

than an individual's conscience. He did, for instance, some years later, state that he had had great misgivings about the Falklands war but had stifled them in the interest of party unity.

Cole's thorough researches give voice to Richard's practicality and to his frustration with Liberals who depended on sentimentality. I had forgotten, for instance, that he had sent me one of his typical typed notes – usually on wafer thin paper – objecting to my quoting of a Russell Johnston peroration phrase, 'As long as birds sing in unclouded skies, so long will endure the power of the compassionate spirit.' Richard chided me: 'real Liberals realise that they have to come to terms with clouded skies and Original Sin. There are too many Liberals, in my view, who share Russell's sentimentality.' Russell wasn't the only colleague that Richard believed to have insufficient depth – he certainly didn't cope with Clement Freud and he felt that David Penhaligon's disinclination to maintain a filing system diminished the usefulness of his undoubted political skills.

His practicality was shown also by the use of his skilfully amassed personal finances. Having failed to persuade the party to give a high priority to local government, in 1961 Richard personally financed a separate department at party headquarters staffed by Pratap Chitnis and, a year later, myself, plus secretarial support. Because it was separately financed it was able to keep out of the regular internal party spats and was much more acceptable with the Scottish Liberal Party than the rest of the London-based party. By 1965 he argued that the local government department had proved its value and that it should be increasingly financed by the party and its councillors. This led to the formation of the Association of Liberal Councillors under its first chair, Alderman David Evans.

Matt Cole attempts to discern Richard's views on the alliance with the SDP and on the eventual merger of the parties but finds it difficult. He has to rely on close colleagues for what they had managed to draw out from Richard. Some of us who were very sceptical about the alliance and who opposed the merger believed that Richard would be supportive of our

**Matt Cole has produced a highly readable and rightly affectionate portrait of one of the Liberal Party's postwar stalwarts.**

position, but we were wrong. He was essentially loyal and pragmatic, whilst firmly believing that the negotiators could have extracted a better deal from the SDP, as well as believing that, within the foreseeable future, the innate philosophical and organisational depth of the Liberal Party would see off the more superficial SDP.

Matt Cole has produced a highly readable and rightly affectionate

portrait of one of the Liberal Party's postwar stalwarts, which *en passant* provides a great deal of material on the nature and vicissitudes of the party to which Richard Wainwright was so long affiliated.

*Michael Meadowcroft was a Leeds City Councillor, 1968–1983, and Liberal MP for Leeds West, 1983–87. He held numerous local and national offices in the Liberal Party.*

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## Labour's right wing

Stephen Meredith, *Labours Old and New: The Parliamentary Right of the British Labour Party 1970–79 and the Roots of New Labour* (Manchester University Press, 2008)

Reviewed by **Richard Toye**

**T**HIS BOOK makes a useful contribution to the study of the politics of the 1970s, taking as its starting point the idea that the right wing of the Labour Party has not been sufficiently understood. Its key claim is that 'The parliamentary Labour right has been a more complex, heterogeneous and disputatious body than conventional accounts of a monolithic ruling Labour right or revisionist tendency would allow' (p. 18). The right's intellectual divisions and consequent weaknesses, moreover, were a significant cause in the party's shift leftwards after Thatcher came to power (which in turn triggered the SDP split of 1981). These arguments are persuasive. Although the personal tensions between the key right-wing figures Tony Crosland, Denis Healey and Roy Jenkins are well known, it would be wrong to put too much emphasis on the conflicting ambitions of individuals at the expense of ideological factors.

Of course, when one argues for the existence of complexity in Labour Party politics, one is unlikely to go far wrong. It is always possible to point to flaws in any suggested taxonomy, such as between trade unionist 'labourists' and middle-class intellectual 'revisionists'. As the former Jenkinsite MP David Marquand comments in an interview for the book, 'it's

always more complicated than that' (p. 37). In particular it is not easy to trace a line between someone's apparent dispositions in the 1970s and whether or not they subsequently joined the SDP. However, even warring opponents had some things in common. One virtue of this study is its demonstration that factional behaviour was hardly unique to the left. After he became prime minister in 1976, James Callaghan deplored the attempts of small groups within the Parliamentary Labour Party to impose their views on the majority. In response, the centre-right manifesto group declared that it 'would be ready to disband the day after the [left-wing] Tribune Group did so' (p. 61), i.e. not at all. If the left was often destructive, the right was not always conspicuously loyal or helpful to the leadership either.

Meredith does a good job of dissecting the right's divisions on the issue of Europe. He writes: 'the Jenkinsite core of pro-Europeans found themselves increasingly alienated not just from the anti-Europeanism of the Labour left, but also from colleagues of the parliamentary centre-right who, anxious about party unity, refused to treat the issue as an article of faith and as one that transcended the (tribal) loyalties and adversarial character of party politics' (p. 94). The Jenkinsites were also divided from the

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more traditional/pragmatic elements of the right by their greater concerns about trade union power, and this too formed part of the backdrop to the foundation of the SDP. In addition, Jenkins himself, increasingly detached from Labour, offered lurid warnings about the threat to freedom posed by high public spending; whereas Crosland, although prepared to rethink his own earlier hopes about the benefits of high spending, believed this position was extreme. The disunity, of course, was fundamentally a product of the difficult and confusing economic situation that Britain found itself in the 1970s. It is worth remembering, though, that Labour kept the show on the road for a long time in spite of it. It was Callaghan's remarkable achievement to keep his Cabinet together throughout the 1976 IMF crisis, laying the groundwork important steps to recovery over the next two years, although he eventually provoked the Winter of Discontent by pushing his anti-inflation stance too far.

The book is thoughtful, well researched and written in a clear style. I would have liked to learn a little more about the 'parliamentary' aspect of the 'parliamentary right'. After all, the management of the Commons formed one of the Labour government's major

problems, especially after it lost its narrow majority. Overall, though, this is a sensible and interesting book that refines our comprehension of an important period.

*Richard Toye is Professor of Modern History at the University of Exeter. His most recent book is Churchill's Empire: The World That Made Him and the World He Made (2010).*

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## Political theory and political thought

Duncan Kelly, *The Propriety of Liberty: Persons, Passions and Judgement in Modern Political Thought* (Princeton University Press, 2010)

Reviewed by **Eugenio F. Biagini**

THIS is a challenging and thought-provoking book which spans two disciplines, political theory and the history of political thought, using the latter as a tool to advance the former. It argues that 'classical' liberalism conceived of freedom as the sphere of man's 'appropriate agency', or 'propriety', understood as 'the capacity of individuals to choose between alternative courses of actions ... and then act on their choices both in private and in public' (p. 1). It involves choice, self-restraint and judgment, the three essential components of a 'progressive or developmental, not fixed or teleological' understanding of liberty (p. 5). It affects two dimensions: the 'quality of agency ... [for which] one can be held responsible ... as an autonomous agent'; and 'shared or intersubjective judgments about the propriety of particular actions, rooted in a common conception of justice' (p. 15). Using such framework, Kelly tries to identify a middle course between 'negative' freedom ('non-domination') and 'positive' liberty (civic entitlement and participation).

Using such framework the author revisits a number of well-known liberal philosophers and economists, including John Locke, Montesquieu, Adam Smith Tocqueville, J. S. Mill and T. H. Green. The section on Green is perhaps the most stimulating, partly because here the author engages with the question of religion (which the rest of the book curiously neglects). Green was not a believer, but he championed the civic virtue of the Nonconformist tradition.

He thought that the latter was strengthened by nineteenth-century 'Higher Criticism', with its rigorous analysis of the texts and demolition of the 'mythical' parts of the Bible. Green elaborated '[the] idea of the religious character of rational, moral action ... [a] metaphysical claim [which] can ... be explored historically and contextually through Green's engagement with historical biblical criticism and modern German philosophy ... through his assumption that rational societies progress historically towards a stage whereby the prerequisite of real freedom, legal freedom, can develop' (p. 255).

Both for its emphasis on Protestant Dissent and reliance on 'Higher Criticism', Green stood for what must inevitably be perceived as an 'anti-Catholic' definition of Christianity. It was a view which had parallels with Giuseppe Mazzini's idealisation of non-hierarchical, non-dogmatic, rational religion. Strangely, Kelly misses the Mazzini parallel, and instead presents Green's liberal religion in racial, rather than civic humanist or republican, terms: 'Catholic countries in general and the "Romance nations" in particular, Green argued, remained content with the unreconciled character of religion and morality', an attitude 'which stood in contradistinction to the spiritual completeness craved by the Teuton'. Green criticised the 'Jesuitry' which in Catholic countries "derationalised" the state from its position as the "passionless expression of general right", rendering it instead the "engine of individual caprice under alternating fits of

