

a telling indication of the extent to which Edwardian Labour was out of touch with the bulk of the working class; trade unionism was simply absent from the 'sweated' trades – which is why the only way of helping the employees was through the Liberal legislation that doubled their wages

Moving on chronologically, Duncan Tanner revisits the vexed question of the collapse of the 1929–31 Labour government, but puts the focus on leaders as opposed to simply MacDonald himself or the party generally. The result is a graphic picture of a dysfunctional government due to Snowden's aversion to communicating with colleagues and MacDonald's inability to consult with or accept criticism from the unions, the Independent Labour Party, the MPs or the intellectuals. In his excellent contribution, Richard Toye considers the role of Keynesianism in Labour Party politics. It was from the start a love-hate relationship. In the 1920s Labour appreciated Keynes's criticism of the return to the Gold Standard, but MacDonald et al. shrank from talk about not balancing the budget as giving an unwanted impression of radicalism. Actually, by the 1930s Keynes's influence was hampered by the fact that Labour had a battalion of its own academic economists, several of whom, such as Hugh Gaitskell, were quite conservative and orthodox, and suspected Keynesianism of causing inflation. Despite this, Toye explains how, after 1936, the party increasingly adopted Keynes, effectively claiming that his ideas were really common-sense Labour ones. All that is missing from this account is the important role of Ernest Bevin and the unions in pressurising Labour into adopting what they saw as a more realistic approach to unemployment and thus embracing Keynes.

**After 1906 Liberalism increasingly reflected the ideas of a new generation; and electorally it demonstrated its capacity to mobilise the working-class vote while retaining middle-class support.**

In a companion essay, E. H. H. Green considers Keynes and the Conservative Party – a more fraught relationship partly because of the dominance of Treasury orthodoxy in the party and partly because Keynes never hid his contempt for the Tory intellect! He shows how three Conservatives, Arthur Steel-Maitland, Harold Macmillan and J. W. Hills, were chiefly responsible for familiarising the party with Keynesian thinking in the 1930s and that the turning point came with acceptance of the 1944 White Paper committing the government to maintaining a high and stable level of employment.

Other chapters in the collection are John A. Thompson on American Liberals and entry into the First World War, Eugenio Biagini on the influence of Keynesianism on post-1945 Italian politics, Stefan Collini on cultural criticism of decline and modernity in inter-war Britain, and Barry Supple on the long-term performance of the British economy, structural change, and attitudes towards the distribution of the fruits of economic growth.

Despite the title of the volume, only a few of these essays are likely to be of interest to readers of the *Journal of Liberal History*. There is very little

attempt to examine the strictly *political* implications of the revisionist work on the Edwardian era with which Peter Clarke was so involved. This is a pity because the impact of Liberalism and Liberal personnel on the other parties after the Liberal Party's post-1918 decline is a major formative force, and, in particular, its impact on Conservative politics in the Baldwin-Macmillan era is of crucial importance to the long-term success of Conservatism. Yet it is largely taken for granted and has never been the subject of systematic study. 'National Liberals' were still standing as late as the 1964 general election and they were of considerable importance in sustaining Conservatism in Scotland, at least until 1955 when the party won 36 of the 71 constituencies. The Strange Survival of Liberal England remains to be fully explored.

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## No end of a lesson

David Marquand, *Britain Since 1918* (Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2008)

Reviewed by Tom McNally

PROFESSOR DAVID Marquand is a curious hybrid: part philosopher, part academic historian, part political adviser and part sharp-end politician. Such a mixed pedigree makes him particularly

suited to being the chronicler and interpreter of twentieth-century Britain. It is a story which he himself describes as 'a story of courage, perseverance, wisdom, selfishness, folly and self-deception.' In his book

*Britain Since 1918*, he chooses to tell his story not through the usual prisms of conflict between left and right, or reformers and conservatives, but by tracing phases in twentieth-century British history, and the major players during those phases, in terms of deeper, longer established political roots. These he describes as the four traditions that structure political debate in Britain, and lists them as whig imperialism, democratic collectivism, tory nationalism and democratic republicanism.

Marquand is unfortunate in one aspect of his work. He brings his narrative to an end in 2007. So, although he is not sparing in his criticism of the Blair years ('In a frenzy of self-destructive messianism, Blair dwarfed the achievements of his first term with the ill-fated folly of the Iraq War and all that flowed from it ...'), he writes, and reaches his conclusions, before the collapse of Anglo-Saxon free-market capitalism, the consequences of which we are now grappling with. It is as if a history was written in 1913 at the end of the long, golden and extended Edwardian age with no knowledge of the cataclysm to come.

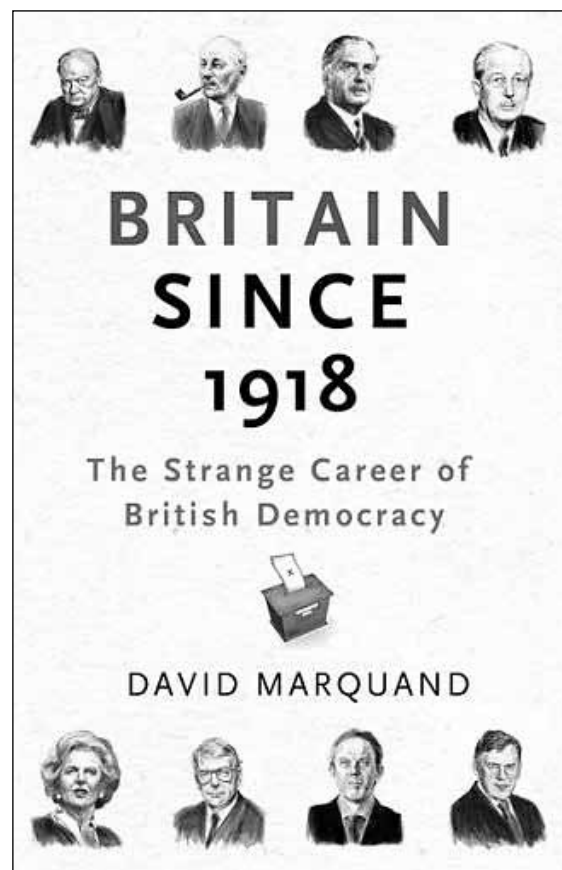
To be fair, he does quote a prophetic piece from Will Hutton calling for the world's anarchic financial markets to be brought to heel by 'the recognition that the market economy has to be managed and regulated, both at home and abroad'. A favourable reference is also given to the Liberal Democrat Commission on Wealth Creation and Social Cohesion, chaired by Ralf Dahrendorf, which argued that wealth was not merely the measure of GDP, but 'the sum of what people value in their social lives'. It followed that conventionally measured economic growth was not an end in itself: development has to be socially as well as environmentally sustainable. Such arguments were hard to sustain

when government, and Gordon Brown in particular, claimed it had ended boom and bust, and Marquand does not strive too hard to do so. Indeed his book ends with state interventionism seemingly consigned to the dustbin of history.

Even more ironically, it ends with hope held high that Gordon Brown was about to take up again the cause of radical constitutional reform: 'Within days of his arrival at Number Ten, Brown made a statement to the Commons holding out the prospect of a "new constitutional settlement" that would curb the government's prerogative powers, enhance parliamentary scrutiny of the executive, and explicitly incorporate "the values founded on liberty that defined British citizenship".' All such ambitions are now put on the back burner as Brown tries to survive the economic tsunami now engulfing us.

From the Prime Minister there is no recognition that it was the stalling of the programme of constitutional reform after the initial first-term burst, inspired by the Cook/Maclennan Report, which still leaves Britain's system of governance so ill-equipped to challenge an over-mighty executive or connect effectively with the people it claims to serve. Prior to 1997 both Tony Blair and Paddy Ashdown agreed that constitutional reform was essential if the modernisation of Britain and its institutions was to be successful. They entrusted mapping out of a blueprint for reform to a joint commission of the two parties chaired by Robin Cook and Bob Maclennan.

The implementation of Cook/Maclennan, of which I had the honour of being a member, resulted in what Marquand calls 'a reconstruction of the British State more radical than any since 1707, and in so doing gave a new dimension to British democracy.' Rather unfairly, in my opinion, he gives no



credit in his narrative to Cook/Maclennan or to the massive input Liberal Democrat policy development in the area made to its success.

The sad fact is that, once Labour ministers settled more comfortably into their ministerial cars and the Whitehall cocoon enveloped them, the impetus for reform was lost. I fear I do not share Professor Marquand's 2007 optimism that Gordon Brown is about to breathe fresh life into constitutional reform. Even something as straightforward as Lords reform is punted safely into the long grass of the next parliament (though the parliamentary expenses scandal may possibly bring it forward).

I have concentrated on the conclusions in his later chapters because they show some of the dangers for historians of writing instant history. The unknown and unexpected can turn round and bite you. That does not make the writing of such histories valueless. It will be of immense value to future

historians to read Professor Marquand's assessments of Blair and Brown and the New Labour Project just before the longest sustained period of economic growth in our history came to an end with such a mighty bang. The fact that he was such a multi-disciplined practitioner of the political arts also makes him a shrewd and expert assessor of earlier administrations. For the answer to the question of whether the credit crunch and subsequent events will influence his assessment of the long-term influence of Thatcherism and Blairism, with their obsessive worship of the free market, we will have to await the second edition of this excellent history. In the meantime, readers

can enjoy agreeing or disagreeing with what one reviewer described as an anthropological approach to history. They can assess for themselves whether their chosen heroes or, indeed, they themselves, are whig imperialists, democratic collectivists or democratic republicans (I will excuse readers of the *Journal of Liberal History* from being tory nationalists). Whatever your conclusions, you will find this a stimulating and thought-provoking book, in keeping with the standards David Marquand has set for himself throughout his political and academic life.

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the tide of appeasement in the cabinet. He argued for rearmament, expanding the Territorial Army, strengthening air defences, even for the early introduction of conscription, but was stonewalled by a Prime Minister who never really believed that war with Germany would come, or if it did, that Britain would have to fight seriously before the conclusion of a negotiated peace. Hore-Belisha also received hostile resistance from the anti-Semitic generals who resented his programme of improvements in living quarters, pay and conditions and the lifting of petty restrictions focused on the other ranks. They eventually succeeded in getting him sacked from the War Office in 1940 and he refused Chamberlain's offer of the Board of Trade in compensation.

Perhaps one reason that Hore-Belisha's career has received less attention than it should is that, despite his efforts to persuade cabinet colleagues of the need for more soldiers, air defences, equipment production, and the creation of a Ministry of Supply, he could still be held responsible for the inadequacies of the British Expeditionary Force in France in 1940. Hore-Belisha has also suffered as a result of his membership of the Liberal Nationals, the group formed by Sir John Simon to support the Conservative-dominated National Government after 1931. This group has been vilified as traitors and turncoats, motivated by the desire for personal office and disliked for its long, slow drift towards eventual absorption by the Conservatives. Liberal MP Isaac Foot particularly resented the campaign against him (when he was unseated by the Tory at Bodmin in 1935) by two neighbouring 'National Liberal' ministers, Walter Runciman (St Ives) and Leslie Hore-Belisha (Plymouth, Devonport).<sup>1</sup>

## 'A little chit of a fellow'

Ian R. Grimwood, *A Little Chit of a Fellow: A Biography of the Right Hon. Leslie Hore-Belisha* (Sussex: Book Guild Publishing, 2006)

Reviewed by **Graham Lippiatt**

**B**ETWEEN THE years 1937 and 1940, Germany incorporated Austria into the Reich in the Anschluss, seized the Sudetenland at the Munich Conference, invaded Czechoslovakia, annexed Memel and attacked Poland, provoking war with France and Britain. In 1939, Mussolini invaded Albania and created the Pact of Steel with Hitler. Throughout this momentous period, Leslie Hore-Belisha was Secretary for War, the cabinet minister in charge of Britain's army and defence. Earlier, as Minister of Transport, he made many improvements in road safety, including the illuminated pedestrian crossing beacons which still bear his name. Yet this household name has been curiously forgotten by

biographers until the publication of this admirable book by Ian R. Grimwood (a former Mayor of Ipswich).

Why was that? It is not that Hore-Belisha left no papers for historians. There are collections in the Churchill Archives Centre at Cambridge and in the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives at King's College. There are other relevant collections, as well as government departmental records. Some of this material was used by R. J. Minney in his book, *The Private Papers of Hore-Belisha* (Collins, 1960) but this is not a full biography as it deals only with Hore-Belisha's career at the War Office.

From 1938 onwards Hore-Belisha was swimming against

**Yet this household name has been curiously forgotten by biographers until the publication of this admirable book.**