

While glorifying Britain's adaptable constitution he never sought to impose it on others.

His reputation for aggrandisement rests not on the colonies added to Britain's realm but on his aggressive foreign policy techniques. Occasionally this went OTT, as when Pam used military force against the Greeks to achieve satisfaction for the dubious claims of Don Pacifico, but overwhelmingly his threats of force prevented rather than caused wars. He only threatened where it was thought he could deliver but where, as in Poland or Hungary, Britain was unable to intervene militarily Palmerston still thought it worth while to lecture Russia or Austria on the benefits of reform. The only major war of the period to involve Britain, the Crimean, occurred when his Foreign Office rival, Aberdeen, was at the helm, employing techniques closer to Neville Chamberlain's. To be effective Palmerstonian policy depended on subterfuge, a willingness to wield a scathing pen and an apparent willingness to resort to arms. With members of the royal family and his own government colleagues in regular, friendly correspondence with his autocratic continental opponents, it is not surprising that he built a reputation for arrogance and independence nor that he sometimes failed to inform the Queen of his intentions until it was too late for her (or Albert) to interfere.

"We cannot go on legislating for ever"

Palmerston only played a limited part in domestic policy. Even as a junior minister, his war office responsibilities had primarily a foreign orientation. Traditionally he is seen as an obstacle in the path of Liberal reform. He tried to moderate the 1832 Reform Bill. His opposition to Gladstonian financial reforms, when PM, remind one of Mrs T's relations with Nigel Lawson or Geoffrey Howe at the end of her career, and in his final term of office he effectively postponed consideration of a further reform act. He recognised that there would be strange doings "when Gladstone has my place" and perhaps this is one of his reasons for clinging to office until he died. Throughout his premierships his policies were sufficiently conservative for the Tories generally to support him in office.

Yet while Palmerston was conservative he was not a Tory. His policy objectives were to preserve aristocratic power by efficient administration while tolerating sufficient reform to head off unrest. He was never an autocratic reactionary trying to defend the indefensible or seeking to put the clock back. It is this outlook which unifies Palmerston's foreign and domestic policies.

Palmerston's resistance to change is also easy to overestimate. Even when in Tory governments he supported Catholic emancipation and his role in the 1832 reform was as an intermediary trying to secure an agreement with Tory moderates and prevent a deadlock with the Lords. In the 1840s he supported factory legislation and had close links with Shaftesbury. When Home Secretary in the Aberdeen coalition, he promoted the Truck Act of 1853 and supported public health reforms to prevent intra-mural burial in churches and to improve London's sewerage. As premier he kept Gladstone at the Treasury despite his acknowledged hostility, his fiscal reforms and his resistance to Pam's defence expenditure.

Both these books are long and detailed. They assume some knowledge of foreign affairs and occasionally make leaps in argument that would leave a beginner groping for a handhold on the reasoning. While Bourne seeks to give a detailed exposition of the early career, the minutiae sometimes smother the larger view. His access to the private papers allow a clearer understanding of the sometimes scandalous social life and the difficulties Palmerston faced in balancing his finances despite his extensive estates. Southgate has drawn on his wide experience of the era and presents his judgements in a comfortable and balanced style. By no means a hero worshipper he comes down broadly in favour of Palmerston's style. A reader with time for only one of these works should prefer Southgate.

After the second Russian revolution, the balance of power in Europe Palmerston sought so strenuously to preserve may again be the most important consideration in foreign policy. Let us hope that our age brings forth a more worthy successor to Pam than the Tories can provide.

A Liberal in Power

Book Review
by Malcolm Baines

Roy Jenkins: *Asquith*
(Collins, 1964, reprinted 1978, 1986)

Asquith and his biographer, Roy Jenkins, have often been compared, although more for their reputations as *bon viveurs* than for their comparative success as statesmen. What is conveyed very powerfully in this biography is Asquith's extraordinary administrative and political effectiveness as Prime Minister. Jenkins briefly considers whether Asquith was our greatest twentieth century peacetime PM and concludes that although Attlee, Baldwin and Macmillan all have claims on that title, none actually compares with him in terms of authority over his colleagues, the impression of permanence of command over the nation, or comfortableness in holding the post of PM. Whether in the light of Thatcher's 11 years at No.10 Jenkins would now revise that judgment must, however, await a future edition.

For Liberals, attention has always focused not only on the achievements of the 1906-1914 government, but also on Asquith's part in the subsequent decline of the Liberals to minority party status. Jenkins deals with Asquith's fall in great detail, effectively explaining it as Lloyd George's ability to build a coalition with Bonar Law, the Tory leader whom Asquith had always distrusted and underrated. However, Asquith's final years after his 1916 resignation as PM are only cursorily covered. The issue of the voting records of individual Liberal MPs following the Maurice debate in the Commons on Lloyd George's veracity regarding the number of UK troops in France being used to determine the denial of the coupon to Liberals supporting Asquith which led to the party's disastrous result in the 1918 election is covered, but there is little about

his role in the rivalry with Lloyd George in the early 1920s. Jenkins does, however, rightly conclude that the major blame for the bitterness which has reverberated among Liberals since rests with Asquith's lieutenants, McKenna, Runciman and Vivian Phillips, rather than with the former PM himself.

One of the most interesting points of the biography is that which deals with Asquith's social activities as Prime Minister. His relaxed cycle of country house visits, frequent letters to women correspondents and disinterest in the media contrasts vividly with the frenetic activity of late twentieth century ministers.

However, Asquith did not come from a wealthy background and although seen as "the last of the Romans" was very much a self made man. Born in Yorkshire, he was brought up in London from an early age. Following a classical education at Balliol with a competent, but not outstanding career as a barrister, he was elected for East Fife and then appointed Home Secretary in Gladstone's last government and Rosebery's brief administration. Jenkins focuses on his period as Prime Minister as the most effective testimony to Asquith's greatness. Confronted by horrendous problems - the suffragettes' campaign of violence, industrial unrest, Ulster and the House of Lords (all identified by Dangerfield in *The Strange Death of Liberal England*) - it is Asquith's effective and fundamentally Liberal use of power which makes him of interest to contemporary Liberal Democrats. Although traditionally Asquith has been linked with the Liberal right due to his support for the Boer War, Jenkins correctly places him in the Liberal mainstream. He contrasts Asquith's pre-eminence over both the last 100% Liberal Cabinet and the 1915-16 period (when, despite an ostensible coalition, the Tory ministers were confined to junior posts), with Lloyd George's key dependence on the loyalty of the Conservative Party during the 1916-22 period.

To conclude, *Asquith*, despite its age, is a masterful and well written biography of one of the greatest Liberal figures of the century. Most significantly, Jenkins displays a Liberal politician who was essentially a man of government, who was always faithful to liberal and humane ideals and to fastidious standards of political behaviour. As such it both entertains and sheds instructive light on what it is like to be a Liberal in power.

What is Liberal Democracy? The Importance of History

by James Lund

In what way does the Liberal inheritance of the Liberal Democrats prevent the party from developing its inescapably political identity in a way that will win wider, more sustained electoral support? The answer is, I think, that that inheritance is not a democratic one, and yet it remains a powerful influence on the presuppositions and style of the party in actuality, contradicting what impression its current, professed policies make.

The inheritance is a powerful one. The Liberal party came into existence and first forged its identity in the second half of the nineteenth century when the greatness of Great Britain had only just begun to come into question, and then only in the economic sphere. The former smoking room and dining room of the splendidly refurbished National Liberal Club, founded in 1884, with their full length portraits of, *inter alia*, Gladstone in early middle age and Lloyd George recall the days when the Liberal party itself was a great political power, a coalition of the landed Whig aristocracy and members of the middle classes, drawn from the worlds of finance, commerce, industry and professions. The terms of that coalition were the continuance of oligarchical government in the name of the crown in return for free trade, reform of major institutions to render them more efficient and open to meritocratic competition, an enlargement of the franchise, and, latterly, important but very limited measures of social reform.

This was not a democratic party. Although in 1885 Joseph Chamberlain might say that "*government of the people by the people ... has at last been effectively secured by the two measures which together constitute the great achievement of Mr Gladstone's administration*", this opinion is very questionable. It took the Reform Bills of 1918 and 1925 to establish adult suffrage for both men and women. Before the Act of 1918, with its variety of franchises for adult men and married women over 30, between 40 and 45 per cent of the Edwardian adult male population was excluded from the electorate. The exclusion levels were particularly high in the industrial towns and great cities, so that the 1918 Act almost doubled the adult male enfranchisement in the latter areas. By that time the party was split and in decline, never having faced a democratic electorate as a major party with power. There has also been some question as to how far the New Liberalism, which gave rise to social reform from 1906 to 1914, was ever fully accepted in principle by the party as a whole.

All this was a long time ago, it may very rightly be said, and Liberal Democrat policy today appears to give the lie to the claim that the party holds back from democracy in its actual approach to politics as distinct from its formal professions of what it will do if elected.

Yet my doubts on this score are fuelled by a pamphlet which has appeared recently, namely Geoffrey Thomas' *Liberal Democracy: the Radical Tradition*, which claims to set out the philosophy of the party, and in doing so draws principally on Kant, who died in 1804, and John Stuart Mill, who died in 1873. More recent figures, notably T. H. Green, who died in 1882, also figure, as do John Rawls and Dorothy Emmett among living philosophers; but the tradition presented by Thomas, who remarks in passing that we should not regard it "*as something self-contained, an independent kingdom of the past*" draws heavily on late eighteenth century and mid-nineteenth century philosophy.

Such a presentation suggests to me that there is an important element in the party that is too much grounded still in the tradition of the days of the old Liberal party in its greatness. Certainly in the radical tradition as Geoffrey Thomas presents it, there is a major philosophical inadequacy of great political importance. What is fundamental in any political philosophy that professes to be a philosophy of democratically conducted