as something through which they interact with government. Edwardian free traders were able to encapsulate the threat to the consumer by the first of Trentmann's symbols, the white loaf. Inadvertently gifted to the Liberals by Chamberlain, the threat to the price of bread, a significant part of the working-class diet, dominated the debate and few speakers neglected to bring large and small loaves to clinch their case. Other components of the breakfast table played their part in homely illustrations to rouse the passions of the voters, while elderly members of the audience were primed to reminisce about the 'hungry [Eighteen] Forties', when Britain had the Corn Laws. Passions were roused to the extent that a riot occurred in Wycombe, which ended with the trashing of a protectionist 'Dump Shop'.

But, as Trentmann argues, it would be a misunderstanding to analyse Liberal commitment to free trade as a cynical exploitation of consumer fears. Cobden's Anti-Corn Law League was not seeking merely to cut the price of cereals. It undermined the influence of the largest landowners who dominated politics as a specially privileged producer interest. Cobden and Bright promoted trade to secure world peace and undermine the aristocratic system of diplomacy with its vested interest in competition between nations and the expansion of empires. Under the Liberals, the state had become not the handmaiden of an elite but a disinterested or neutral umpire in a pact with all citizens represented under a gradually widening franchise. Taxes were levied fairly on all, through a mix of income and indirect taxes rather than disproportionately on the poor through charges on basic necessities. Free competition should work in favour of all groups in all nations.

However, it was this moral case for free trade that was its undoing. The Liberals won the 1906 election and both the elections of 1910 with free trade as an important part of their armoury. But after World War I popular support faded and with it support for Liberalism. Trade clearly had not preserved world peace. Winning the war was not achieved by letting free competition allocate resources. The national interest required that Britain be self-sufficient in some commodities, whatever the economic theory of comparative advantage suggested. Trades disrupted by the war and its aftermath required protection to survive. Cartels and mergers, securing economies of scale, could, arguably, produce more efficiently than old-fashioned smaller firms.

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Each of these developments peeled away free trade supporters, including lifelong Liberals. In future, the state would be more active: no longer the umpire but a player in securing cooperation among producer interests, epitomised by Trentmann's second symbol – milk. The white loaf was demonstrated to be deficient in food values – wholemeal bread was better and wasted less of the wheat made scarce by war. Milk, on the other hand, was not only vital but required the assistance of active government to secure its purity, to prevent profiteering and to organise cooperatives of appropriate magnitude along the supply chain.

Gradually the number of exceptional treatments built up until, when the depression of 1929 struck, free trade no longer had a popular foundation, and when Chamberlain's son, Neville, pronounced the obsequies, few mourned its passing.

The second part of Trentmann's book deals with this decline of free trade, with a coda about modern trade talks made even more relevant by the financial crisis and the temptation towards beggar-thy-neighbour policies that occurred after his text was written. He has focused on the details of the various bodies that considered post-Great War trade, and on the elite thinkers, such as Keynes, who provided the intellectual underpinning for the changing climate. While these chapters lack the novelty of the material on the popular endorsement of free trade, Trentmann has produced a valuable guide to the process by which an argument, and the party that promoted it, were at first sustained and later undermined. What changed was not the economics but the public engagement with an ideal.

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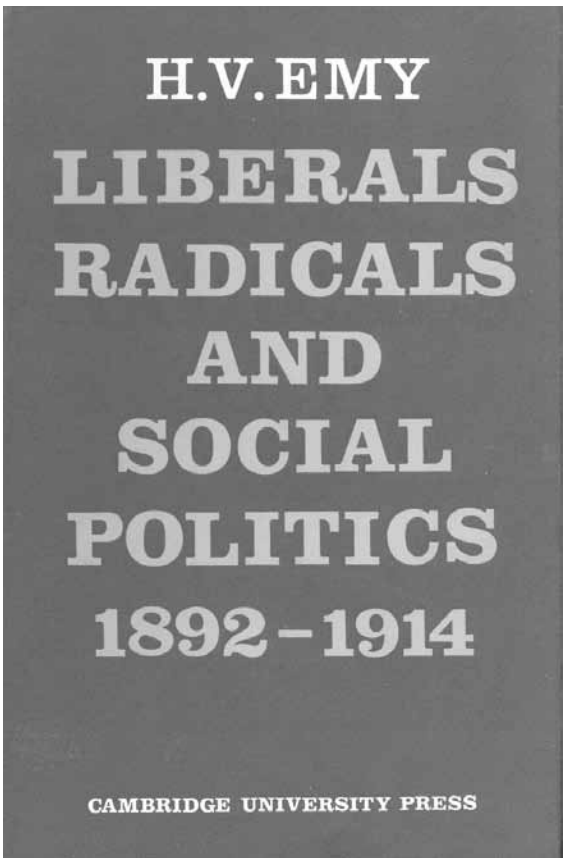
Edwardian Liberalism

H. V. Emy, *Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics, 1892–1914* (Cambridge University Press, 1973; reprinted 2008)

Reviewed by **Ian Packer**

When this book was first published in 1973 it appeared at an opportune moment. Only two years previously, Peter Clarke's *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* had ignited a wide-ranging debate about the nature and fortunes of Edwardian Liberalism. Clarke had argued that the pre-1914 Liberal Party was in good health and showed few signs of the rapid decline that was to set in after the Lloyd George–Asquith split of 1916 and which was to lead to the party's replacement by Labour as the main anti-Conservative force in Britain. The key to Clarke's case was his contention that Edwardian Liberalism had embraced social reform, and so outflanked the embryonic Labour Party as the obvious choice for working-class voters. Ross McKibbin's *Evolution of the Labour Party, 1910–24* (1974) responded by claiming that Labour's appeal was based on its identity as a working-class party, whatever policies were pursued by the Liberals, and that Labour's organisation and electoral performance were growing strongly before 1914.

Emy's book made an important contribution to the sometimes fierce debate that ensued between Clarke's and McKibbin's viewpoints. *Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics* is a study of political ideas at the national level in



the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. It argues that the central division between the Conservatives and the Liberals was becoming their disagreement over the extent to which state intervention in the economy could be justified, especially in the arena of social reform. While the Conservatives defended a minimal role for the state in the economy, the Liberals increasingly modified their ideology to accommodate increased direct taxation and welfare provision – the 'New Liberalism'. Emy concentrates on how Liberals made the general arguments for this departure and, in particular, on the group of young men from the professional classes who were committed to these ideas and who entered Liberal politics and journalism in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Indeed, he suggests that the Liberal Party could only adopt the cause of social reform because economically conservative businessmen were declining as a percentage of Liberal MPs and being replaced by middle-class lawyers and writers with a strong interest in social reform.

Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics was one of the first extended studies of New Liberalism as an ideology. In addition, the book made a range of important and innovatory points: it emphasised the significance of looking back to the 1880s and 1890s to trace developments in Liberal thinking; examined the use of speeches in Parliament and the press, together with pamphlets and books, to uncover the nature of Liberal thought; used Parliamentary voting patterns to try and identify who the advocates of social reform were among the Liberal MPs; and emphasised the significance of the long-overlooked issue of land reform to Edwardian Liberalism. Yet, despite this impressive list of achievements, Emy's book never quite achieved a central position in the debates about Edwardian Liberalism that Clarke had unleashed. This was partly because it was not obvious on which side of the argument Emy stood. His emphasis on the importance of New Liberal ideology could be read as support for Clarke's case that the Liberal Party had been transformed in the years before 1914 into a vehicle for working-class aspirations. Yet Emy was not convinced that the New Liberalism would do the Liberal Party any good in the long run. He suggested that support for social reform created severe strains within the Liberal Party and, by alienating its business supporters, led to organisational weakness and imminent financial collapse.

But Emy's book was also overshadowed by later works on New Liberal thinking, especially two books that appeared in 1978: Clarke's *Liberals and Social Democrats* and Michael Freeden's *The New Liberalism*. Clarke's work was a superb in-depth study of the interlinked lives and thought of a key group of New Liberal writers and intellectuals, while Freeden expanded the analysis of New Liberalism to look at its relationship to theories about character, ethics, evolution and society. Emy, however, published nothing further on Edwardian Liberalism. By the time *Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics* appeared he had already taken up a post in the politics department at Monash University in Australia, where he has pursued a distinguished career as an analyst of modern Australian politics.

Moreover, some of Emy's conclusions need to be put into the context of subsequent scholarship, which suggests that the book's picture of the scale and nature of the changes in Edwardian politics need to be treated cautiously. E. H. H. Green's *The Crisis of Conservatism* (1995) has drawn attention to the way in which many Tories favoured state intervention in the economy through tariffs and, to some extent, social reform. This suggests that the debate between Conservatives and Liberals on the economy before 1914 was not a straightforward matter of laissez-faire economics versus state intervention. Duncan Tanner's *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900–1918* (1990) argues convincingly that Liberal organisation and finances in the Edwardian era were fairly robust and efficient and not subject to the decline that Emy posits. Most importantly, G. R. Searle's article, 'The Edwardian Liberal Party and Business' (*English Historical Review*, 98, 1983) pointed out that the percentage of businessmen in the ranks of Liberal MPs was not falling substantially in the Edwardian era and that they still made up nearly 40 per cent of Liberal MPs in 1914. The business element in Edwardian Liberalism remained powerful and had not been alienated by social reform policies to the degree Emy argued. Some supported the New Liberalism, while others were still attracted by the party's continuing devotion to causes like free trade and its close identification with religious Nonconformity. The Liberal Party remained a house of many mansions, and while social reform was an important part of Liberal identity by 1914, it was only one element.

Cambridge University Press's decision to reprint *Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics* is very welcome. The debate on whether the Liberal Party was in decline before 1914 still continues, and hopefully the wider availability that a reprint will bring to this book will lead to a renewed appreciation of its significance. But this reprint comes thirty-five years after Emy's book was first published and a great deal has been written on Edwardian Liberalism since then. It would have been helpful if the reprint

had contained at least a new preface to take account of recent developments in the historiography about Liberalism before 1914 and to relate Emy's work to these developments.

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British intellectual life, 1918–39

Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain Between the Wars*
(London: Allen Lane, 2009)
Reviewed by **Dr J. Graham Jones**

Richard Overy, Professor of History at the University of Exeter, is renowned for his numerous highly esteemed volumes on the history of the Second World War, notably *The Origins of the Second World War*, *Why the Allies Won* and the award-winning *The Dictators: Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Russia*, which was awarded the prestigious Wolfson Prize for History and the Hessell Tiltman Prize.

The present voluminous tome is really a history of ideas during the predominantly sad inter-war period when many people became convinced that the West was facing a real crisis of civilisation. Overy's research work is awesomely impressive and complete, comprising material from a wide range of archival repositories (most notably the holdings of the London School of Economics, the British Psycho-Analytical Society, King's College, Cambridge, and the British Library, London), newspapers and journals, and a huge amount of contemporary literature and more recent secondary sources. This wide range of disparate source materials is skilfully brought together in a compelling narrative and analysis.

A good number of fascinating individuals are covered in this study, many of them literary figures like Aldous and Julian Huxley, Sidney and Beatrice Webb (also very much political activists, too, of course), H. G. Wells, and George Bernard Shaw. There are also political figures like J. A. Hobson, historians like the Oxford don Arnold Toynbee and G. D. H. Cole, and psychoanalysts such as Sigmund Freud and Ernest Jones (both of whose papers the author has extensively quarried).

Readers of the *Journal of Liberal History* devoted to the history of their party in a strictly narrow party-political sense are likely to be disappointed. There is a passing reference to former Liberal J. A. Hobson joining the Labour Party (p. 62), and a mention of Lloyd George, as premier of the post-war coalition government, arguing powerfully the case for practising birth control – 'it was not possible to run an A1 empire with a C3 population' (p. 98). Long-serving Labour MP Philip Noel-Baker, lover of Megan Lloyd George, is described as 'a tall, distinctively good-looking man, a sociable teetotaller well known for his dizzying energy, who sustained a lifelong commitment to sport' (p. 225), and here discussed in the context of pacifist movements in the 1920s and 1930s.

But devotees of 'liberal' history more broadly will find much of interest here on the role of pacifist movements like the League of Nations Union (pp. 225–26), the most prominent anti-war society of the 1920s, and the 'People's Front' of the 1930s, championed by the so-called 'Popular Front' (pp. 302–04). The varying fortunes of more minor parties like the Communists and the British Union of Fascists are discussed in the context of inter-war British political evolution (pp. 266–68).

There are many passages here of exceptional interest and highly readable too, among them the story of Walter Greenwood's ground-breaking, highly timely novel *Love on the Dole* (1933), an acclaimed best-seller almost overnight, which quickly spawned a stage play which ran for no fewer than 400 nights (pp. 70–74). Equally compelling is the analysis of the publication and impact of the Webbs' massive tome *Soviet Communism: a New Civilisation?*, which eventually appeared in two volumes, running to no fewer than 1,174 pages, in the high summer of 1935. It was a major enterprise which had cost the ageing Webbs dearly during the first half of the 1930s. As Overy outlines, the work developed a fascinating history all of its own and made a major impact at the very time of the Soviet purges and the growing cult of Stalin in Russia (pp. 294–95).

Equally absorbing is the story of the success of the Left Book Club launched by Victor Gollancz in 1936, which attracted a membership exceeding 50,000 within two years (pp. 304–05). Its growth and influence prompted bookshop owner W. A. Foyle to launch a rival (but rather less successful) Right Book Club in the following year. The other great publishing success of the second half of the 1930s was the series of Penguin