

## REVIEWS

treatment of political parties' (p. 160) or that Tocqueville met many political actors who could have been good informants had he only asked the right questions. Done as it is, openly and unashamedly, Brogan's expression of his frank opinions actually strengthens his story and often draws attention where it should. Finally, as is not uncommon with biographers writing about noblemen and women, Brogan does appear at times to be *à la recherche du snobisme* and to project onto

Tocqueville the assumptions and prejudices one might expect of a member of the Normand nobility. We, who live in times when referenda are denied us or their results disregarded until we vote as we should, will understand that one does not need to be the scion of an illustrious family to be concerned about mass democracy.

*Sylvana Tomaselli teaches the history of political thought papers at Cambridge, where she is a Fellow of St John's College.*

the party's policy approach in practice being heavily informed, implicitly or explicitly, by ideas of social rights. The final thematic chapter, by Andrew Russell, considers political strategy, and sets in a historical context the strategic dilemma facing the party in the 2005 parliament – a dilemma for which Liberal Democrats might now be forgiven for feeling somewhat nostalgic.

The thematic chapters are well complemented by the broader analytical chapters on the influence of classical liberalism, social liberalism and the 'centre' on party policy. The inclusion of Roy Douglas and Vince Cable as exponents of classical liberalism – the one a prominent classical liberal activist since the 1940s, the other the Liberal Democrat Shadow Chancellor at the time of writing and now Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills – has an attractive symmetry to it. Richard Grayson and Steve Webb correspondingly outline the social liberal case, emphasising the extent to which the social liberal willingness to use state power to promote greater equality and sustainability, as essential prerequisites of freedom, has informed the

---

## Liberal thought

Kevin Hickson (ed.), *The Political Thought of the Liberals and Liberal Democrats since 1945* (Manchester University Press, 2009)

Reviewed by **Peter Sloman**

**T**HIS IS, as Kevin Hickson notes in his introduction, the fourth major academic collection of essays on Liberal and Liberal Democrat politics to have appeared over the past thirty years, following on from the volumes edited by Vernon Bogdanor and Don MacIver in 1983 and 1994 and a 2007 special issue of the *Political Quarterly* edited by Richard Grayson.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to the three earlier collections, however, this book focuses almost exclusively on issues of political thought and policy development within the party. In its organisation and intellectual approach, it represents a companion volume to *The Political Thought of the Conservative Party since 1945*, also edited by Hickson,<sup>2</sup> and it has a dual objective of drawing scholarly attention to centrists within the party as well as to strands of thought on the right and left, and of fostering interaction between academics and active politicians in the discussion of political thought. This latter ambition is achieved by bookending six thematic chapters with contributions outlining classical liberal, social liberal, and centrist approaches to Liberal political thought at the front of the book, and with commentaries by parliamentary exponents of these approaches – Vince Cable, Steve

Webb, and David Howarth – at the back. It is striking that not only have all three parliamentary contributors had academic careers of their own, but three of the academic contributors (Roy Douglas, Richard Grayson and Alan Butt Philip) have also stood as Liberal or Liberal Democrat parliamentary candidates, whilst Duncan Brack and Russell Deacon are also active in Liberal Democrat politics.

The quality of the contributions is consistently high throughout. In the thematic chapters, Matt Cole on constitutional reform, Russell Deacon on decentralisation, Duncan Brack on political economy and Alan Butt Philip on internationalism all provide lively and comprehensive accounts of Liberal (Democrat) thought and policy on the model of the essays in the Bogdanor volume. Although the volume was published well before the 2010 election, journalists and scholars looking to set the policies of the coalition government in the context of Liberals' historic policy commitments will find these chapters invaluable. In a spirited chapter on social morality, Bruce Pilbeam argues that rhetorical fidelity to the writings of John Stuart Mill has not prevented



## The political thought of the Liberals and Liberal Democrats since 1945

Edited by  
**Kevin Hickson**

mainstream of Liberal Democrat thought. Mark Garnett and David Howarth search for a Liberal Democrat centre, though they find it in rather different places: Garnett in the idea of Liberalism as a force for political moderation, embodied by successive party leaders since the Thorpe era and reconstructed in a centre-right direction under Menzies Campbell and Nick Clegg; Howarth in a 'core liberalism' where Liberals can unite around the goal of a society in which individuals enjoy the freedom and capacity to make their own life choices.

One paradoxical achievement of the contributions to this volume is to reveal just how difficult classical and social liberalism – not to mention the 'centrist' strand of Liberal thought – are to pin down. Hickson, in the introduction, suggests that the distinction between classical and social liberalism is broadly analogous to that between negative and positive liberty, but alternative definitions appear throughout the volume: for instance, Douglas argues that 'classical liberalism pivots on the idea of personal liberty' and notes that classical liberals differ amongst themselves over the legitimacy of state intervention to remedy 'extreme disparities of wealth and poverty', whilst Grayson suggests that the classical–social liberal distinction may be most useful as a shorthand means of distinguishing between less and more egalitarian and statist positions in Liberal Democrat policy debates. Both Grayson and Brack allude approvingly to David Howarth's argument, developed in the 2007 volume *Reinventing the State*, that most self-described economic liberals in the party are actually not classical liberals – defined by a belief 'that all the state should do is guarantee rights and then move out of the way' – but 'minimalist' social liberals, who share with more 'maximalist' social liberals a recognition that political freedom requires a measure of material redistribution but stop short of recognising Rawlsian supplementary fairness principles as justifications for further intervention.<sup>3</sup> Both of the 'classical liberal' authors in this book can be regarded in Howarth's terms as minimalist social liberals;

**Overall, however, this is an extremely valuable addition to the literature on post-war Liberalism, combining scholarly rigour with often passionate argument about the nature of Liberalism and its implications for the future of the party.**

yet their concerns for free trade, land value taxation, and a smaller or simpler state indicate the influence of a distinctive classical liberal tradition within the party, which is not fully captured by the more philosophical criteria Howarth uses. Perhaps this bears out Howarth's suggestion, in his contribution to the present volume, that Liberal thought has frequently been at its most fertile and distinctive where classical and social liberal ideas have interacted and combined.

In a couple of respects, the volume falls slightly short of what it might have been. Recurrent hints of divergent Liberal views on the welfare state – from Cable's reminder that Jo Grimond supported education vouchers, to Grayson's observation that social liberals have tended to support diversity of provision in the public services in principle but to shy away from it in practice – suggest that a chapter on social policy might have been well justified. Perhaps, too, the commentaries by Cable, Howarth and Webb at the end of the book would have been of greater value if they had discussed the arguments developed in the preceding chapters as well as the influence of the different ideological traditions on contemporary Liberal Democrat policy; the compilation schedule

may, of course, have prevented this. Overall, however, this is an extremely valuable addition to the literature on post-war Liberalism, combining scholarly rigour with often passionate argument about the nature of Liberalism and its implications for the future of the party. Hickson and his contributors should be congratulated on their achievement. As with many similar academic texts, the price (£60) will be prohibitive for many; but it is well worth reading, so you should certainly get your library to buy it.

*Peter Sloman is a doctoral student at The Queen's College, Oxford. His research focuses on economic policy development in the Liberal Party, 1929–1964.*

- 1 Vernon Bogdanor (ed.), *Liberal Party Politics* (Oxford, 1983); Don MacIver (ed.), *The Liberal Democrats* (1996); *Political Quarterly*, 78, 1 (2007), special issue on the Liberal Democrats.
- 2 Kevin Hickson (ed.), *The Political Thought of the Conservative Party since 1945* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
- 3 David Howarth, 'What is social liberalism?', in Duncan Brack, Richard S. Grayson and David Howarth (eds.), *Reinventing the State: Social Liberalism for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Politico's, 2007).

## Of pies and politics

Ophelia Field, *The Kit-Cat Club: Friends Who Imagined a Nation* (HarperPress, 2008)

Reviewed by Mark Pack

FOUNDED IN the late 1690s by London bookseller Jacob Tonson, utilising the premises and consuming the food of pie-maker Christopher Cat, the Kit-Cat Club evolved into a club with a cast of prominent members of the cultural, political and social circles of the time. The origins of the club were literary, with Tonson regularly feeding aspiring authors at Cat's pub in return for the promise of a first publication option on their works. Over time this evolved

into the Kit-Cat Club, a pioneer in mixing politics, culture and professional interests in one club, such areas having previously been kept separate in organisations that served but the one niche. The combination of the rich and politically powerful with artists and authors in search of patronage was an effective one and, in contrast to the highly stratified nature of society at the time, the club was a meritocratic forum, founded and hosted by non-aristocrats. However, its place in