree in a by-election in February 1935, criticising both major parties for their attitudes towards the international situation. He out-pollled the Liberal candidate in Liverpool but came third and was persuaded that he had to join a political party in order to gain a wider hearing for his point of view. He had family ties with the Liberal Party and he respected their clear support for the League of Nations and for rearmament. Consequently, he accepted an invitation to become Bury's prospective Liberal parliamentary candidate in August 1935. Johnson was to

remain a Liberal Party member for eight years (he later became a Conservative MP) and throughout that period he raged against the sloth and inactivity which he felt characterised the leadership of the party, at both national and local levels.

Two factors influenced Johnson's decision to form the LAG. First, Johnson contrasted the lethargy of the Liberal organisation with the enthusiasm with which he felt the electorate would receive a progressive political programme. Johnson resigned his candidature at Bury, after polling a disappointing third in the 1935 election, because he felt that the local Liberals did not relish his energetic approach to the role. He was later involved with the Oxford Liberal Association and urged Ivor Davies to fight the 1938 Oxford by-election even after the party leadership had advised the local Liberals to back the left-wing independent, A. D. Lindsay. He was unimpressed by the state of the Liberal Association at Bewdley, but polled 36 per cent of the vote in a by-election there in 1937 and this, combined with other by-election results at the time, persuaded him that the party did have a future if it was better organised and embraced a more radical programme. Between June 1937 and July 1939 the Liberal Party contested 12 of the 45 by-elections held and polled an average 36.2 per cent of the vote, although only four of these contests were three-cornered. In 1940, independent challengers to Conservative seats at by-elections polled an average of 22.2 per cent between them; in 1941 their average poll was 31.7 per cent. These results suggested that the Liberal Party could still attract anti-Conservative votes, in certain circumstances, and that it might be profitable for the party to challenge the war-time truce.

Secondly, at the outset of the war, Johnson began formulating

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a set of radical policies for the post-war era aimed at preventing the rise of fascism in the UK, but found that as a lone voice he was unable to promote his scheme effectively. Johnson's ideas were set out in a memorandum he sent to the Director General of the Ministry of Information, Sir Walter Monckton, and the Liberal leader, Sir Archibald Sinclair, and which he later expanded into a book, *Safer than a Known Way*. Sinclair expressed no interest in Johnson's ideas and Johnson began to make contact with other Liberals who felt similarly that the Liberal hierarchy ought to be more receptive to new thinking.

Membership and organisation

The Liberal Action Group originally comprised a small number of mostly young Liberal candidates. Two MPs were involved from the start – George Grey and Sir Richard Acland – but neither played a major role. Acland had already established his own New Liberal Economic Policy Committee which was devoted to the principle of common ownership and opposed to the 'Unrestricted Profit Motive'. Acland was rapidly disengaging from the Liberal Party and in September 1942 formed his own party, Common Wealth. Johnson and Acland remained in touch, however, and Johnson sent Acland some of the LAG's policy resolutions. During 1942, Acland told Johnson, 'I feel the gap between us is closing⁴ – but it never did.

The original LAG membership was just 27, but by the first formal meeting of the group, a two-day conference at the National Liberal Club in November 1941, membership had risen to 50. This was described as a 'bare number on account of the group distribution through the country'.⁵ A five-shilling subscription fee was proposed, and associate

membership conditions were discussed. The group had a secretarial board, comprising Johnson, J. A. Paton Walker and Frank Rodgers. Johnson appears to have been the most active of these, circulating his own papers on the 'Rights of Man', international affairs and the economic outlook. At the November meeting a standing committee was formed, to deal with day-to-day problems. Honor Balfour, one of the founding staff of *Picture Post* and later to become an eminent journalist with *Time* and *Life* magazines, was made secretary. This committee, later known as the group's executive committee, met at the Park Lane offices of Everett Jones, a prominent member of the group.

Johnson's leadership of the LAG ended in September 1942, after the group failed to back a motion to the Liberal Assembly which again urged the abandonment of the electoral truce (of which more below). However, the group continued to expand and on 8 September 1942 Lancelot Spicer was elected chairman. Wilfrid Roberts, MP for North Cumberland, had originally been approached to fill this new position. His pro-Republican stance during the Spanish Civil War had marked him out as left-leaning but his close involvement with the Liberal Party Organisation precluded, in his view, acceptance of the post.⁶ Spicer was the chairman of a paper company and the son of Sir Albert Spicer, a Liberal MP before 1918. He had joined the LAG at the start and Johnson said of him, 'no other tiger had growled more fiercely at the very mention of 'action' than had Lancelot Spicer'.⁷ It was agreed at this time to increase the group's membership to 100 and to consider the possibility of employing a full-time secretary. Funds could not be found for this in 1942, so two honorary secretarial assistants were engaged. In August 1944 Wilfrid Roberts asked Spicer whether the group

was taking on a full-time organiser, but nothing came of this initiative.⁸ Funds were found for premises and staff in December 1944, in anticipation of the general election. The group received two substantial donations which enabled it to rent a room at 346 Abbey House, Victoria Street, London and take on a secretary.⁹ However, this situation can only have lasted until the general election, after which the organisation was drastically reduced.

The LAG's activities continued in the same vein as before, despite the change of leadership from Johnson to Spicer. Discussion papers and long policy resolutions continued to be debated, Spicer wrote upwards of eighty such papers himself, and there were occasional conferences at the National Liberal Club. A conference was held there over the weekend of 5–6 December 1942, for example.¹⁰ Spicer reported that no fewer than five MPs (Clement Davies, Tom Horabin, George Grey, Megan Lloyd George and Wilfrid Roberts), five members of the Liberal Party executive committee and seven members of the party council were now members of the LAG. Donald Johnson attended the conference, as did Elliott Dodds, the editor of the *Huddersfield Examiner* and a prominent Liberal, generally thought to be on the right of the party; Harold Stoner, the editor of the *Liberal Magazine*; Lady Louise Glen-Coats, one of the senior figures in the Scottish Liberal Party; and Philip Fothergill, treasurer of the group, and later President of the Liberal Party. Also in attendance, although not as a member of the LAG, was Thomas Balogh, later a member of Harold Wilson's 'kitchen cabinet'. The group attracted some major figures from the Liberal establishment, which enhanced its credibility; but, as we shall see, not all of

those claimed as members were active participants.

During 1943 the group met at three-monthly intervals, and Spicer reported in October 1943 that the group's membership was 80.¹¹ Johnson noted in his autobiography, *Bars and Barricades*, that the group changed its name to Radical Action as a result of Spicer assuming the organisation's chairmanship.¹² However, the name was not used in correspondence by Spicer until May 1943.

Objectives

The LAG's original aim – to activate and energise both the Liberal Party's policies and its organisation – was capable of a number of different interpretations and the group's focus changed over time, depending on who was most actively involved in its work. Throughout the 1941–45 period, however, the group was mostly concerned with three issues within the Liberal Party: the party's electoral strategy, its social and economic policy, and its internal organisation and activity in the constituencies.

The electoral truce

The issue which provided the immediate spur for the formation of the LAG was the electoral truce. The idea of suspending political competition during the war predated the commencement of hostilities and was agreed without opposition by all the main political parties, eventually including even the Communist Party. This had not stopped a plethora of independent candidates contesting by-elections, the first significant challenge being in June 1940 when an independent Conservative, Sir Cuthbert Headlam, gained over 70 per cent of the vote at Newcastle North. Liberals started to take notice of these independent challengers during 1941, when

Noel Pemberton-Billing stood at four by-elections within seven months and came close to winning at Dudley. Donald Johnson's opposition to the truce stemmed from his frustration with the prosecution of the war, and wartime propaganda in particular, and from the government's failure to articulate a vision for post-war Britain. 'The time was ripe for the political entrepreneur who could stake a claim in the unexplained territory of anti-Party truce sentiment', he wrote later.¹³ Johnson did not suggest that the Liberal Party should break the truce in order to gain a party political advantage, but he did believe that individual Liberals, and like-minded independents, could challenge the Conservatives and win.

However, the LAG did not follow a united course on the issue of the truce. A few members, notably Johnson, J. E. Emlyn-Jones, Ivor Davies and Honor Balfour, did challenge the truce, both by argument and by standing at by-elections. However, the group as a whole adopted a less clear-cut position. Spicer, writing in July 1942, commented that the 'political truce is probably a necessity',¹⁴ and argued that the party whips should between them agree a government candidate to stand at by-elections, against independents if need be. This was a plea to get 'more vigorous members of the community' or, in other words, more Liberals, into Parliament, and was unlikely to interest the two major parties. At the 1942 Liberal Assembly Emlyn-Jones proposed a motion hostile to the truce, but Spicer wrote later that both he and Johnson had agreed to withdraw the LAG's support for it.¹⁵ Spicer claimed that the motion, which was debated during the Assembly's final hour, gained 'considerable support', but he himself did not vote for it. Emlyn-Jones was the only LAG member to

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associate himself publicly with the motion.

There were several reasons why Liberals felt uneasy about the existence of the truce. The 1935 Parliament, which sat throughout the war, was the same body which had approved Chamberlain's appeasement policy and which had failed to tackle unemployment, until rearmament finally began in earnest. There were legitimate questions to be asked about the prosecution of the war effort, especially after the fall of Singapore in early 1942; there were also those who disliked Churchill because of his record, for example his part in the Gallipoli expedition, or were suspicious of his demagoguery. Spicer noted four criticisms of Churchill in 1944, including his 'mastery of words' and his 'delight in the game of war'.¹⁶ At heart many Liberals felt that good government required good opposition and that without intelligent opposition the government's prosecution of the war and its deliberations on post-war politics would both suffer. Thomas Lodge summed up this strand of Liberal opinion in stating that the 'principles of democracy are absolute, and as valid in war as in peace.'¹⁷

However, most Liberals also admitted that there was force in the counter-arguments put forward by Sinclair and his Liberal colleagues in the government. Sinclair made it clear to LAG members, at a dinner held in March 1942, that if the party was to break the truce the Liberal ministers would be required to leave the government.¹⁸ It would clearly be intolerable for a party to support the government in the House of Commons but oppose it in the constituencies. Sinclair also indicated that his first responsibility, in the instance of the party breaking the truce, would be to the Prime Minister and that if Churchill wished him to remain a minister he would

do so. Behind the question of the continuance of the truce lay the spectre of another, probably fatal, party split in which the independent Liberal Party would be left without a leader of national standing. Furthermore, because of the support for independents in by-elections in 1942, the three main party leaders agreed jointly to endorse candidates nominated in accordance with the truce and to question the patriotism of anyone who stood against them.¹⁹ This reinforced the Liberal leadership's support for the truce, as did its opposition to a motion about the truce put forward by Johnson and Ivor Davies at the party Assembly in 1943.

Following the failure of their efforts to persuade the Liberal Party to abandon the truce, Johnson and Ivor Davies drew up a list of 100 constituencies which they felt could offer a promising result for an independent Liberal candidate.²⁰ They agreed to contest any by-elections in these constituencies, with or without help from the LAG, Davies concentrating on the north of the country, Johnson on the south. Both men were backed by Clement Davies, who professed to be delighted at the idea. However, these plans did not take into account the existence of other independents eager to contest by-elections to attack the government. Eight independents originally came forward to contest the Central Bristol by-election in February 1943, for example, although only three eventually stood. Johnson secured a provisional agreement from the National Committee of Common Wealth that they would not contest the 100 seats on Johnson's list. However, Johnson was unable to prevent 'independent' independent Liberal candidates standing at Eddisbury and Daventry in April 1943, seats not on the list of 100. To complicate matters further, Denis Kendall, the independent

MP for Grantham, was also organising independent candidatures at certain by-elections. He put forward a supporter at the Newark by-election in June 1943, who was enthusiastically backed by Clement Davies and Tom Horabin. Their decision scuppered Johnson's hopes of organising by-election campaigns which would harness the full support of the LAG and its parliamentary supporters.

During 1943 both Johnson and Balfour stood for Parliament, at Chippenham and Darwen (a Liberal seat until 1935) respectively, and both came exceptionally close to victory.²¹ Despite being independently organised, their campaigns were very similar. Both were publicly opposed by the weight of the official Liberal Party, which on both occasions backed the Conservative candidate. This led to both Liberal associations offering only limited help to the 'Liberal' candidates. Johnson stated that the only help he received from the Chippenham Liberals was the right to buy 38,000 addressed envelopes, which had been prepared in advance of a possible 1940 general election.²² Balfour received help from members of the Darwen Liberal Association after the association's President, Sir Fritz Hindle, signed the nomination papers of her Tory opponent. Both Balfour and Johnson were, at first, strongly attacked by the local media. Balfour was backed by the *News Chronicle*, but only after the local newspapers had threatened to boycott her campaign altogether.²³ The *Bath and Wiltshire Chronicle* fired several broadsides at Johnson, describing him as an 'irresponsible adventurer' of 'unbalanced mind' whose 'presence is highly undesired' and whose candidature served only to 'divert effort from the winning of the war for several weeks'. Furthermore, the newspaper described Johnson as a:

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political beggar who wants others to play him the part of glorifying him, a lone, unknown, untried and very audacious figure who has gambolled on to the political platform as if it were a music-hall stage and he was a rag-tailed comedian out only to catch laughs – for he will certainly never catch votes.²⁴

Neither candidate benefited from a substantial political organisation. Johnson was unable to book any indoor venues for his meetings and was barely able to reach any electors outside the towns of Chippenham, Calne and Malmesbury. Balfour relied on an ad hoc local committee and an enthusiastic band of Young Liberals. Although both candidates received minimal support from Radical Action, they were backed by many individual Liberals and others. The Labour Party supported the truce candidate in both by-elections. Johnson had argued with Common Wealth and received no help from them; nor was he helped by A. D. Lindsay or Vernon Bartlett. He noted that Radical Action ‘discovered a variety of reasons for not being able to back him at all’.²⁵ Spicer wrote to both Johnson and Balfour and urged them both not to stand.²⁶ All of Johnson’s meetings were addressed by a team comprising himself, Balfour and two independent, truce-breaking MPs, Bill Brown and George Reakes.²⁷ Balfour received several private messages of support. Lord Davies sent her £150 towards her election expenses; Lady Violet Bonham Carter and Sir George Gower offered encouraging words; Clement Davies and Vernon Bartlett were enthusiastic in their private backing. The Liberal Associations in Halifax, Lancaster and Newcastle-under-Lyme offered assistance, as did a Labour councillor from

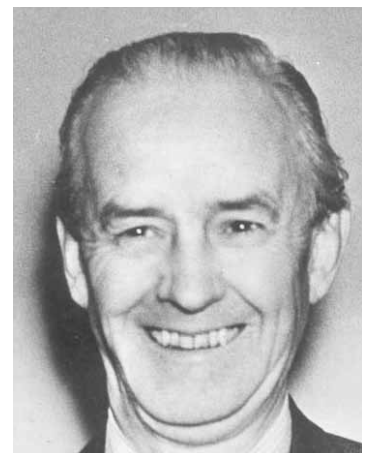
Blackburn. N. R. Dickinson of the Yorkshire Liberal Federation summed up a growing grassroots feeling, ‘it is positively heart-rending to see the dissipation of energy that is going on in quarters that should be united in common hostility to the organised forces which brought our country so near to disaster at the time of the outbreak of the war’.²⁸ However, both candidates failed to make a breakthrough and the truce held. Radical Action failed to provide active support for the candidates, despite both being prominent members of the organisation. Radical Action offered more help to Margaret Corbett-Ashby at Bury St. Edmunds in 1944, but it was ‘too little and too late’.²⁹

Liberal membership of the Churchill government

As early as 1942 the LAG abandoned its fitful efforts to break the truce and turned its attention to two more issues of Liberal strategy – whether the party should remain part of the government and when the party’s independence should be reasserted after the end of the war. Tom Horabin argued at the LAG conference in December 1942 that the Liberal ministers should first leave the government and then break the truce, as a party of opposition. Even if the war was won, he suggested, the ‘present government would lose the war for the common people’.³⁰ Johnson supported this, but Spicer was doubtful, wondering whether Horabin was suggesting that the parliamentary party should manufacture a situation whereby it could cross the floor.³¹ A motion supporting the move into opposition was backed by the conference, with Clement Davies again an enthusiastic supporter.

The idea of leaving the government was put to Sinclair at a lunch shortly after the

Allies and opponents of Radical Action: Sir Archibald Sinclair, Tom Horabin, Clement Davies and Sir Richard Acland



conference. Predictably, Sinclair refused to countenance the idea and then raised the issue of the Liberal Party's position after the war. Sinclair felt that the war leaders, presumably including himself, would not participate in a large way in the post-war general election, and that there might be more than three parties competing for power, with a strong Communist challenge, and a right-wing Tory splinter party. In his view, this, combined with possible US isolationism, would necessitate the avoidance of party politics in the House of Commons. This was interpreted as a clear signal that Sinclair was considering an alliance with left-wing Tories, his ministerial colleagues, in order to counteract a Communist breakthrough. Spicer was scathing:

They might have well been the views of someone who had spent the last two years living in a trance. When I reflect on them I can now understand, at last, the attitudes of the grey beards in the party, who seem to resent the intrusion of people who wish to set the Liberal Party in motion, to overtake the spontaneous march of public opinion to the left. Nothing which he said seemed to justify my joining the Liberal Party instead of either the Tory or the Labour Party. I came to the conclusion that Sinclair does not believe that the Liberal Party will survive as a separate entity.³²

Spicer suggested to Sinclair that the debate over the implementation of the Beveridge Report, early in 1943, could be used as an opportunity to make a stand on a radical issue and break with the government. Sinclair condemned what he saw as a dangerous game of party politics, arguing that 'victory is the only basis on which the Beveridge Report or any other plan for the betterment of the life of the

people can be made into reality'.³³ Following this exchange of correspondence between Spicer and Sinclair, the LAG continued to argue that the Liberal Party had a duty to oppose and embarrass the government, and move into opposition if need be. Sinclair had made it plain that he was staying in the government, however, and Radical Action turned its attention to the matter of the party's status after the war.

The Liberal Party after the war

Sinclair had suggested in 1941 that the coalition government could continue after the war, until international peace, order, justice and commerce were all restored. This process would take nearer to '3 years' than '3 weeks'.³⁴ Sinclair was not simply thinking of what might be best for the country; he suspected that an early election would be to the benefit of the Conservatives and to the detriment of the poorly organised Liberals.

By 1943 the political situation had evolved and it was becoming clearer that the Labour Party did not wish to continue with coalition government beyond the end of the war in Europe. Speaking at the 1943 Assembly Sinclair said:

I have always recoiled from the prospect of a general election fought immediately after we finish the war with Germany ... [but] ... consultation with the electors ought not to be unduly delayed.³⁵

This approach did not satisfy party members at the 1943 Assembly, who supported Johnson's motion opposing the continuance of the coalition after the war in Europe. Sinclair refused to be bound by the decision, but the pressure on him increased when a meeting of Liberal candidates in January 1944 urged that the forthcoming

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election should be fought by the party 'without any obligations to any other party'.³⁶ The Liberal Party Council also backed this approach.

As late as July 1944 Sinclair indicated at a luncheon with Sir Malcolm Stewart, the brick manufacturer, that he wished Churchill to stay in power after the war, that he hoped Liberals could support Churchill's election programme and that there would be increased Liberal representation in the government after the election.³⁷ Sinclair was not without allies amongst his parliamentary colleagues. A few months earlier Harcourt Johnstone had said in a speech at Middlesbrough that Liberals could be satisfied with the reform measures undertaken by the National Government.³⁸ However, Sinclair was also a party man and he recognised the pressure being exerted upon him by the Liberal Party Organisation as well as by Radical Action. The Labour Party's position was also influential; continuing in a coalition with the Conservatives after Labour had departed would have severely compromised the Liberal Party's identity. In October 1944 the Liberal Parliamentary Party finally stated that the party would fight the election with the maximum number of candidates and in complete independence. Spicer, in a letter to Edward Hulton of the *Picture Post*, felt that this announcement implied that both of Radical Action's aims – to secure the party's independence and to guarantee the party's backing for a radical programme – had been achieved.³⁹

Social and economic policy

Several individual Liberals offered their vision of post-war economic and social policy in a variety of books and pamphlets published during the war years. Johnson's social and economic policy proposals,

outlined in *Safer than a Known Way*, stemmed from his perception that the pre-eminent post-war concern would be the prevention of the re-emergence of fascism. He advocated the redistribution of wages and profits, industrial co-partnership, improved credit facilities to aid the improvement of industry, and the eventual creation of a federal world government, which would bring with it free trade and international peace and harmony. In the context of the war years, this did not constitute an especially radical agenda. Johnson was followed into print by two Liberal MPs, Sir Richard Acland and Tom Horabin, who both set out far more extreme positions. In *What It Will be Like in the New Britain*, Acland suggested that the nation's economic problems would be solved by the 'Common Ownership' of land and property and went as far as to claim that, 'we, without forecasting any of the details of Common Ownership, can be certain that it must be better than giant capitalism'.⁴⁰ Horabin, in *Politics Made Plain*, argued that Radical Action wanted to use 'the power of the State to build a Britain fit for ordinary decent people',⁴¹ and this would involve the abolition of the public schools, the nationalisation of power, transport, coal, land and the banking industry, and the implementation of the Beveridge Report in full.

The bulk of the Liberal Party, Radical Action included, was sceptical of policies which involved the dramatic extension of the power of the state. The LAG meeting in December 1942 was primarily concerned with an economic policy motion which was initially close to the position of the Liberal Party as a whole. Although it sought the nationalisation of the natural monopolies and transport it also made clear that there should be a 'framework of law within which there will be the widest possible scope for free enterprise'

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and that Liberals should guard against 'the kind of planning which would establish a regime of totalitarian or bureaucratic tyranny'.⁴² Horabin led the opposition to this orthodoxy and the group's policy took on a more radical tone as a result. The questions of whether monopolies were all bad and which industries should be nationalised were referred to a committee, headed by Dr Balogh, and an amendment suggesting that the state should decide 'in which spheres restricted private enterprise can continue to operate' was passed.

The LAG's enthusiasm for considering economic solutions which were anathema to the Liberal hierarchy did cause the party's leadership some concern. After Spicer and Everett Jones lunched with Sir Archibald Sinclair in December 1942, Spicer wrote to Sinclair, 'I inferred from several of the remarks you made that you feel that members of the Liberal Action Group have been largely dominated by one or two members of Parliament. One in particular.⁴³ That one was Horabin, who was widely regarded within the Liberal Party as a left-wing extremist.⁴⁴ Horabin became involved with the LAG late in 1942,⁴⁵ and his claim to speak for Radical Action was a result of his regular attendance at the group's meetings. However, he was never closely involved with the running of the group. Although he was vocal in the discussion of the group's policy resolutions, Radical Action never supported resolutions which went as far as Horabin desired in extending the state's economic role. Spicer, in an ongoing correspondence with Harold Stoner, regularly expressed his exasperation with Horabin and his political ally Clement Davies. 'We were unusually free of personalities (Horabin, Balogh and Clem Davies were none of them present)', noted Spicer of a Radical Action meeting in June

1943.⁴⁶ Another former group member went further, stating of Horabin, 'we had no firm contact with him and certainly were not linked to the policies he put forward in his book'. Spicer was forced to make the same point to Sinclair, when the latter suggested that Radical Action was pressing the Liberal Party to accept wide-scale economic planning:

Radical Action was not formed by a group who have the same views on economic questions, it was formed by a group of people who were dissatisfied by the inertia of the Liberal Party organisation and were determined to try and get some life into it.⁴⁷

Radical Action's main objective in the economic sphere was to persuade the Liberal Party leadership to adopt a thorough programme of post-war economic reform and reconstruction, which could form the basis of a popular appeal to the electorate. As early as December 1942, Spicer sent Sinclair a LAG motion which stated:

That the war can only be won in the shortest time, and the opportunities of victory be realised if a substantial measure of reform is embodied in legislation now. It considers that a firm assurance to the people of Great Britain of the kind of economic and social life which will be open to them at the close of hostilities is indispensable.⁴⁸

Spicer argued that the other two parties would not be able to tackle adequately the challenges of peace because both would be too tired at the end of the war and both represented constituencies which were diametrically opposed to each other. Consequently, post-war reconstruction offered enormous electoral potential to the Liberal Party.⁴⁹

The publication of the Beveridge Report in November 1942, and its immediate popularity with the general public, galvanised those Liberals most concerned with post-war reconstruction issues. Spicer called for the Liberal Parliamentary Party to back the report, almost immediately after it was published, but received an equivocal reply from Sinclair on the subject, to the effect that the 'government is doing a great deal about social reform and reconstruction after the war'.⁵⁰ In February 1943, with the House of Commons about to divide on a Labour amendment urging the government to implement the report's recommendations, the LAG sent a telegram to Sinclair and Sir Percy Harris (who led the Liberal backbenchers in the Commons) urging them to back the amendment. Sinclair supported the government, but only three backbench Liberal MPs backed him up, while nine voted against the government.⁵¹ Sinclair's decision to support the government and oppose the immediate implementation of the Beveridge Report caused a great deal of disquiet amongst Radical Action members. Spicer later wrote that, 'Sinclair should have resigned on the third day of the Beveridge Report debate'.⁵²

Beveridge himself was elected as Liberal MP for Berwick in 1944, under the terms of the truce, following the death in action of George Grey. This allowed Spicer to conclude that Radical Action had succeeded in infusing the party with a militant, radical policy.⁵³ Beveridge was prominent in the Liberal Party's campaign during the 1945 general election and most Liberal candidates made reference to his report and to the party's commitment to fight want, ignorance, idleness, squalor and disease. However, if there was any advantage to be gained from the Liberal Party

being the party of Beveridge and his report, it was lost in 1943, when the party failed to stake out its position with sufficient clarity to make an impact on the electorate.

Party organisation

Johnson described the Liberal leadership as the 'most outstanding example of nepotism of any institution I have ever known'.⁵⁴ The higher echelons of the party were dominated by individuals who owed their positions to their family connections, their money or both. The Cadburys, Seelys, Foots, and, of course, the Bonham Carters, formed the quasi-aristocratic Asquithian hierarchy which outsiders found difficult to penetrate. All the Liberal ministers in the coalition government – Sinclair, Dingle Foot, Seely, Rothschild and Johnstone – belonged to the same dining club as Churchill, the Other Club.⁵⁵ The LAG may have been formed to achieve certain ill-defined political ends, but it also reflected the frustration felt by young, ambitious candidates to 'get on' in the party and to assume the positions of responsibility which they were largely denied by dint of their background.

In 1944, Stephen Bonarjee, who had been an officer of the National League of Young Liberals before the war, complained of the snobbery of the senior figures in the party, remarking how easily Mark Bonham Carter had been selected as candidate for the promising Barnstaple constituency, and how Philip Rea had revived his interest in standing for Darwen in 1945, in the light of Balfour's by-election performance. Violet Bonham Carter attracted a large part of Radical Action's censures, because, to some, her prominence in the party was at least as much due to her family connections as to her ability. Bonarjee commented that she

was the 'best living argument I know against having women in politics'.⁵⁶

Initially the LAG formed no coherent plan to tackle this oligarchy. However, Radical Action did launch one assault on the make-up of the party's leadership, by submitting a slate of candidates to the elections for the LPO officerships in 1944. Leonard Harris spelt out the group's intentions in a letter to Arthur Worsley, one of the party's senior agents:

Try to consider what I should think of a business which had on its board of directors men of the age and temperament of Rea, [H.] Worsley and Johnstone. My objection to the latter is chiefly his conservatism, not his age. I should not be inclined to put money into such a company.⁵⁷

Four Radical Action candidates were advanced. J. E. Emlyn-Jones and A. P. Marshall were put forward for the vice-presidential vacancies; Spicer and Harris stood for the three vacancies for the position of treasurer. Spicer, who by this time had been invited on to a committee whose remit was to re-fashion the machinery of the LPO, was appalled at the complacent attitude of some of its members. He asked Marshall:

if you want to revive the party, do you honestly think it can be done by having as officers, men of the age and temperament as Lord Rea, Harcourt Johnstone and Isaac Foot? Do you really think Wilfrid Roberts has the vigour to infuse dynamic into the organisation throughout the country? When you look round the council, whilst I have the greatest respect for the Viscountess Gladstone and the Marchioness of Crewe, I cannot believe that they are capable, at their age, of reviving the Liberal Party. Lord Stanmore is up for the peers;

Johnson described the Liberal leadership as the 'most outstanding example of nepotism of any institution I have ever known'.

do you think he will help revive the Liberal party? Sir George Paish is sincere, but will he be a potent force in the Liberal Party?⁵⁸

Radical Action's challenge failed, but it had been a half-hearted one at best. The group only turned its attention to organisational matters after it was clear that pressure to abandon the electoral truce, pull the Liberal ministers out of the government or force Sinclair's hand over the matter of the party's independence were futile. The 1944 Assembly was the only occasion on which Radical Action used the LPO machinery to challenge the leadership, but the group's failure to build links with the party rank and file (as will be seen below) cost it dear. In October 1944 Spicer wrote a paper entitled 'Liberals must lead a radical revival', which stated that an immediate goal of Radical Action must be to ensure that all the officers and members of committees throughout the party were radical in outlook and active in the constituencies.⁵⁹ At the national level, this was not achieved.

In August 1944 Spicer declared that, 'Radical Action as a unit and members of Radical Action individually are doing all they can to get constituencies active'.⁶⁰ This indicated a further rationale for the group's existence. If Radical Action could galvanise the constituency associations, by encouraging the activities of radical, young candidates throughout the country, then it might have been possible for the group to achieve its objective of giving the party a 'leftwards tendency' by ensuring that a bloc of radical Liberal MPs was returned to the House of Commons.

The evidence to suggest that Radical Action played a part in galvanising constituency associations, however, is thin. Only 40 of the 99 identifiable

Radical Action members who could have stood in the 1945 election (excluding sitting MPs) put themselves forward at the poll. Radical Action members performed slightly better than Liberal candidates as a whole in 1945, but 31 of the 40 finished third and one Radical Action member finished fourth. More strikingly, 24 of the 40 Radical Action members who stood for Parliament in 1945 failed to stand in 1950, despite the fact that the party was desperate for candidates and even advertised in the press to secure them.

Radical Action and the Liberal Party

The relationship between Radical Action and the leadership of the Liberal Party was always strained, but at least there was a relationship. Sinclair was willing occasionally to engage with the group, and Radical Action was allowed to affiliate to the party as an independent organisation. Radical Action therefore enjoyed the same status within the party as the Liberal Social Council or the Liberal Candidates' Association.⁶¹

Sinclair appears to have met the leadership of the Liberal Action Group on only one occasion, at a luncheon on 16 December 1942. It was at this occasion that Sinclair spelt out why he would not lead the Liberal Party out of the electoral truce or out of the government. Sinclair and Spicer exchanged correspondence throughout the winter of 1942–43 but, as has been noted, Sinclair refused to alter his position on these issues and the correspondence ceased. After February 1943 only one other exchange of correspondence appears to have taken place between the two men, in January 1944 on economic issues. Clearly, Sinclair did not care for Radical Action's views and felt that having communicated his position to them, he could safely ignore them.

The relationship between Radical Action and the leadership of the Liberal Party was always strained, but at least there was a relationship.

A major issue for the Liberal leadership during the war was the possibility of reuniting the Liberal and Liberal National parties. Ernest Brown, the Liberal National leader, approached Sinclair on the subject of Liberal reunion in July 1943 and negotiations were conducted for eighteen months before it was decided that agreement could not be reached.⁶² A Radical Action pamphlet cited 'ending attempts at union with the Liberal Nationals' as an aim of the group.⁶³ A letter from Everett Jones was published in *The Guardian* in November 1943 opposing Liberal reunion and Spicer concluded that the Liberal Nationals represented nothing which was 'not more honestly represented by the Tories'.⁶⁴

There was virtually no communication between Radical Action and Liberal ministers such as Rothschild, Seely and Johnstone. What is perhaps surprising is that two of the wartime Liberal MPs who later defected to Labour – Dingle Foot and Sir Geoffrey Mander – took no part in the activities of the group.⁶⁵

Although Clement Davies and Horabin, the 'twin spirits of Liberal oppositionism in the wartime parliament',⁶⁶ were regularly involved in Radical Action's activities, other parliamentary members of the group – Granville and Megan Lloyd George – seem to have been members in name only. Wilfrid Roberts had an ambiguous relationship with the group. Roberts joined the LAG at its inception but was always heavily involved with the Liberal Party Organisation and consequently had a semi-detached attitude towards the group's concerns.⁶⁷

When the Liberal Action Group was set up, it was deliberately established as a small group. Its membership was restricted to MPs, parliamentary candidates and party

officials. For all Spicer's exhortations for the group to get involved in the constituencies, the contact between the group and the rank-and-file membership of the Liberal Party was minimal. A number of Liberal Party members from the 1940s were interviewed during the course of this research and none appeared to realise that the electoral truce was ever a bone of contention within the party.⁶⁸

The Liberal Assembly was the only forum in which non-members of the group could have come into contact with Radical Action, but assemblies were held in London throughout the war and only a relatively small number of constituency associations sent delegates to them, compared to the assemblies of the immediate post-war period. Only one motion proposed by Radical Action members was carried, and that, on the party's post-war independence, could have been expected to have attracted widespread support. As might be expected, Liberal regional and constituency organisations were practically moribund during the war and, as a result, there are few indications of what rank-and-file members thought about Radical Action or the views it espoused. Spicer was a member of the executive committee of the London Liberal Federation and this may have been the reason why the London Liberal Federation passed a motion in 1944 noting 'with regret that Radical Action is now canvassing Liberals everywhere to join their group'.⁶⁹ The federation opposed the group's formal affiliation to the party on the grounds that it was 'resolved in certain particulars in direct conflict with the majority decisions of the Assembly and the LPO Council'. In contrast, the Scottish Liberal Council called in September 1943 for the ending of the truce after the end of the war and the adoption of

the Beveridge Report in full.⁷⁰ Altrincham & Sale Liberal Association wrote to the government to express its dissatisfaction at how the Beveridge Report had been handled.⁷¹

Conclusion

Seen within the context of wartime politics, the formation of the Liberal Action Group, later Radical Action, was not a surprising event. With the normal outlets of political expression closed for the duration of the hostilities, political activists dissatisfied with the course of the war or the government's proposed policies of post-war reconstruction had nowhere to turn. New political groups sprang up as a consequence and independents enjoyed a field day in dozens of by-elections. What is perhaps surprising is that Radical Action kept its faith with the Liberal Party throughout the war.

The development of Common Wealth into an independent political party suggested one path for the development of Radical Action. There were three reasons why this did not happen. First, the group's leaders felt very strongly that Radical Action should be a constitutionally recognised element of the Liberal Party and that it should not do anything which would not be approved by the party as a whole. There was little challenge to this conception of the group's role. The LAG applied to become a recognised unit of the Liberal Party as early as 1941, and mindful of the 'schisms and distractions of the last twenty four years', it was made clear from the start that it was 'in no way intended to usurp' the proper functions of the Liberal Party.⁷² Secondly, Radical Action served as a vehicle by which young, radical parliamentary candidates and members of the party's council and executive could challenge the Liberal leadership.

The group is best understood as a player in internal Liberal Party politics, not as a body which was prepared to step out on the national political stage. Thirdly, Radical Action did not possess a set of policies which it could expound and to which members could subscribe. Unlike Common Wealth, which had a doctrinaire approach to economic questions, Radical Action was a forum for discussion. It was never fashioned as a body for putting coherent political principles across to the electorate.

The influence of Radical Action on the direction taken by the Liberal Party in the mid-1940s was significant, in two respects in particular. Firstly, its strong support for the immediate implementation of the Beveridge Report, and its pressure on the party leadership to back the radical blueprints for post-war reconstruction, were highly influential. Secondly, Radical Action consistently pressed the Liberal Party to fight the post-war general election on an independent basis, and helped force Sir Archibald Sinclair to agree to that course of action late in 1944. On both issues, Radical Action struck a chord with the party rank and file and was successful in achieving its objectives only after other influential, and more formal, bodies within the Liberal Party had expressed the same views. Nevertheless, it was Radical Action which raised these issues first and continued to do so clearly and persuasively.

On issues where most Liberal activists did not share the views of Radical Action, such as the participation of Liberal ministers in the Churchill government, the group made little headway. Radical Action was able to initiate and lead debate within the Liberal Party on such matters, but could not overcome the opposition of the party establishment without the support of the Liberal Council or other bodies of activists.

In conclusion, Radical Action had a significant role to play in ensuring that the Liberal Party entered the post-war era as an entirely independent party, free from ties to Churchill's Conservative Party.

Radical Action cannot claim to have revived the constituencies, and the electoral performance of its members was decidedly average. Neither the group nor its members were involved in the publication of the report of the post-war reconstruction committee, *Coats Off For The Future!*, and the initiative resulted from the outcome of the election, not from any events or suggestions made beforehand.

It is worth examining whether the Liberal Party would have been better off if Radical Action members had been able to gain control of the party during the war and run it according to their aims, or if Sinclair had been persuaded by the group's arguments. Firstly, both Ivor Davies and Donald Johnson claimed that the Liberal Party would have benefited electorally from ending the truce. Davies wrote in 1950 that the 'position in the middle of 1943 provided the best opportunity for the creation of a new Liberal bloc in the House of Commons that had taken place for twenty years'.⁷³ Sinclair stated that ending the truce would require the Liberal ministers to leave the government, and he would contemplate doing this only in the unlikely event of the government compromising an essential Liberal principle. Leaving the government on a lesser matter than Sinclair envisaged would undoubtedly have split the party and a considerable number of senior figures and constituency members would have remained loyal to the government. The remaining 'independent' Liberal Party would have been very weak, but it would have been well placed to pick up a handful of seats in by-elections before 1945. However, it is difficult to envisage how a post-war general election would have brought anything but electoral disaster, especially if Tory-backed Liberals stood against independent

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Liberals in the few seats the latter held. It is difficult to appreciate the basis on which Davies believed the Liberal Party could have benefited from 'seizing the initiative' in 1942–43 by fighting by-elections. Only if an issue arose on which the whole Liberal Party could leave the government would such an opportunity have existed; without such an issue, any formal attempt to end the truce would have split the party and probably killed off independent Liberalism.

Secondly, it could be argued that had the Liberal Party as a whole, and its ministers in particular, embraced the Beveridge Report immediately on its publication and pressed the government for the immediate implementation of its recommendations, then the party would have benefited from the leftwards swing evinced at the

1945 general election. By 1945, however, the party was unequivocally backing the report and many other measures of post-war reform. Furthermore, Beveridge himself campaigned extensively in the Liberal interest. For causes of the Liberals' embarrassment in the 1945 election, one must look elsewhere, particularly towards the party's weak organisation in the constituencies.

In conclusion, Radical Action had a significant role to play in ensuring that the Liberal Party entered the post-war era as an entirely independent party, free from ties to Churchill's Conservative Party. Historians have tended to identify Clement Davies' refusal of office in the 1951 Conservative government as a key moment in the survival of the Liberal Party;⁷⁴ Archibald Sinclair's reluctant decision to indicate that the party would

fight the 1945 general election on an independent basis, which followed a sustained campaign by Radical Action, was perhaps equally significant. Furthermore, in leading the campaign in favour of the Beveridge Report, Radical Action took up arms against the economic liberals who were in the ascendant in terms of the Liberal Party's ideological direction in the 1930s and 1940s. In this, the group presaged the ideological battles of the 1950s, which were only finally resolved when Jo Grimond became party leader in 1956.⁷⁵

Mark Egan, a political historian, has recently published Coming into Focus: The Transformation of the Liberal Party 1945–64 (VDM Verlag, 2009).

1 This article is principally based on the papers of Honor Balfour, which Miss Balfour kindly allowed me to consult in the years before her death in 2002. The papers have now been deposited with the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

2 Johnson, D., *Bars and Barricades*, p. 211.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 49. For more information about Johnson see Ingham R., 'Donald Johnson: the last Liberal Imperialist', *Journal of Liberal History*, No. 25, Winter 1999–2000, pp. 31–33.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 215.

5 Balfour papers, resolutions passed by Liberal Action Group at various meetings, 23.11.41, resolution no. 3.

6 *Ibid.*, Liberal Action Group memorandum, 8.9.42.

7 Johnson, *Bars and Barricades*, p. 217.

8 Balfour papers, letter W. Roberts to Spicer, 7.8.44. Roberts also accused Radical Action of plotting to overthrow Sir Archibald Sinclair in favour of Clement Davies.

9 *Ibid.*, letter from Radical

Action to Balfour, 14.12.44.

10 *Ibid.*, Liberal Action Group, report of meeting at National Liberal Club, 5.12.42 and 19 New Bridge Street 6.12.42.

11 It is worth noting that one non-Liberal MP joined Radical Action prior to 1945: Vernon Bartlett, the independent member for Bridgwater, who had previously been associated with Acland.

12 Johnson, *Bars and Barricades*, p. 218.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 220.

14 Balfour papers, 'Some thoughts on the present political and war situations', 6.7.42.

15 *Ibid.*, letters Spicer to W. Roberts, 13.8.42, and Spicer to D. Foot, 8.9.42.

16 *Ibid.*, 'Political Reflections', No. 61, 26–27.3.44.

17 *Ibid.*, memorandum by T. Lodge, no. 43, 19.8.43.

18 *Ibid.*, note from dinner by Radical Action to Sinclair, 9.3.42.

19 Davies, I., *Trial by Ballot*, p. 156. The coupon was tremendously unpopular amongst many Liberals. Honor Balfour received several letters on the subject during her by-election campaign, including one from Lord Davies, who threatened to resign from the party because of it. (Balfour papers, letter Davies to Balfour, 31.12.43).

20 Johnson, D., *Bars and Barricades*, pp. 221–25. Johnson may have hoped that opposition to Sinclair could have crystallised around a suitable by-election campaign and that Sinclair could have been forced to resign if a significant number of MPs and prominent Liberal members had opposed a coupon being issued to Johnson's or Ivor Davies' opponent. Without the support of Clement Davies and Horabin it was obvious that such a plan would lack the backing required to force the issue. Hence Johnson's disappointment at Clement Davies' actions.

21 Balfour lost by 70 votes,

Johnson by 195.

22 Johnson, *Bars and Barricades*, p. 236.

23 *The Guardian* 11.12.43 and interview with Honor Balfour.

24 Johnson, *Bars and Barricades*, pp. 238–39.

25 *Ibid.*, pp. 234–5.

26 Balfour papers, letter Spicer to Johnson, 21.7.43 and Spicer to Balfour, 26.11.43.

27 Johnson, *Bars and Barricades*, p. 241.

28 Balfour papers, letters to Balfour from: Lord Davies, 27.11.43, Lady Bonham Carter, 18.12.43, Sir George Gower, 17.12.43, C. Davies, 10.12.43, V. Bartlett, 7.12.43, Halifax Liberal Association, 11.12.43, Cllr A. E. Turner, undated, M. Jackson, 8.12.43, T. McNamee, undated and N. R. Dickinson, 8.12.43.

29 Johnson, *Bars and Barricades*, p. 248.

30 Balfour papers, Liberal Action Group, report of meeting at National Liberal Club 5.12.42, and 19 New Bridge Street, 6.12.42 – second day's proceedings.

31 *Ibid.*, letter Spicer to Sir A. Sinclair, 30.12.42, 'I would never advocate leaving the government in order to build up the strength of the Party in the country'.

32 *Ibid.*, memorandum on lunch with Sinclair, 16.12.42.

33 *Ibid.*, letter Sinclair to Spicer, 22.12.42.

34 Liberal Pamphlets, National Museum of Labour History, 329,72: 'Speech by Sinclair at National Liberal Club 19.3.41'.

35 *Ibid.*: 'The Party of Youth – Sinclair Speech to Liberal Assembly 17.7.43'.

36 Joyce, P., 'The Liberal Party and the 1945 General Election', pp. 1–2.

37 Balfour papers, 'Note made after luncheon 11.7.44 given by Mr. E. H. Gilpin to Sir Malcolm Stewart'.

38 *Ibid.*, 'Radical Action and Liberal Survival', March 1944.

39 *Ibid.*, letter Spicer to E.

Hulton, 10.11.44.

40 Acland, Sir R., *What it will be like in the New Britain*, p. 10.

41 Horabin, T., *Politics made Plain*, pp. 125–26.

42 Balfour papers, 'Liberal Action Group, report of meeting at National Liberal Club, 5.12.42 and 19 New Bridge Street 6.12.42'.

43 *Ibid.*, letter Spicer to Sinclair, 17.12.42.

44 Reynolds and Hunter, 'Liberal Class Warrior', and Ingham and Wright, 'Tom Horabin Remembered'.

45 Balfour papers, letter Spicer to H. Stoner 10.12.42, 'Horabin has been a very frustrated person ... [I am] hopeful that when he has got a place in which [he] can express himself, he may be nothing like as extreme as you seem to fear.'

46 *Ibid.*, letter Spicer to H. Stoner, 8.6.43.

47 *Ibid.*, letter Spicer to Sinclair, 12.1.44.

48 *Ibid.*, LAG resolution sent by Spicer to Sinclair and to Sir P. Harris, 18.2.43.

49 *Ibid.*, memorandum on lunch with Sinclair, 16.12.42.

50 *Ibid.*, letter Sinclair to Spicer 22.12.42.

51 Voting with the government were Dingle Foot, Harcourt Johnstone, Sir Geoffrey Mander, James de Rothschild, Sir Archibald Sinclair and H. Graham White. Voting against the government were Clement Davies, George Grey, Edgar Granville, W. J. Gruffydd, Sir Percy Harris, Thomas Horabin, David Lloyd George, Megan Lloyd George and Wilfrid Roberts.

52 Balfour papers, 'Political Reflections', No. 61, 26–27.3.44.

53 *Ibid.*, letter Spicer to E. Hulton, 10.11.44.

54 Johnson, *Bars and Barricades*, p. 217.

55 Harris, Sir P., *Forty Years in and out of Parliament*, p. 151.

56 Balfour papers, letter S. Bonarjee to Spicer, 20.5.44. For more

- on Bonarjee see his obituary in *The Independent*, 7 October 2003.
- 57 Ibid., letter L. Harris to A. Worsley, 14.4.44.
- 58 Ibid., letter Spicer to A. P. Marshall, 8.5.44.
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- 61 Radical Action was disaffiliated as a result of the constitutional changes following the publication of *Coats Off for the Future!* in 1946. Balfour papers, letter Spicer to G. Naylor, 12.1.49, in which Spicer criticises the party's decision.
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- 64 *The Guardian* 11 November 1943 and Balfour papers, Spicer memorandum No. 56, 30 November 1943.
- 65 Foot was a Minister during the war and Mander was Sinclair's PPS.
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- 72 Ibid., 'Resolutions passed by Liberal Action Group at various meetings', 23.11.41, resolution no. 15.
- 73 Davies, *Trial by Ballot*, p. 160.
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- 75 Ingham, R., 'Battle of Ideas or Absence of Leadership?', *Journal of Liberal History*, No. 47, summer 2005.

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.

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.

'Economic Liberalism' and the Liberal (Democrat) Party, 1937–2004

A study of the role of 'economic liberalism' in the Liberal Party and the Liberal Democrats. Of particular interest would be any private papers relating to 1937's *Ownership For All* report and the activities of the Unservile State Group. Oral history submissions also welcome. Matthew Francis; matthew@the-domain.org.uk.

The Liberal Party's political communication, 1945–2002

PhD thesis. Cynthia Messeleka-Boyer, 12 bis chemin Vaysse, 81150 Terssac, France; +33 6 10 09 72 46; cynthiandrea@aol.com.

Liberal policy towards Austria-Hungary, 1905–16

Andrew Gardner, 17 Upper Ramsey Walk, Canonbury, London N1 2RP; agardner@ssees.ac.uk.

Liberal Unionists

A study of the Liberal Unionist party as a discrete political entity. Help with identifying party records before 1903 particularly welcome. Ian Cawood, Newman University College, Birmingham; i.cawood@newman.ac.uk.

The Liberal Party in the West Midlands December 1916 – 1923 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.

The Lib-Lab Pact

The period of political co-operation which took place in Britain between 1977 and 1978; PhD research project at Cardiff University. Jonny Kirkup, 29 Mount Earl, Bridgend, Bridgend County CF31 3EY; jonnykirkup@yahoo.co.uk.

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.

The political career of Edward Strutt, 1st Baron Belper

Strutt was Whig/Liberal MP for Derby (1830–49), later Arundel and Nottingham; in 1856 he was created Lord Belper and built Kingston Hall (1842–46) in the village of Kingston-on-Soar, Notts. He was a friend of Jeremy Bentham and a supporter of free trade and reform, and held government office as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Commissioner of Railways. Any information, location of papers or references welcome. Brian Smith; brian63@inbox.com