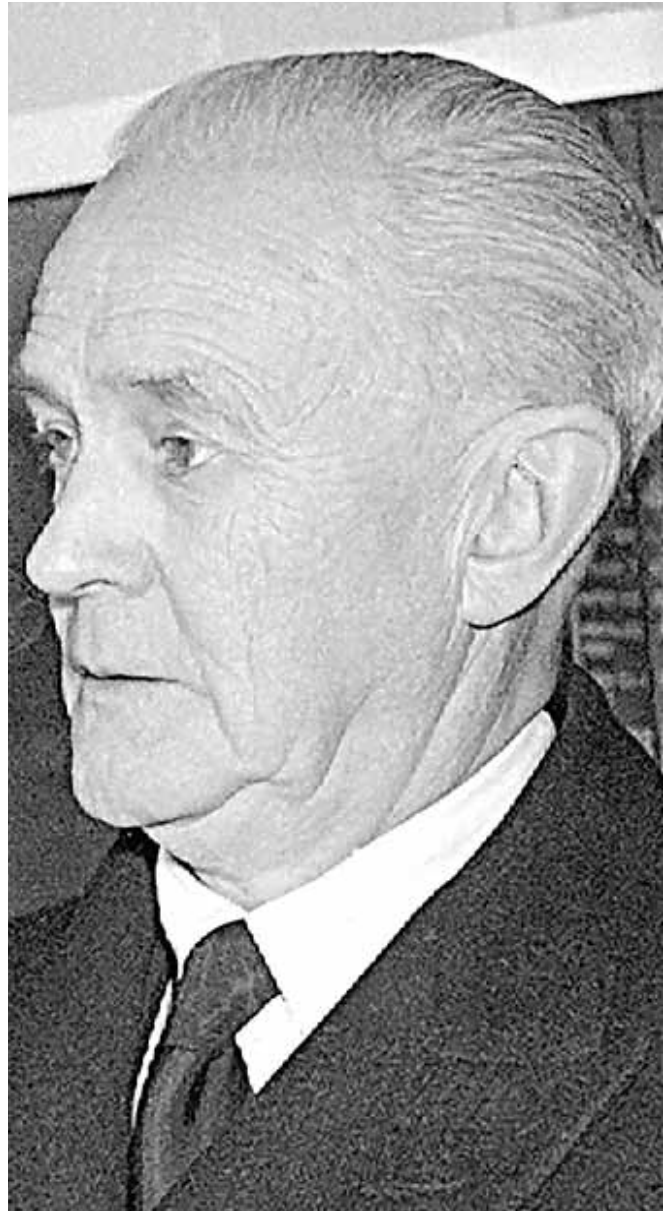
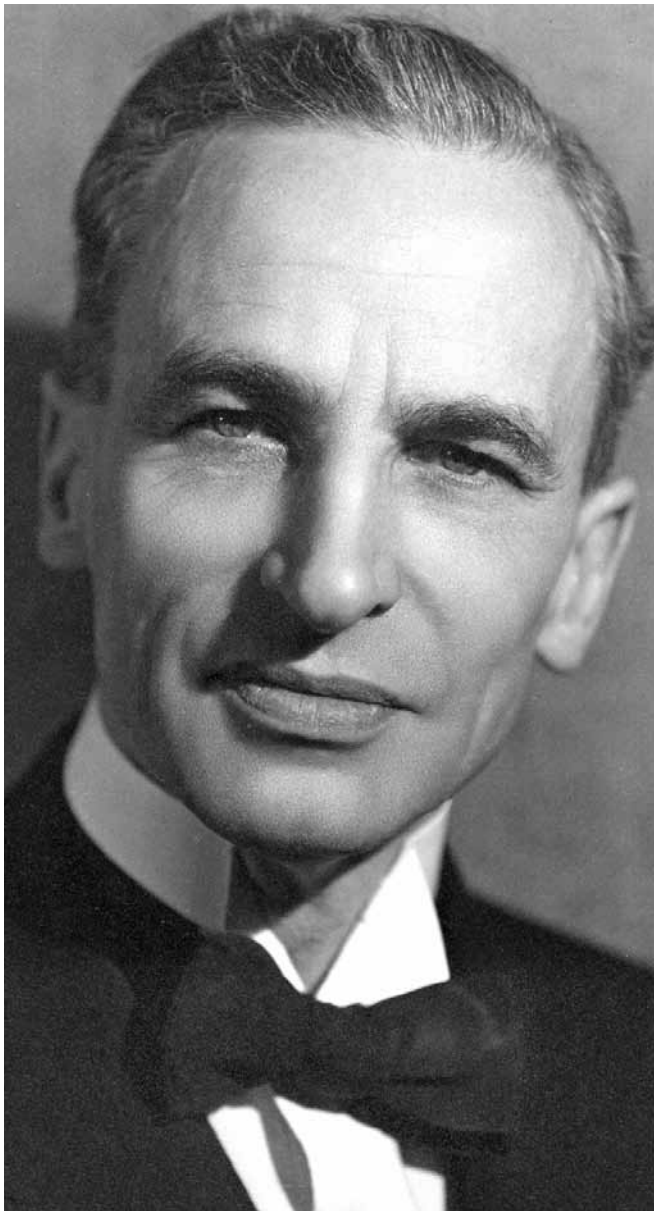


ARCHIE A

Dr J. Graham Jones examines the political and personal relationship between Clement Davies, leader of the Liberal Party, 1945–56, and his predecessor Sir Archibald Sinclair, later Viscount Thurso, who led the party from 1935 until 1945.



AND CLEM

ARCHIBALD HENRY Macdonald Sinclair was born in London on 22 October 1890, the son of a lieutenant in the Scots Guards, and was educated at Eton College and Sandhurst before entering the army in 1910 in the 2nd Life Guards. The death of his paternal grandfather in 1912 saw his succession to the baronetcy and inheritance of a large estate exceeding 100,000 acres at the northernmost tip of Scotland. Throughout the World War I he served with some distinction, forming a close bond of friendship with Winston Churchill, with whom he served in the 6th Royal Scots Fusiliers in 1916. After the hostilities were over, Sinclair served as Churchill's military secretary at the War Office from 1919 to 1921, and subsequently at the Colonial Office until 1922. While at the War Office he played an important role in the British attempts to nip the Bolshevik revolution in the bud.

In 1922 Sinclair was elected to parliament as the 'National Liberal' (pro-Lloyd George) MP for Caithness and Sutherland, which he continued to represent until his shock defeat in the general election of July 1945. Also in 1922 his old ally and mentor Churchill was defeated at Dundee. Sinclair soon became a prominent, highly regarded backbench MP, lending support and advice on policy revision – especially in relation to

Sir Archibald Sinclair (1890–1970) and Clement Davies (1884–1962)

land and agricultural policy formulation – to Lloyd George when he returned to lead the party following Asquith's final retirement in October 1926. He also spared no effort to urge LG to continue dipping into the infamous Lloyd George Fund to sustain their impoverished party.¹ In November 1930, a period of deep-rooted division and acrimony in the ranks of the Parliamentary Liberal Party, Sinclair rather reluctantly succeeded Sir Robert Hutchison as the party's chief whip in the House of Commons. He pleaded with Liberal MPs henceforth to behave less erratically and to attempt to act in greater unison, advice which was totally ignored by his parliamentary colleagues. His party had indeed by this time almost totally collapsed as a political force capable of acting unitedly. The PLP had become little more than a disorganised rabble. A dejected Sinclair spelled out the nub of the dilemma which faced him daily: 'I am all for the party being independent and having a mind of its own, but if individual members claim the same right, it is impossible for us to work effectively in the House of Commons'.² In March 1931, in a vote on a motion introduced by the Labour government to abolish all the university constituencies, official Liberal policy was to support the motion. But only nineteen Liberal MPs did so: ten voted against, and there was also a large number of

Liberal abstentions.³ Consequently the motion was narrowly defeated in the House by just four votes, too bitter a pill for Sinclair to swallow. The chief whip promptly resigned. Some Liberal MPs rejoiced at the sudden departure of their chief whip whose approach they had considered to be rather heavy-handed. One of these was E. Clement Davies, the rather politically low-profile Liberal MP for Montgomeryshire, who was later to condemn what he had regarded as 'the lash of Sinclair'.⁴

At the time of the financial and constitutional crisis of August 1931, Sinclair took the view of the Samuelite Liberal MPs that the so-called national government should be supported as a temporary expedient but that the long-term independence of the Liberal Party should be protected at all costs. As a committed Scottish home ruler, he accepted the position of Secretary of State for Scotland, initially outside the Cabinet, one of several Liberal ministerial appointments at this point, including Herbert Samuel as Home Secretary and the Marquis of Reading (formerly Rufus Isaacs) as Foreign Secretary. In the further Cabinet reshuffle which followed the October general election, Sinclair's position was promoted to Cabinet rank, now one of twenty such ministers. The following January, Sinclair was one of four free trade ministers who could not agree to the need to accept a policy

of protective tariffs; however their widely expected resignation from the government was prevented by the adoption of the so-called 'agreement to differ'.⁵ By this time, Sinclair was widely viewed, together with Samuel, as constituting the Liberal 'high command'. Sinclair had undoubtedly savoured his first taste of ministerial office, but agreed totally with Samuel that the independence of their party and the ultimate restoration of free trade should be their top priorities. Both men were also painfully conscious that their party's future development was ever likely to be jeopardised by its chronic financial problems, now exacerbated still further by the drying up of handouts from the Lloyd George Fund which had hitherto provided resources to pay for some two-thirds of the recurrent annual running costs of the party's parliamentary organisation. Following the inevitable severe financial strain of the recent general election, Sinclair warned Samuel, 'Unless certain steps are taken immediately we shall be unable to maintain the present structure of the Party – apart from any question of enlarging or strengthening it'.⁶

During the high summer of 1932, Sinclair's Caithness home was the venue for a protracted series of deliberations which ultimately led to the resignation from the government of the Samuelite Liberals in September – as a protest against the conclusion of the so-called Ottawa agreements. This grand gesture, however, still left them in an extremely anomalous position. They were no longer part of the national government, and yet they still continued to occupy the government benches in the House of Commons. In the country at large, the party's rank-and-file supporters grew ever more restive and unhappy. Herbert Samuel feared the loss of further Liberal MPs to the other political parties, while Sinclair grew ever more concerned at their manifestly ill-defined identity, warning his leader, 'The longer we remain in our present position, the more inglorious, embarrassing and insignificant it becomes. Our speeches of criticism of the government and manifestos of Liberal policy will make no impression so long as it lasts; and while it is true that it would be disastrous to go into opposition at a

The party projected an increasingly conservative image, being identified with free trade and an outdated economic outlook – in such striking contrast to the Liberal summer school movement of the 1920s and the dramatic (if ultimately abortive) revival led so flamboyantly by Lloyd George in 1927–29.

time and manner that commanded no public interest or support, I doubt if we can remain where we are for long without witnessing the complete disintegration of the party'.⁷ Samuel could only – reluctantly – concur with Sinclair's pessimistic assessment. He conceded that, if the current state of affairs continued, 'The party would fade away'.⁸ On 16 November, Samuel made a broadcast speech which was a broad attack on the National Government's policies and recent conduct, and announced his followers' intention belatedly to cross the floor of the House of Commons. But, inevitably, not all of them followed him to the opposition benches.⁹

Herbert Samuel had walked a political tightrope with great skill and diplomacy, but in the general election of November 1935 he went down to defeat at Darwen. In his Caithness and Sutherland constituency, where the Labour Party resolved not to put up a candidate against him, Sir Archibald Sinclair easily defeated his sole opponent William Bruce, a Liberal National, by 12,071 votes to 4,621. His was evidently one of the safest Liberal seats in the whole of the country. Following the general election, Lloyd George (still heading his tiny parliamentary grouping of just four MPs – all of them members of his own family – and consequently somewhat estranged from the mainstream Liberal Party) was persuaded to preside over the first meeting of the newly elected Liberal MPs – although he still adamantly refused to stand for the chairmanship of the Parliamentary Liberal Party. On LG's proposal, Sinclair was elected the new Liberal Party leader in succession to Samuel on 26 November 1935. Again rather reluctantly, he accepted, as the natural successor. Still aged only forty-five, he had sat in parliament continuously since 1922 and had already served in the Cabinet as Secretary of State for Scotland and as his party's chief whip. The new party chief whip, Sir Percy Harris, who generally respected Sinclair, wrote in his reminiscences, 'On service subjects and foreign affairs he [Sinclair] speaks effectively, but he is not so strong on social problems in which he lacks experience'.¹⁰

The new leader undoubtedly faced a tough, uphill task. The

Liberal Party was profoundly demoralised, it had lost several seats in by-elections since 1931, and in November 1935 just twenty-one mainstream Liberal MPs were returned. The party projected an increasingly conservative image, being identified with free trade and an outdated economic outlook – in such striking contrast to the Liberal summer school movement of the 1920s and the dramatic (if ultimately abortive) revival led so flamboyantly by Lloyd George in 1927–29. The radical initiative was not totally forgotten. It was expressed in Ramsay Muir's *The Liberal Way* published in 1934 and again in Lloyd George's quasi-sensational 'New Deal' proposals (modelled on those of Franklin D. Roosevelt in the USA) which were unveiled to his Bangor constituents in January 1935. But such worthy initiatives were by now very much on the periphery of the Liberal Party; they did not occupy the centre ground. Sinclair, an astute, experienced politician, was fully sensitive to the array of interrelated difficulties powerfully undermining his party's well-being. In the wake of the announcement of Lloyd George's 'New Deal' proposals in January, he had repeatedly warned Samuel, 'There is real danger that the Liberal Party may cease to be regarded as an effective political force'. The ongoing chronic lack of financial resources and deficiency of personnel together had rendered it nigh on impossible to 'maintain ... activities at a high level of intensity over a prolonged period'. Consequently he considered it imperative that the party 'make a big effort to arrest public attention and to arouse the fighting spirit of Liberals in the country by dramatic announcements and skilful publicity'.¹¹ Problems at the centre had been compounded by a poor showing by the Liberal Party in successive local government elections. There was obviously to be no quick fix for the new party leader of November 1935. Bravely, he set up a Liberal Organisation Commission under Lord Weston to examine ways of re-establishing the ailing party, while the new Liberal Chief Whip Sir Percy Harris won the battle that the independent Liberals (rather than Simon's National Liberals) should be granted use of

the Whip's Office at the House of Commons – a modest symbolic triumph. The ultimate goal of a Liberal government had been restored.

British political life from the middle of the decade was dominated by the situation in Europe. Sinclair and most of the party lent support to a policy of collective security via the League of Nations while pressing for a strong air force and secure defences. They were generally opposed to appeasement. This genuine middle way was also reflected in Churchill's campaign for 'arms and the covenant'. Indeed, the rapport between Sinclair and Churchill continued as they both roundly condemned the Munich agreement of 1938. Sinclair faced a great deal of abuse during the late 1930s both inside and outside the House of Commons and was frequently accused of being a 'war-monger'. At the beginning of the war he refused the offer of office from Neville Chamberlain – as indeed did the Labour leader Clement Attlee, both men voicing their lack of confidence in Chamberlain's continued leadership. The prime minister had informed Sinclair that it was his intention to form a small inner War Cabinet (as had happened back in December 1916), but that he [Sinclair] was not to be one of this inner group. Most of the senior Liberals were adamant that their leader must refuse the offer, convinced that its acceptance would mean that the Liberals would thus be excluded from major policy decisions. They were indeed convinced that the party 'could best support the vigorous prosecution of the war from an independent basis'.¹² The proposal that Herbert Samuel might enter the government as an individual (mainly because he had supported Neville Chamberlain over Munich), without implicating the Liberal Party, soon came to nothing. In the event, of the Liberals, only Gwilym Lloyd-George went in, accepting a junior position in the government as parliamentary secretary to the Board of Trade.

During the famous Norway debate of 7–8 May 1940, Sir Archibald Sinclair readily joined in the vehement attacks on the beleaguered Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. Once his old ally Churchill, having formed a coalition government between the Liberals and the Labour Party, had

kissed hands at Buckingham Palace, he appointed Sinclair to be the Secretary of State for Air, where he remained until the war ended and the dissolution of the coalition government in May 1945. (He was later requested to serve as the British Ambassador to Washington in 1941 and as Viceroy of India in 1942, but his preference was to remain steadfastly at the heart of the allied war effort.) Although Sinclair was one of the first ministers whom Churchill consulted on 10 May 1940, his role throughout the war was to be somewhat peripheral as (like the other service ministers) he was generally one step removed from military decision-making (although he occasionally attended Cabinet meetings and was thus able to voice his opinions. Sinclair had, however, participated in the crucial War Cabinet discussions of May 1940 about whether Britain should continue the war after the fall of France.). He had no personal power base and his party was small and relatively insignificant, while the key role of aircraft production had become the responsibility of a new creation, an independent Ministry of Aircraft Production under Lord Beaverbrook, who predictably became ever anxious to expand the ambit of his authority. Sinclair's main strength was his close personal bond of friendship with Winston Churchill. On the very day following his appointment, 11 May 1940, he wasted no time in pressing the claims for junior ministerial office on behalf of some of his Liberal colleagues like Samuel, Sir Percy Harris and Dingle Foot. Interestingly, he went on, 'Perhaps I ought also to mention to you the name of Mr Clement Davies, KC, because, since he withdrew his support from the last government, he has accepted our whip. He has played an active part in recent events, and I think it only fair to suggest that his claims might be considered'.¹³

Sinclair's nomination of Clement Davies at this point is rather remarkable (although he had, of course, contributed to the downfall of Neville Chamberlain). First elected as the Liberal MP for his native Montgomeryshire on 30 May 1929, and initially viewed as an ardent Lloyd George devotee, Davies had quickly grown disenchanted with political life, reflected in his

Although Davies had certainly helped to bring Churchill to power, the new prime minister conspicuously chose not to reward him with the offer of ministerial office, partly because he was widely viewed as a somewhat erratic political maverick whose loyalties were at best uncertain, partly because he was loathed by Chamberlain and his followers who simply would not serve alongside him.

contentious decision in August 1930 to accept an immensely lucrative position as legal director to Lever Brothers, part of the international company known as Unilever. Yet conjecture that his complete retirement from political life was imminent proved premature. Against the odds, Davies had joined the Liberal National grouping (known as the Simonites) in August 1931 and was returned unopposed to parliament in the general elections of October 1931 and November 1935. From the outbreak of hostilities he had become one of the most vocal and unrelenting of critics of the Chamberlain administration which he helped to bring down the following May.¹⁴ Although Davies had certainly helped to bring Churchill to power, the new prime minister conspicuously chose not to reward him with the offer of ministerial office, partly because he was widely viewed as a somewhat erratic political maverick whose loyalties were at best uncertain, partly because he was loathed by Chamberlain and his followers who simply would not serve alongside him. Davies's support for the Munich agreement in October 1938 had also not been forgotten. All that ensued was the half-hearted offer of a viscountcy which Clem Davies promptly rejected. Generally it was widely felt and deeply resented in Liberal circles that the party had been largely ignored in May 1940. Even Sir Percy Harris, the party chief whip, knew nothing of the new ministerial appointments until he consulted the morning newspapers.¹⁵

In 1941 Clem Davies became a leading member of the Radical Action group which campaigned forcefully for the implementation of radical, progressive policies when peace came and was opposed to the wartime parliamentary truce. He also became a close advocate of Sir William Beveridge, the well-known academic and governmental adviser whose famous report *Social Insurance and Allied Services*, published on 1 December 1942 (to be followed by a second, highly influential report *Full Employment in a Free Society* [1944]), was later to become a radical blueprint for post-war reconstruction. By this time Davies had resigned his position with Unilever, and in August 1942 he formally rejoined the mainstream Liberal Party led

by Sinclair. His return to mainstream political life saw Davies deliver dozens of public speeches both within his constituency and throughout the realm.

As the war drew to an end in the spring of 1945, election speculation was inevitably in the air, as in 1918. At his party's assembly in February, Sinclair called for an early contest – 'A democracy in which the people were never consulted on concrete and specific issues of policy would be a sham'. The Liberal Party, he insisted, still offered a distinctive alternative to 'the two evils of Tory stagnation and the Socialist strait-jacket of control'.¹⁶ Talk of a national Liberal revival proved to be wholly misplaced. As Clem Attlee's Labour Party romped to an unexpected landslide victory at the polls, the Liberals were humiliatingly decimated, returning just twelve MPs to Westminster. In Caithness and Sutherland, Sinclair faced a closely fought three-cornered contest. Here the Labour aspirant Robert MacInnes repeated the well-worn argument that, 'The once great Liberal Party has sunk to a position of insignificance and impotence in the State'.¹⁷ It was widely expected that Sinclair's majority would be considerably reduced.¹⁸ He had been much criticised locally for allegedly neglecting his constituency because of his responsibilities as a party leader for almost the last ten years and as a minister of the crown from May 1940. It was readily alleged by his detractors that Sinclair had focused his attentions exclusively on the Air Ministry and on winning the war at the expense of attending to his constituency where his reputation accordingly suffered considerably. Difficulties were intensified by the extremely remote location of his constituency in the far north of Scotland, and as the largest parliamentary division in the whole of the United Kingdom. The war years had seen Sinclair ever more cut off from his constituents, and in July 1945 they had their revenge in a remarkable poll which saw just sixty-one votes separating the three candidates. While the Conservative E. L. Gandar Dower headed the poll, just six votes ahead of MacInnes, Sinclair was at the bottom. Liberal Party organisers were also partly to blame. Convinced that their leader's seat was relatively safe,

they had deployed him widely elsewhere with the result that Sinclair did not arrive in the constituency until 22 June, reluctantly abandoning his nationwide tour as a result of ominous pessimistic reports from Caithness and Sutherland.

The Liberal debacle went far beyond the worst fears of the party faithful. Not a single seat was held in any of the large towns. Not a single Liberal MP was returned in the whole of Scotland. Of the twelve Liberal MPs returned, no fewer than seven represented Welsh constituencies, including the rather spurious University of Wales division whose days were by now certainly numbered. Nor was Sir Archibald Sinclair the only senior Liberal to suffer defeat in July 1945. Other Liberal casualties included Sir Percy Harris, the committed deputy leader and chief whip, at Bethnal Green South West, Dingle Foot at Dundee, and James de Rothschild in the Isle of Ely. Even in Wales all was not rosy. Major Goronwy Owen, veteran of 1922 and a member of Lloyd George's family, was defeated by the Labour Party in the Liberal citadel of Caernarfonshire, while even LG's old seat of the Caernarfon Boroughs, retained by the Liberals in a by-election in March, now symbolically fell to the Tories, again by the agonisingly slim margin of just 336 votes. Other prominent Liberal candidates who had realistic, if sometimes inflated, hopes of election to parliament were all unsuccessful. These included Sir William Beveridge, Roy Harrod, Isaac Foot (himself a former Liberal MP) and Lady Violet Bonham-Carter, daughter of Asquith, together with her adored son Mark Bonham-Carter. Lady Violet, utterly dejected by the outcome, wrote in her diary, 'I didn't care about myself – but the thought of Mark's victory had buoyed me up. It was my great *personal* stake in this Election – & his whole future hinges on it. Meanwhile the astounding election results came rushing in ... & then the astounding news that not only Dingle [Foot] & Beveridge (which I feared) but *Archie* also had lost his seat. This last seemed to me to be incredible. He was bottom of the poll at Thurso of all places. Like the monarchy falling'.¹⁹ The Liberals had put up a total of 307 candidates; more than 200 had ended up

at the foot of the poll. Following a meeting at London of the Liberal Party Election Committee at the end of the month, the following public statement was issued:

The Liberal Party has suffered a reverse as overwhelming as it was unexpected. Reports from the constituencies showed almost without exception a keener and far more widespread interest in the Liberal programme than for many years past. But it is clear that the majority of the electors were mainly concerned to defeat the Conservative Party and all those associated with it. They were naturally and justifiably resentful of the Conservative record before the war, and deeply suspicious of their lukewarm attitude towards projects of reconstruction. This was undoubtedly the principal reason why they elected a Labour Government. Liberal candidates were rejected, not because the electors disapproved of their policy or outlook, but simply because they appeared to offer a less effective alternative to an Administration which the majority were determined to bring to an end.²⁰

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One of the most pressing immediate tasks to face the severely depleted and demoralised Parliamentary Liberal Party was the selection of a new party leader as successor to Sinclair. Few of the Liberal MPs elected in 1945 were truly national figures, with a proven aptitude for leadership. The most well known and popular was probably Lady Megan Lloyd George (Anglesey), certainly a charismatic and eternally youthful, effervescent individual, and also possessing the great advantage of a famous name. But she had always been viewed as firmly on the left wing of the party from the early 1930s, and she had little aptitude for organisation and administration. Her elder brother Major Gwilym (Pembrokeshire) was obviously already making tracks for the Conservative Party. Yet he was still approached by Sinclair and Harris in connection with the vacant leadership, but he at once refused even to consider the vacancy on the pretext that 'he could not afford the incidental expenses which the office would entail'. Bizarrely, an approach was also made to

him at this time in relation to the National Liberal group, the former Simonites. Again his reply was firmly negative.²¹ Gwilym was in any event ill suited to lead the party given the circumstances of 1945 and his obvious inclination 'to go to the right'. In 1946 the Liberal Party whip was to be withdrawn from him, as he had consistently voted with the Conservatives in the lobbies of the House of Commons. Sir Rhys Hopkin Morris (Carmarthen-shire) had only recently returned to political life following thirteen years engaged in other occupations. Again, he had no ambition or passion to lead his party. Eventually, the twelve Liberal MPs elected in 1945 adopted the bizarre expedient of requesting each of their parliamentary colleagues to leave the room while the others candidly discussed his leadership potential. Sir R. H. Morris at once refused to allow his name to be considered in this way. Their choice was to fall on E. Clement Davies, by this time aged sixty-one (and thus the oldest Liberal leader since Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman back in 1899), now proclaimed as 'Chairman of the Liberal Parliamentary Party' at the beginning of August. It was emphasised that he had been elected to 'hold the office for the session' only.²² The left-winger Tom Horabin (North Cornwall), a close personal friend to Clem Davies, was also chosen as the party's new chief whip as successor to Sir Percy Harris.

At this time Clem Davies was widely depicted as a stopgap, short-term party leader pending Sinclair's imminent re-election to the Commons in a by-election. After all, Sinclair was generally viewed as the natural Liberal Party leader who had been defeated in most unfortunate circumstances and by the slenderest of margins in July 1945, surely just a temporary setback. Indeed, some Liberals had even pressed Sinclair to continue in the leadership although he was no longer a MP. Moreover, the Tory victor at Caithness and Sutherland in 1945, Gandar Dower, had foolishly promised to resign his seat and cause a by-election following victory against Japan. Sinclair might soon be returned to Westminster after all. In the meantime he gave his cautious blessing to Clem Davies as his successor. Although Sinclair

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readily appreciated that Clem Davies had previously pursued 'a very independent – indeed, it has seemed to many Liberals an erratic – course in politics', he was now convinced that his successor had 'undertaken big and serious responsibilities', impressing everyone with 'his determination to make a success of his job. ... We must all help him and do our utmost to build up his position in the Party'. His one heartfelt fear was that Clem Davies, in associating himself so closely with the policies and aspirations of the incoming Attlee administration, might well adopt the potentially 'dangerous tactics of trying to outflank the Labour Party from the left – tactics which would ... give the public an impression of insincerity'.²³ Sinclair's concern was understandable; during the 1945 general election campaign Clement Davies had warmly endorsed extensive land reform and some nationalisation of British industry. Ironically, within two years Davies was to be accused by some of his left-wing parliamentary colleagues of initiating 'a drift to the right' within their party and even 'veering towards the Tories'. But throughout Clem Davies never wavered from his belief that a future Liberal revival would eventually occur.

Sinclair, who had clearly never anticipated his electoral defeat in 1945 and his succession by Clement Davies as party leader, was still anxious to encourage and support his successor. Although Sinclair was in reality Davies's junior by six years, Davies still appeared to consider him as some kind of elder statesman. Should Sinclair return to the House of Commons, Clem Davies's position would change dramatically at once. But conjecture that Gandar Dower might cause a by-election by resigning his seat, as he had indicated, predictably came to nothing.²⁴ Local Liberals were sorely disappointed, but began to pin their hopes on the next general election. There were some who still pressed Sinclair to mount a challenge to Clement Davies's leadership, while Lady Violet Bonham-Carter repeatedly urged him to join the influential Liberal Party Committee. But, as he pointed out to her, he had neither the means nor the least inclination to travel regularly to London: 'I belong here and my roots are here, except when my

friends and neighbours send me to parliament and, unless and until that happens, I cannot be half in and half out of national politics'. Lady Violet still persisted, 'Honestly we need you badly to help us in our very uphill task'. Generally, Sinclair had no wish to be involved in national politics, desiring to remain within his constituency. In November 1946, his old associate Winston Churchill urged him to become part of a cross-party 'handling group' to press for a United Europe, but Sinclair was adamant – 'I am with you in spirit, but cannot be with you in action unless and until I return to Parliament. Samson without his hair was not more disabled than I am from participating in national politics without my seat in Parliament'.²⁵

While he frequently dangled before his supporters the prospect of his return to the Commons in a by-election or the next general election, Sinclair continued to lend constant encouragement to Clement Davies. In 1949 he made something of a political comeback with a speaking tour of the major cities. Following a national radio broadcast by Davies in February of that year, Sinclair enthusiastically described it as 'splendid! We heard every word as clear as a bell. Grand stuff too. I only wish you could do it more often'.²⁶ Davies was truly delighted:

Thank you so much. I do appreciate a pat on the back from you more than from anybody. No one knows better than you what a hard struggle it is. However, I am convinced that we are on the up grade. It is quite amazing to see the response at these rallies and many of them are making financial sacrifices which I am sure are greater than they can really afford. There is a new spirit and with it comes confidence. At last they are expressing their pride in the Liberal faith and not putting on, as they have been doing, a sort of half-apologetic look and assuming a hangdog attitude. Of course, I have no end of trouble here, as you can well understand. I believe if we can have real unity from now till the Election and a true loyalty, rising above mere personal idiosyncrasies, we shall be able to give a very good account

of ourselves when the Election comes.²⁷

Clem Davies's respect and admiration for his predecessor clearly grew. As it became apparent that the ageing Lord Samuel's days as Liberal Party leader in the House of Lords were now numbered, Davies came to believe that Sinclair would make the ideal successor – although at this point he was not a peer, and still had real hopes of re-election to the Commons at the next general election which was now certain to come during the first half of 1950. In December 1949 Davies invited Sinclair to join the highly influential Liberal Party Committee. Anxious not to appear to neglect the Caithness and Sutherland constituency, and looking askance at the inevitably lengthy train journeys from Thurso via Edinburgh to London, Sinclair turned him down, but curiously several national newspapers then carried reports of his alleged acceptance. Two days into the new year – 1950 – Sinclair wrote to Davies:

I was, indeed, surprised to see my name in the newspapers as a member of the Liberal Committee the day after I had written to you to decline with regret and reluctance the honour of your invitation to serve on it. I can quite understand how it happened in the pre-Christmas rush but I am afraid that, for the reasons which I have already given to you, I must adhere to my decision. I feel that I should be open to serious criticism if in the critical time immediately preceding [sic] the General Election I failed to attend the meetings of the committee, which must be generally regarded as the most important and influential committee of the Party. Yet regular attendance will quite clearly be impossible for me.²⁸

He proceeded to discuss at length the voting intentions of Liberal sympathisers in constituencies where there was no party candidate. Both men were convinced that a general election was likely during the first months of 1950.

On 6 January Clement Davies poured out to Sinclair his profound sense of heartfelt pessimism and dejection in relation to the

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impending trial of strength, 'I do not know whether I shall be back here. Last time I had a straight fight with a Tory. This time Labour are in the field, and possibly a Welsh Nationalist. Even if I do pull it off, it will be "a damned near thing". If I did not come back, then of course naturally I [shall] at once resign from the Committee, as I am only on it as happening to be the Chairman of the Parliamentary Party. Each of us in Wales will have a very tough fight'. Lady Megan's position in Anglesey he felt was especially 'difficult' in the face of an impending three-cornered contest, likewise Emrys Roberts in Merioneth, but there was a crumb of comfort to be derived from the calibre of the Liberal candidates in Wales: 'Fortunately our Welsh candidates are good. They are young, vigorous, and good speakers, both in Welsh and English, and each one of them has had a good University career, and where old enough a good war record as well. The three in South Wales that have just come forward are really good. Gwilym [Lloyd-George] of course has caused us a tremendous lot of worry, and now the Welsh Party have publicly declared that he is not a candidate that the Party can support'.²⁹ Sinclair proved supportive and sympathetic:

It would be a terrible blow to the Party if you don't hold your seat; but I feel sure you will. I should imagine that the Welsh Nationalist will take away at least as many votes from the Labour Candidate as from you and that all the Liberal and radical elements in the constituency will see you as the only real alternative to the Tory. Moreover, you probably have a reserve, which will rally to you in a four-cornered contest, in a number of Liberals who did not turn out to vote at the last election feeling confident that you would easily beat the Tory in a straight fight. I have no doubt at all that, if everybody here had voted in the last election, I should have won quite easily. There was a general feeling that I was sure to get in and some people have confessed that they even voted for Gandar Dower in order to express their gratitude and admiration for Winston in the hope and belief

that I was quite safe!! I trust that you too have a certain number of people who voted Tory at the last election merely in order to make certain that Winston finished up the War with Japan and will rally to you at the next election. Clearly, however, you will have a tough fight and I hope you won't travel about too much but concentrate on holding your seat.³⁰

Clem Davies spent the next week on a whirlwind tour of some of the Welsh rural constituencies: 'My meetings were full and enthusiastic, but I am not relying very much on that. I know I have a very tough passage, so it will be "a very damned near thing" one way or another'. While the sole meeting convened in Merioneth had left the Liberal leader 'disappointed' because of the 'poor attendance', a similar gathering at Wrexham proved to be 'the biggest any Party has had for thirty years'.³¹ The two men corresponded extensively on policy formulation and on the perpetually thorny issue of an electoral pact with the Conservatives, a possibility being strongly pressed in some sections of the party. Another pressing issue was how Liberal sympathisers should vote in constituencies where the party had no candidate of its own. In an election broadcast a week before polling day Clem Davies told his listeners, 'If you fear Socialism and dislike the Labour Government, do not rush into the arms of the Tories'.³² Speaking at Denbigh two days later Sir Henry Morris-Jones, the National Liberal and Conservative MP for Denbigh (who had represented the division since 1929, initially as a Liberal), told his audience, 'If I were a betting man, I would bet that at the very most there will be no more than twenty Independent Liberals in the next House of Commons'. To Morris-Jones, Wales was 'the cradle of Liberalism', but, in his opinion, by 1950 not one of the Liberal-held seats was really safe. It was impossible for the party even to pretend to be running for government, while Sir Archibald Sinclair was the only one of the 475 Liberal candidates ever to have held governmental office.³³ The sentiments which Morris-Jones expressed so cogently in public Clem Davies also felt in his heart and voiced privately

to senior figures in the party like Sinclair. Now aged sixty-six, he led his party's national campaign while also fighting to save his skin in Montgomeryshire, a large, sprawling, largely rural division. Many of his Liberal colleagues had been returned in 1945 by the narrowest of margins. Sinclair and Jo Grimond, again standing at Orkney and Shetland (where, unexpectedly, he had come within 200 votes of victory in 1945) were considered the most likely potential Liberal gains. Elsewhere the prospect of success was very remote.

To some extent Sinclair and Jo Grimond campaigned as a team during January and February 1950. It was avidly reported in the Scottish press that the former party leader had won 'tumultuous applause by packed halls'.³⁴ Sinclair was certainly at his vintage best – charismatic, even heroic, lucidly expounding Liberal policies and ruthlessly laying bare the shortcomings of the Attlee administration. Its successes, he insisted, were manifestly a continuation of the policies initiated by the wartime coalition government to which the Liberals had contributed a great deal. The Liberal policy commitment to a Scottish parliament was also strongly underlined in Sinclair's campaign speeches. The optimism and enthusiasm generated by Sinclair and Grimond north of the border contrasted starkly with the sense of malaise and pessimism projected by the party generally in England and Wales. In a rare display of realism, the Liberal Party, tortured by self-doubt, had even taken the extremely unusual step of insuring itself with Lloyds against the loss of between 50 and 250 deposits.

The reality was even worse than anticipated – 319 Liberal deposits were lost, and only nine seats were won. But again Sinclair was defeated by the slimmest of margins – just 269 votes behind the Tory Sir David Robertson. The outcome at Caithness and Sutherland was truly astonishing and a terrible shock to Sinclair himself who had felt that his numerous campaign meetings had 'varied from good to excellent'. He concluded that he had failed to restore the faith of the local electorate in the Liberal Party and that Robertson's lavish pledges to establish light industries throughout the constituency had won him large

numbers of votes.³⁵ To Lady Violet Bonham-Carter, who had travelled to Scotland to address a number of public meetings, he wrote, 'My meetings seemed to get better and David Robertson's to get less good – the contrast being most marked on the eve of the poll at Thurso & Wick, when both my opponents had poor & noisy meetings, while ours were terrifically successful – ending up with a packed audience largely standing in the biggest hall in Wick singing "Auld Lang Syne"! But that silent Tory vote – a phrase from your letter which we have often repeated to ourselves – frightened anti-Socialists, & mutts who fell for Sir David's promises, won the day'.³⁶

Liberal successes were indeed few, but, against the odds, all the Welsh Liberal MPs were re-elected, and Jo Grimond also won Orkney and Shetland, immediately catapulted into the position of Liberal Party chief whip to succeed Frank Byers (defeated at Dorset North by ninety-seven votes). Nor was there any reason for Clem Davies to fear the outcome in Montgomeryshire where he positively romped to victory with a majority of no fewer than 6,780 votes in an intensely fought three-cornered contest. No one was more surprised at this ringing endorsement than Davies himself. Towards the end of March he wrote self-effacingly to Sinclair, 'I am frankly surprised at my return and especially at the support that was ultimately forthcoming in Montgomeryshire'.³⁷ He had already communicated with Attlee in relation to a measure of electoral reform, somewhat heartened by the tiny overall majority of just five seats which the re-elected Labour government now had and the resultant potential clout enjoyed by the small band of Liberal MPs: 'I think that that is to our advantage and I am in real hope that we can get some measure of reform'.³⁸ His position as party leader was now also rather more secure at long last. Sinclair's defeat at Caithness and Sutherland in February 1950, and the unlikelihood of his ever standing again for parliament, meant that no one would now challenge Davies for the party leadership.

Yet, for a man in his mid-sixties battling health problems, depression and an addiction to alcohol (all serious problems which had beset

him over many years), the 1950 general election campaign had proved very exhausting. Before the end of March national newspapers carried reports that Davies's doctor had ordered him to take 'a complete rest'. Sinclair wrote at once:

You have been under a severe strain for a long time – the leadership of the Parliamentary Party, the conduct of the General Election campaign, your own hard but triumphant fight, your wife's recent illness, and the perplexities of the present situation, must all have thrown an almost insupportable burden on you. Do *not* scamp your rest. It is by far the most important thing you have to do now. Health is the only thing that matters now – not only to you and your wife but to all to whom you feel responsibility. There is no conflict between your duty to yourself and your family and your public duty. You can only discharge the latter effectively when you are well and strong – so stay away till your doctors are perfectly happy about letting you resume work.³⁹

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'There was nothing organically wrong', responded Davies, 'but the ancient machine at last was refusing to function. Sleep had gone and there was almost continuous pain. Thereupon, these doctors became judicially serious and, in legal language, said I had embarked upon a criminal career of serious neglect. ... I was ordered quickly away. I have been very well protected. No letters or messages were sent and I had a complete rest. I now feel 100 per cent fit. I do think I must cut down engagements, but you know how difficult that is. To-morrow comes the Budget and I feel that much will turn upon that so I suppose I shall have to deliver such thoughts as are in me on Wednesday or Thursday'.⁴⁰ His health was clearly at best uncertain – as was that of his wife Jano who was two years his senior. The combined effect of excessively long hours of hard work, leading a fractious, feud-racked political party and serving as a constituency MP, had certainly taken their toll, as had heavy smoking and occasional excessive drinking bouts. Once restored to reasonable health,

Davies was most anxious to meet up with Sinclair at London to discuss in depth the future development of the Liberal Party. Detecting a close similarity in the programmes and outlooks of the three major political parties, Davies believed that it was now essential for the Liberal Party to spell out 'that which is distinctive in our policy so that we can say our belief in that is fundamental and without it what is not Liberal'.⁴¹ In response, Sinclair asserted that in a measure of electoral reform lay 'the means of preserving the life, and securing the independence, of the Liberal Party', possibly the adoption of an 'alternative vote' system as a prelude to proportional representation. He was inclined to believe that such reforms would be more likely to be introduced by a future Conservative administration rather than by the Attlee government.⁴²

But, while Clem Davies, at sixty-six years old, was certainly feeling his age, Lord Samuel, now fully eighty years of age, was naturally very anxious to stand down as the Liberal Party leader in the House of Lords. To Davies, Sinclair appeared the ideal successor to Herbert Samuel, feeling convinced that they could work together harmoniously as a team. Moreover, removal of Sinclair to the upper house would mean that he would never again contest a parliamentary election and would thus much strengthen Davies's position as party leader. By September the proposal was well advanced that Sinclair should be granted a peerage with a view to his later succeeding Samuel as party leader in the Lords. Initially approached by Philip Rea, the Liberal chief whip in the House of Lords, Sinclair had demurred 'on the grounds among others that I was disinclined to abandon hope of re-entering the [House of] Commons, that I knew the job as back-bencher in the Commons but gravely doubted my fitness for the high responsibilities of leading the Party in the strange surroundings of the Lords and that I was deeply reluctant to relinquish my present name and status for that of a Peer of the Realm'. Pressed by Rea and Clem Davies to reconsider, and assured that Attlee fully supported such a move, Sinclair flew to London for extended talks with Samuel, Rea and other 'intimate friends' in the metropolis.

Efforts to contact Davies proved frustratingly abortive, probably because he was at his constituency home at Meifod. Subjected to persuasive pressure and flattery from Samuel, who even offered to continue in office (as Liberal leader in the Lords) for several more months, Sinclair allowed his natural reluctance to be overcome, turning to Clem Davies for reassurance – 'I hope I have made it quite clear to you that the last thing I want is a Peerage as a form of honourable retirement. In no circumstances would I contemplate going to the Lords, except if there is an important job of work to be done there. It is on this point, in particular, that I require your advice'.⁴³

Clement Davies, having discussed the matter at length with Attlee and Lord (Christopher) Addison (himself a former Liberal minister, now the Labour leader in the Lords), tended to take the same line as Lord Rea. Consequently Sinclair, although still entertaining 'grave misgivings' about his 'fitness for the role', was highly 'impressed by the unanimity of [his] friends' advice.⁴⁴ Sinclair, it seemed, was at last destined to go to the House of Lords – in the midst of repeated talk about electoral reform and future electoral deals with Churchill and the Tories. But the envisaged peerage did not appear overnight, and the issue was clouded somewhat by the ever-increasing likelihood of yet another general election at some point during 1951. As late as September of that year there was renewed conjecture that Sinclair might well be inclined to stand yet again at Caithness and Sutherland. There was even speculation that, as he was unhappy at the failure of the local Liberal Party to reorganise itself, he might well stand as a Liberal candidate elsewhere. It was even suggested that Churchill was prepared to allow him a free run in his chosen constituency and, if elected there, would promptly reward him with ministerial office. There was further conjecture that an earldom was his for the asking from the Conservative leader.⁴⁵ In the event, Sinclair stood nowhere in November 1951, simply speaking on a few Liberal platforms. As the further trial of strength had come so quickly, the impoverished Liberal Party could muster only 109 candidates. They won just 2.5 per cent of

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the popular vote and only six seats in parliament. Bolton West was the party's only gain. Clem Davies was now the only one of the six Liberal MPs to have sat in the Commons representing the same constituency since before 1945. (Sir Rhys Hopkin Morris, elected in Carmarthenshire in 1945, had represented Cardiganshire from 1923 until 1932.)

Sinclair was determined never again to stand for parliament and claimed to wish to return to farming. At long last, the envisaged peerage materialised with Churchill as prime minister. Sinclair was to become Viscount Thurso of Ulbster in the county of Caithness.⁴⁶ As the ailing Liberal Party now enjoyed a greater numerical presence and thus potential clout in the Lords, the long-awaited move appeared auspicious for the party's future. Sinclair would feel very much at home amongst the more elderly Liberals in the upper house, it was felt, and would soon become their leader. Illness, however, cruelly intervened when, early in 1952, Viscount Thurso suffered a severe stroke which meant that he was unable to take his seat in the Lords until July 1954. Poor Viscount Samuel again reluctantly agreed to postpone his retirement plans as Liberal Party leader in the House of Lords. Clem Davies, probably failing to realise the seriousness of Thurso's condition, sympathised with him but expressed the hope that he might soon serve on the Liberal Party Committee.⁴⁷

Samuel finally retired as Liberal leader in the Lords in June 1955. The idea that Thurso might succeed him, a prospect which certainly appealed to him personally, was at once vetoed by his doctor and his wife Marigold. The position then went to Lord Rea, who had five years' experience as Liberal chief whip there.⁴⁸ Further minor strokes then prevented Viscount Thurso from playing an active part in the proceedings of the upper house as he had originally hoped. Sadly, when Clement Davies finally stood down as party leader at the Folkestone national assembly in the autumn of 1956, his indifferent health prevented Thurso (who had recently returned from a holiday in Switzerland) from attending his farewell dinner at the National Liberal Club.⁴⁹ A further even more severe stroke in 1959 left Thurso a

bed-ridden, only partly conscious invalid. In this pathetic condition he was to survive for another eleven years. His condition meant that, very sadly (unlike most of his contemporaries), Thurso never had the opportunity to pen his reminiscences or publish a volume of war memoirs. His own side of the story remains untold with the inevitable result that Sinclair's important role and contribution have tended to be overlooked.

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1 Parliamentary Archive, House of Lords, Lloyd George Papers G/18/4/4, Sinclair to Lloyd George, 30 January 1927; *ibid.*, Samuel Papers A/84, f. 10, Sinclair to Samuel, 3 November 1931.

2 Churchill College, Cambridge, Thurso Papers I/17/4, Sinclair to V. Finney, 19 March 1931 (copy).

3 For details, see the *Liberal Magazine*, 1931, p. 194.

4 Cited in Alun Wyburn-Powell, *Clement Davies: Liberal Leader* (London: Politico's, 2003), p. 46.

5 *Liberal Magazine*, 1931, p. 549.

6 Parliamentary Archive, House of Lords, Samuel Papers A/84, f. 10, Sinclair to Samuel, 3 November 1931.

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9 See the report in *The Times*, 17 December 1933.

10 Sir Percy Harris, *Forty Years in and out of Parliament* (London and New York: A. Melrose, 1949), p. 126.

11 Sinclair to Samuel, 21 January 1935, cited in Gerard de Groot, *Liberal Crusader: the Life of Sir Archibald Sinclair* (London: Hurst & Co., 1993), p. 105.

12 Cited in Roy Douglas, *Liberals: a History of the Liberal and Liberal Democrat Parties* (London: Hambledon, 2005), p. 204.

13 The National Archives, Kew, PREM 5/209, Sinclair to Churchill, 11 May 1940.

14 J. Graham Jones, 'Clement Davies and Montgomeryshire politics during the Second World War', *Montgomeryshire Collections*, Vol. 95 (2007), pp. 111–143; David M. Roberts, 'Clement Davies and the fall of Neville Chamberlain', *Welsh History Review*, Vol. 8 (1976–77), pp. 188–215.

15 Harris, *op. cit.*, pp. 150–51.

16 *The Times*, 5 February 1945.

17 Election address of Robert MacInnes, July 1945.

18 *The Scotsman*, 22 June 1945.

19 Bodleian Library, Oxford, Violet Bonham-Carter Papers, diary entry for 26–28 July 1945.

20 *The Times*, 1 August 1945.

21 Roy Douglas, *The History of the Liberal Party, 1895–1970* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1971), p. 249.

22 *The Times*, 3 August 1945; *Manchester Guardian*, 3 August 1945. Davies's position remained somewhat insecure. Even in November 1946 it was pointedly reported that he had been re-elected as 'chairman' 'for the present session' only, (*The Times*, 26 November 1946), and even at the end of 1950 (after five and a half years in the position) he voiced his heartfelt exasperation to Lady Violet Bonham-Carter, frustratingly referring to 'this so-called leadership'. (National Library of Wales (hereafter NLW), Clement Davies Papers J3/45, Davies to VB-C, 15 November 1950 [copy]).

23 Cited in de Groot, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

24 *The Times*, 15 and 26 February 1946, 31 January 1947.

25 Sinclair to Bonham-Carter, 1 October 1946; VB-C to Sinclair, 26 September and 10 October 1946, cited in de Groot, *op. cit.*, p. 232; Sinclair to Churchill, 18 November 1946, cited in Ian Hunter (ed.), *Winston and Archie: the Letters of Sir Archibald Sinclair and Winston S. Churchill, 1915–1960* (London: Politico's, 2005), p. 430.

26 NLW, Clement Davies papers J3/2, Sinclair to Davies, 14 February 1949.

27 *Ibid.* J3/3, Davies to Sinclair, 16 February 1949 (copy).

28 *Ibid.* J3/9, Sinclair to Davies, 2 January 1950.

29 *Ibid.* J3/10, Davies to Sinclair, 6 January 1949 [recte 1950] (copy).

30 *Ibid.* J3/11, Sinclair to Davies, 17 January 1950.

31 *Ibid.* J3/12, Davies to Sinclair, 17 January 1950 (copy).

32 *The Times*, 17 February 1950.

33 *Ibid.*, 20 February 1950.

34 *Orkney Herald*, 1 November 1949.

35 Parliamentary Archive, House of Lords, Samuel Papers A/155 (xiii), Sinclair to Samuel, 28 February 1950.

36 Bodleian Library, Oxford, Violet Bonham-Carter Papers, Sinclair to VB-C, 26 February 1950.

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38 *Ibid.*

39 *Ibid.* J3/15, Sinclair to Davies, 28 March 1950.

40 *Ibid.* J3/16, Davies to Sinclair, 17 April 1950 (copy).

41 *Ibid.* J3/22, Davies to Sinclair, 25 April 1950 (copy).

42 *Ibid.* J3/23, Sinclair to Davies, 3 May 1950.

43 *Ibid.* J3/37, Sinclair to Davies, 5 September 1950 ('Personal and Secret').

44 *Ibid.* J3/38, Sinclair to Davies, 14 September 1950.

45 de Groot, *op. cit.*, pp. 235–36.

46 *The Times*, 1 January and 16 April 1952.

47 NLW, Clement Davies Papers J3/72, Davies to Sinclair, 11 January 1952 (copy).

48 Parliamentary Archive, House of Lords, Samuel Papers A/144 (i), Samuel to Rea, 7 June 1955 (copy); *ibid.*, A/144 (v), Thurso to Samuel, 13 June 1955.

49 NLW, Clement Davies Papers J3/85, Thurso to Coss Billson, 31 October 1956 (copy).

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