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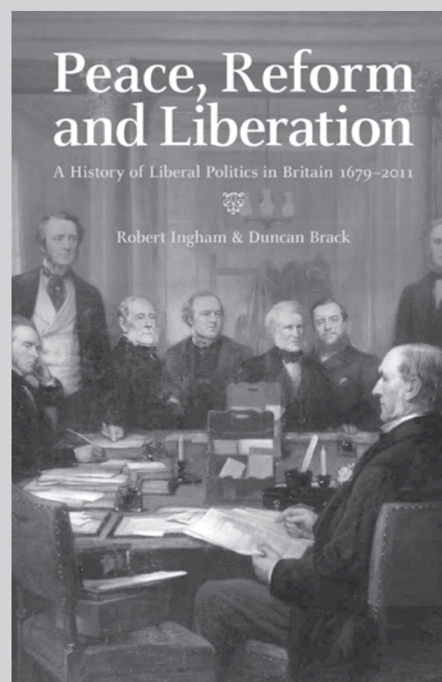


groups such as the Nonconformist churches, trade unions, manufacturing, the City and the professions. These would have given *Peace, Reform and Liberation* a wider perspective on the party and set it in a broader political and electoral context.

These minor caveats aside, though, the History Group is to be commended for producing this history of the party and Liberalism since the end of the seventeenth century. Other party histories are either rather dated like Roy Douglas's *Liberals: The History of the Liberal and Liberal Democrat Parties*, dry and academic like *A Short History of the Liberal Party: the Road Back to Power*, or primarily cover the twentieth century like David Dutton's *A History of the Liberal Party*. Ingham and Brack is not a substitute for the range of more academic studies of the party at different periods – indeed each chapter ends with a list of suggestions for further reading – but it is both an excellent introduction for the student and a great reference book for both the party member and those interested in politics more generally.

Following completion of a D.Phil. on Liberal Party survival in Britain, 1932 to 1959, at Exeter College, Oxford, Malcolm Baines now works in tax for a well-known hotel and serviced offices group.

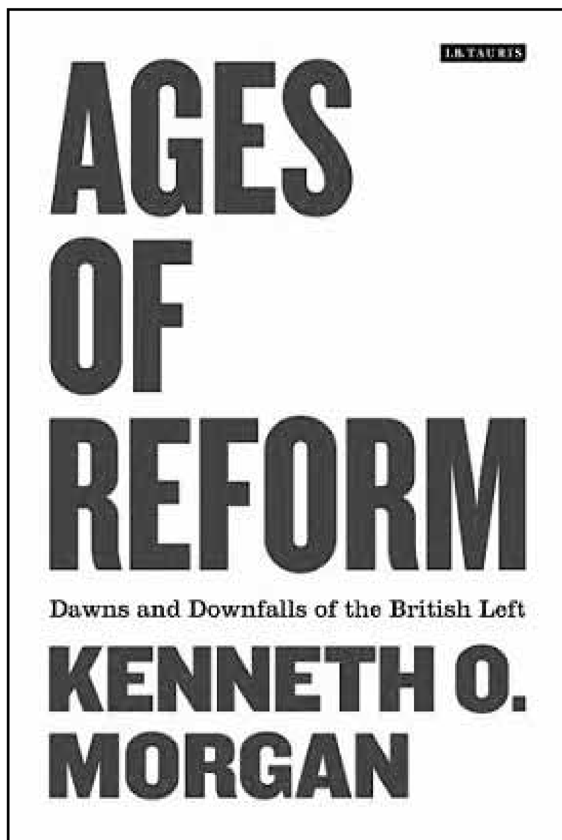
Personalities and causes of the left

K. O. Morgan, *Ages of Reform: Dawns and Downfalls of the British Left* (I.B.Tauris, 2011)
Reviewed by **Martin Pugh**

Readers of the *Journal of Liberal History* will find much to interest them in *Ages of Reform*, a collection of nineteen essays, lectures and articles written by Ken Morgan over a long period and ranging widely across left-wing politics in nineteenth and twentieth century Britain. They reflect an emphasis on the prominent personalities, including Keir Hardie, Lloyd George, Nye Bevan, Jim Callaghan and Michael Foot, four of whom have been the subject of biographies by Morgan, and also on the great issues and causes of progressive politics, as opposed to questions of party organisation and elections. Some chapters are short, though none the worse for that, notably

his splendidly incisive speech in the House of Lords attacking the decision to go to war in Iraq. The sentiments, if not the language, are reminiscent of Gladstone's condemnation of Disraeli for his irresponsible imperialist wars in the late 1870s. The speech is also a reminder that a modicum of knowledge about the dismal history of British invasions of Afghanistan on the part of today's Labour and Liberal Democrat politicians might have opened their eyes to the predictable fiasco in which Britain has been embroiled for ten years.

It is hardly possible in a review of this kind to comment on all nineteen of the chapters. Suffice it to say that this reviewer's interest was especially attracted by several of the essays in the second half of the book dealing with aspects of Labour history. For example, Morgan draws attention to a neglected theme in 'Labour and republicanism' – or perhaps one should say 'Labour and monarchism'. Historically Liberals have experienced more conflict with monarchs than Labour partly because they tend to be more interested in constitutional questions and because their governments suffered from Queen Victoria's inability to adjust to her role as a politically neutral figurehead. By contrast,



Labour prime ministers have got on rather well with their monarchs and the wider movement has shown minimal interest in republicanism. The foolish decision to exclude Blair and Brown from the royal wedding is completely out of line with past practice. From the early 1920s onwards Labour politicians were routinely invited to royal functions which they eagerly accepted.

The question is *why* has Labour been so content with a hereditary monarchy? Morgan does not delve far into this, but part of the explanation is that, in so far as Labour has been a working-class movement, it has simply reflected working-class enthusiasm for the royal family. The other is that George V set a crucial precedent in 1924 when he invited Ramsay MacDonald to form a government with a mere 191 MPs and with no conditions attached. In effect, the king conferred legitimacy on Labour at a time when Tory propaganda was denouncing it as unfit to govern.

A similar question is raised by the chapter dealing with Labour and imperialism. Morgan's focus is on a handful of leading figures during the post-1945 era. As a result, he tends to miss the extent to which the early Labour movement reflected conventional attitudes about empire. Though not very interested in India and Africa, it was enthusiastic about the colonies of white settlement which were seen to offer opportunities for emigration, markets, employment, trade union organisation and, in Australia and New Zealand, Labour Parties that won power relatively early and offered useful models for interventionist social legislation.

Instead Morgan examines the process of post-war decolonisation in which Labour, though largely out of power, proved to be influential. He makes a strong case for the role of Jim Callaghan as both supporter and critic of Conservative policy under Lennox Boyd and Ian Macleod. In effect, decolonisation was an aspect of *consensus* politics, although Morgan does not use the word. Indeed, Labour sometimes wanted to proceed more slowly to independence than the Conservatives in that it aspired to create a measure of democracy and economic stability before renouncing control. In many ways this was an extension of inter-war policy in which the parties cooperated over moves to extend participation in government to Indians, the main controversies occurring within the Conservative Party.

In 'The rise and fall of nationalisation' Morgan tackles another important but neglected theme. He traces Labour's gradual adoption of nationalisation between the wars leading to the innovations of 1945–51 and the party's marked retreat from the idea thereafter. But why did Labour lose confidence in the whole enterprise so quickly ? As Morgan points out, the timing of the launch was not perfect – a fuel crisis in 1947 undermined wartime confidence in planning and linked nationalisation with failure. But this is not sufficient explanation. It was an error, politically, not to involve the labour force more closely in the running of nationalised industries and thereby to take the opportunity to build an ethos around the idea of collective ownership. As a result, by the early 1950s there was no popular appetite for further nationalisation. Yet nationalisation was never as unpopular as later propaganda suggests, partly because state ownership had a longer history. Early Socialists like Robert Blatchford had used the Victorian Post Office as evidence of the efficiency and popularity of public enterprise. The foundation of the Forestry Commission in 1920 reflected the general belief that state intervention was necessary to remedy the failure of the private sector to invest in the national interest. Moreover, Labour's nationalisation programme proved to be too narrow, focusing on problematic, underfunded industries and backing away from profitable private monopolies in consumer goods such as sugar refining.

Morgan's survey of Labour and the special relationship with the United States offers a useful corrective to impressions of the Blair–Brown era. He reminds us that while the relationship enjoyed a brief climax during the late 1940s during the Cold War, it was otherwise complicated by friction over such issues as the post-war loan, the atomic bomb and the Korean War, but also sustained by Gaitskell's enthusiasm for America, by sympathy for New Deal policies and by the writing of J. K. Galbraith. It is

salutary to note that three Labour governments have effectively been destroyed by slavishly following American priorities: those of Attlee, Blair and Wilson. The latter bought American backing for the currency after 1964 with a view to avoiding devaluation, thereby upsetting his entire economic strategy; Wilson antagonised his domestic support by backing the war in Vietnam but irritated the Americans by resisting pressure to send troops to fight there. Morgan shows that even in the 1960s American politicians had little genuine regard for Britain despite extravagant public displays of mutual admiration.

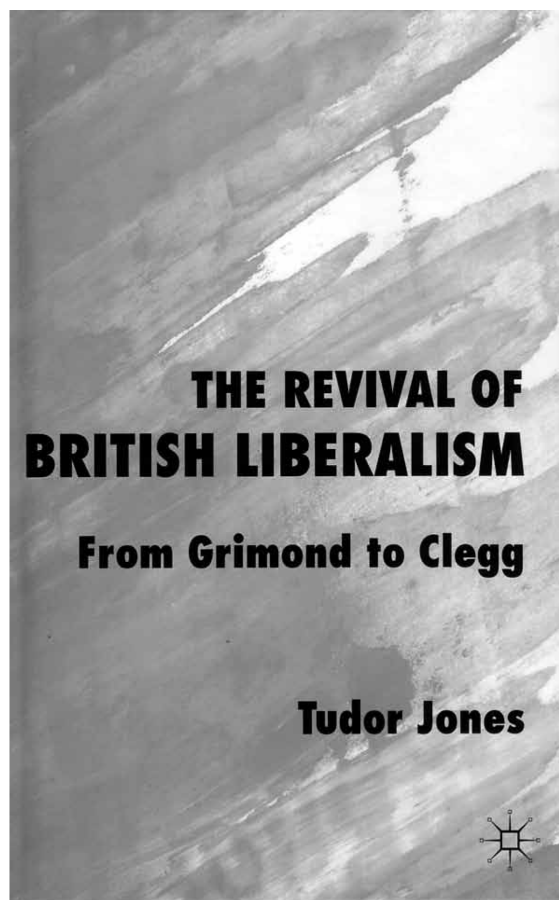
Finally, Morgan offers a persuasive revisionist view of the Wilson-Callaghan governments of 1974–79 which, indirectly, gives food for thought for Liberal Democrats. Although the party learnt some lessons from the abortive pact between David Steel and Jim Callaghan, its present leaders have hopelessly misjudged the wider implications of minority government. In May 2010 both the Lib Dem negotiators and the MPs generally seem to have assumed that they could not risk leaving the Conservatives to form a minority government because that would lead to a second general election and an inevitable government victory.

However, there is scant historical support for this view. Voters tend to resent being forced to the polls twice in a short space of time. A second election in 1910 failed to improve the Asquith government's position. In 1951 Attlee risked his small 1950 majority at a second election and lost it. After the first election of 1974 Wilson's minority government successfully managed to lead the country out of the chaos of the miners' strike, the three-day week and raging inflation, though it suffered fifty-nine parliamentary defeats in 1974–76. Encouraged by the pollsters, Wilson opted for the expected autumn election – and *failed* to win the expected working majority. Would a minority Tory government, handicapped by economic austerity and internal divisions in 2010–11, really have been in a position to risk a second election? On the contrary, the ensuing post-election interval would have allowed Lib Dems to maintain their distinctiveness and leave the Conservatives to shoulder the blame for economic failure while giving Labour the opportunity to select a new leader, distance itself from Blairism and cooperate with the Lib Dems to oust the government.

Martin Pugh was Professor of Modern British History at Newcastle University until 1999 and is now a freelance historian. His most recent book is Speak for Britain! A New History of the Labour Party *(2010) and he is currently writing a book on the crisis of British national identity, which will be published in 2012.*

Policy and ideology

Tudor Jones, *The Revival of British Liberalism – From Grimond to Clegg* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011)
Reviewed by **Michael Meadowcroft**



Any Liberal wanting a single reference volume on the development of party policy from 1956 to the present, and its relevance to the political history of the Liberal and Liberal Democrat parties, will find this an admirable and reliable guide. Tudor Jones has applied his experience and academic skills to produce a companion volume to recent political histories of Liberalism. By spending four years reading the whole oeuvre of Liberal writing over fifty-five years, by interviewing a wide range of contributors to the policy debate – including, I need to declare, myself – and by utilising his particular speciality of political thought, he has brought a remarkable sense of order to what would otherwise be regarded as an inchoate jumble.

Jones uses the advent of Jo Grimond to the Liberal leadership as the starting point of his study not least because Jo enjoyed and welcomed ideas and debate. I recall, for instance, at my first Liberal Assembly in 1961, Jo attended a meeting at Edinburgh University. He sat on a table surrounded by a large attendance of maybe two hundred Young Liberals happily participating in a lively debate on current issues, without any sense of condescension or hierarchy on his part.

Grimond directly and indirectly sparked a whole raft of policy publications. By 1960 there was the beginnings of a formidable research department at headquarters headed by Harry Cowie, a very able but somewhat acerbic Scot in whom Grimond placed considerable trust. By the time of my arrival at headquarters in January 1962, there were also three research assistants, John Blake, Michael O'Hara and Ann Rodden, and between them they produced a high-quality monthly political bulletin *Current Topics* and staffed a series of *New Directions* policy booklets, plus a set of reports on key subjects by committees which included experts from beyond the party's formal membership, drawn in by Grimond's charismatic leadership.

Grimond tells in his memoirs of arriving in the Commons in 1950