

income tax rate, whereas in fact, of course, it voted for it.

Speaking as someone who's edited a fair number of books in the past, I would say this book hasn't been near an editor – or at least, not one who knew anything about the subject. History books ought not to make so many simple mistakes. And the English, while clear enough, is often clumsy and inelegant, for example as in describing the outcome of the 2007 local, Scottish and Welsh elections as 'mixed' three times in three successive sentences. A decent editor ought to have fixed that.

More seriously, the book's contents are heavily imbalanced. As I observed in my review of the last edition, a good party history ought to include a description of the party's leading personalities, its internal structures and ways of functioning, key elements of its strategy (or lack of one) at crucial moments, and party philosophy and policy. It should show how it related to the outside world (i.e. what difference it made), its underlying bases of support in the electorate, and, of course, its electoral record.

This book, like its previous editions, really only scores well on the last point, Liberal psephology, where it provides a comprehensive record of local, by- and general election achievements. If it had covered all the other elements as thoroughly as this, it would be an excellent source – and also, of course, a good deal longer. As it is, it is really quite unbalanced, lacking, in particular, any real consideration of Liberal policy and ideology. For example, the chapter on Jo Grimond's period as leader refers to his important policy innovations, such as Liberal support for UK entry to Europe, and industrial democracy, in less than half a sentence, whereas the party's opinion poll and electoral record is examined in painstaking detail. The 1986 defence debate at the Eastbourne Assembly – the occasion when the Liberal-SDP Alliance began to fall apart – is referred to with no explanation of the background whatsoever, while the same chapter looks at the Alliance's electoral record in impressive detail. (Pleasingly, however, the 1986 vote at Eastbourne is not

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represented as Liberal adoption of unilateral nuclear disarmament (a common mistake), though the 1981 vote at Llandudno against Cruise missiles, wrongly, is.) The party's strong environmental policy stance is almost never mentioned. The 2010 election campaign is dealt with in two pages, and the results then described in eight – though the analysis is purely geographical; there is no attempt anywhere in the book to look at the socioeconomic or attitudinal underpinnings of the party's voters or its members.

Overall, this is a frustrating book. Parts of it are actually quite good – particularly the first couple of chapters, on the pre-1900 period, and the last, which provides a perceptive analysis of the case for a coalition and the progress and outcome of the coalition negotiations. But in between there's just too many mistakes, too much on the electoral record and not enough on anything else.

*Duncan Brack is Editor of the Journal of Liberal History.*

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## Modernising the state

Steve Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (Yale University Press, 2009)

Reviewed by Mark Pack

**T**HE TRADITIONAL picture of 1688 is of a rather English revolution – one much politer, less violent, more limited and rather more sensible and rational than the bloody versions of revolution seen in other countries. In this work Steve Pincus sets out to challenge that view.

In his view, the Glorious Revolution was not simply a quick and painless transfer of power at the top of the state but a wide-reaching and fundamental alteration to the state, politics, society and culture – all deliberately planned by opponents of James II. They were not seeking simply to oppose him but also to offer the country a different route to modernisation. The Glorious Revolution was not, as in the traditional version, a defence of the English way of life against an errant monarch who had blundered for a few years but, in Pincus's eyes, the creation of a new way of life. This view, he argues, returns historical interpretation to a position much closer to that held by many in the eighteenth century.

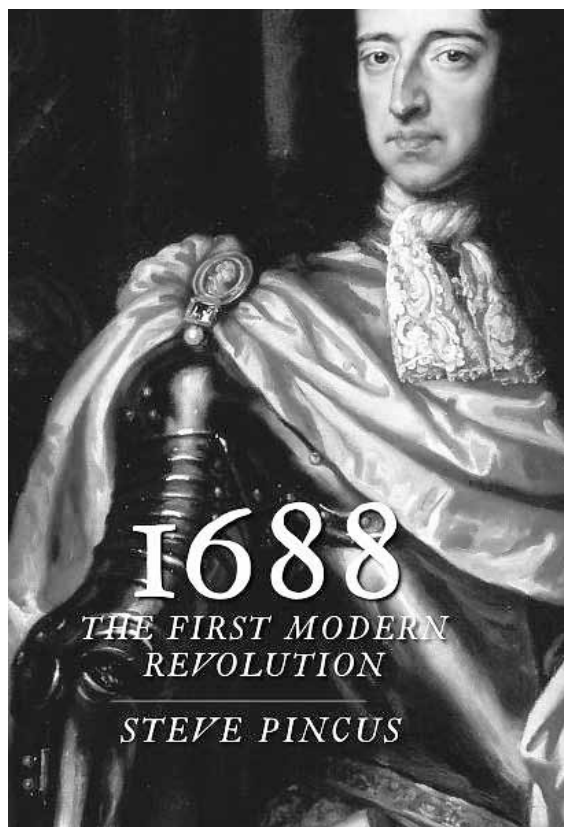
Rather than James II's approach of centralisation, intolerance of dissidents and territorial empire, his opponents created a participatory state set on a course of continuous evolution. Instead of James II taking the country

down a path leading towards a country in the style of Louis XIV, the revolutionaries looked to Holland for a radically different, alternative vision of the future.

Holland, too, was a country where the military was at the centre of the government's efforts, with a centralised state at home and military intervention abroad. However, it was also a state that valued political participation rather than an absolute monarch, tolerated different religions and encouraged manufacturing rather than focusing on protecting a landed empire. The driving motor of society and government was commerce, not the monarch. Pincus therefore argues that 'the revolution pitted two groups of modernisers against each other.'

He also, as a result, asks us to see 1688 not as a short, English revolution but rather as an event that played out over several years and had important repercussions across the world, including India, the West Indies, North America and continental Europe.

Moving into more theoretical territory, he therefore also positions the Glorious Revolution, and not the French Revolution, as the first modern revolution. Part of this argument is about the bloody nature of 1688 in his eyes: 'Though we have come to view



the Glorious Revolution as bloodless, aristocratic, and consensual, the actual event was none of these things ... the English endured a scale of violence against property and persons similar to that of the French Revolution.'

The case is an impressive, sweeping one, and it is a laid out in a long book, rooted in years of research and buttressed by pages of footnotes. It is a case, though, that does not fully convince.

Take the striking argument that the Glorious Revolution was as bloody as the French Revolution. A footnote tells us, 'Statistics that highlight the bloodiness of the French Revolution inevitably include the Napoleonic Wars ... By including the Nine Years' War (1689–97) and the wars of Ireland and Scotland – all direct consequences of the Revolution of 1688–89 – the percentages of dead and wounded are comparable to the French case.'

However, for many the bloody reputation of the French Revolution is based not on its wars but on its civil violence. It is the guillotine and not the battlefield that shapes the view of a bloody revolution. Hence, making a like-for-like comparison based on including the wars has merit, but does not form a good basis for the

claim that 'the English endured a scale of violence against property and persons similar to the French Revolution', especially given the domestic implication many will take from that wording and given only the scattered and incidental subsequent comparison of violence off the battlefield in France and Britain.

Part of the book hinges on what is considered a revolution, with Pincus suggesting that revolutions should not be seen as a struggle of the new to usurp the old but rather as a staged process in which the existing power structure seeks to change and then in turn is challenged by an alternative route to change. It is a theory that prompts thoughts across many centuries and countries; in particular, whether or not the crucial early stage of revolutions is when the existing establishment starts to break down existing power structures in its own desire to bring about change – but thereby also opening up the possibility of a different form of change replacing the establishment. It is an intriguing idea, although one that in itself cannot really be supported by a book that focuses on just the one revolution.

In addition to the novel interpretation the book offers of both 1688 and revolutions more generally, it also offers an unusual reading experience as, at the end of the introduction, Pincus points readers with different interests to start reading the main book at different chapters inside. That offer reflects the breadth of a work that has been heavily praised for the detail of its research and which, whilst not convincing all fellow historians of the strength of its case, has certainly opened up new viewpoints to debate. The concentration on presenting those viewpoints means that those looking to understand the full cast of personalities or the story behind James II's accession to power will mostly not find it here.

As a result, this controversy and length, yet narrow focus, make the book more for the student of the period than for the causal reader looking for an accessible introduction.

*Mark Pack ran the Liberal Democrat 2001 and 2005 internet general election campaign and is now Head of Digital at MHP Communications. He also co-edits Liberal Democrat Voice ([www.LibDemVoice.org](http://www.LibDemVoice.org)).*

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## Prophet of democracy

Hugh Brogan, *Alexis de Tocqueville: Prophet of Democracy in the Age of Revolutions* (Profile Books, 2009)

Reviewed by **Sylvana Tomaselli**

**T**HE PRAISE lavished on the 2006 hardback edition which adorns this, its paperback version, would be difficult to better. Described as 'an incomparable portrait of one of the sharpest and most sympathetic writers of all time', 'lively, comprehensive, well researched and exceeding well-written', '[a] magisterial account', as well as '[w]arm, witty, intimate, exhaustive, digressive, autumnal, and not in the least idolatrous' by well-known literary figures and academics on both sides of the Atlantic, this biography has been ranked alongside some of the greatest produced in the last

century, most notably Nicholas Boyle's *Goethe*. Shortlisted for the Orwell Prize, Hugh Brogan's *Alexis de Tocqueville: Prophet of Democracy in the Age of Revolutions* was awarded the Richard E. Neustadt Prize.

The praise is well merited. *Alexis de Tocqueville* is the first comprehensive biography in English of the greatest nineteenth-century French liberal, who formed much of Europe's view of America and its democracy, and indeed helped fashion America's own self-perception and understanding of its unique political culture. Through his influence on J. S. Mill, Tocqueville further