

a contrasting interpretation of late-nineteenth century and early-twentieth century Liberal politics, from the perspective of a staunchly Labour historian.

However, Hattersley has declined this intriguing opportunity. He does not offer any overarching interpretation of Lloyd George's career. The absence of an Introduction and conclusion are clear indications of his determination to concentrate on a narrative of Lloyd George's life, which begins with the Welshman's birth on page 1 and ends with his funeral on page 640. This narrative is very well done, though the size of the book remains a little daunting. Hattersley's writing is clear and vigorous throughout, as one would expect from such a stylish journalist and author (this is his nineteenth book). There are few factual errors – a situation that Hattersley is happy to acknowledge is partly attributable to the book's proof-reading by Lord Morgan and Professor Anthony King; and a number of complicated political tangles, like Lloyd George's replacement of Asquith in December 1916, are

deftly handled. There is plenty here that patient non-specialist readers will find enjoyable, especially as Hattersley varies the diet of politics with details of Lloyd George's complicated and controversial love life. However, there are times when Hattersley's lack of familiarity with the latest scholarship on Lloyd George leads him astray, as in his treatment of Lloyd George's schemes to 'Conquer Unemployment' in 1926–31.

But, above all, the book lacks the perceptiveness and sense of commitment of Jenkins's *Asquith. The Great Outsider* does not give the impression that Hattersley is really interested in Lloyd George. That he has written such a detailed treatment of his subject is a truly remarkable testament to the energy and prolific writing powers of a senior statesman who is now nearly eighty years old.

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whose name will forever be associated with appeasement. One could, therefore, be forgiven for placing Lloyd George in the 'anti-appeaser' camp along with Winston Churchill, his former Liberal colleague. Yet, Rudman argues that Lloyd George 'was the first and one of the most determined appeasers of Germany' (p. 264).

Rudman joins those historians who root appeasement long before Neville Chamberlain's premiership. Although Lloyd George attempted to get the best deal possible for Britain at the Paris Peace Conferences, his pro-German sympathies were already apparent. After blocking a French attempt to annex the Rhineland, Lloyd George duplicitously undermined Britain's guarantee of French security by making it dependent upon American ratification. This never materialised and France was left without a defensive frontier on the Rhine or a security pact. This did nothing to calm French fears of a German resurgence. Lloyd George also agreed that a preamble should be added to the peace treaty's military clauses which maintained that Germany was disarmed 'to render possible the initiation of the general limitation of the armaments of all nations'. When the world's powers failed to craft a disarmament convention, this provided Hitler's Germany with a ready-made pretext for rearmament.

Lloyd George's compassionate approach developed into a failure to implement the treaty that he had helped shape. Rudman clearly explains his apparently contradictory, but considered, rationale. The Prime Minister's 'deep-seated faith in the German nation as a general force for good' reasserted itself (pp. 82–83). He wanted Germany to be able to pay reparations, resist a Bolshevik revolution, restore the European balance of power, and help revive international trade. So-called 'appeasement', at this stage, reflected a pursuit of what Lloyd George perceived were Britain's national interests. When considering reparations, for example, 'he took a generally consistent, anti-appeasing line' (p. 48). His Fontainebleau memorandum of 1919 was lenient in warning about the perils of placing Germans under foreign sovereignty but it also called for heavy German payment.

Lloyd George and appeasement

Stella Rudman, *Lloyd George and the Appeasement of Germany 1919–1945* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011)
Reviewed by **Chris Cooper**

ALTHOUGH LLOYD GEORGE was absent from power after 1922, he 'continued to wield enormous influence in British politics' into the 1940s (p. 161). The Welshman is best remembered as the architect of Britain's victory in the First World War and for his role in splitting the Liberal Party after 1916. Dr Stella Rudman's converted doctoral thesis charts Lloyd George's interventions in foreign policy after the conclusion of the First World War, and the development of Britain's ultimately unsuccessful appeasement of Germany. Although Lloyd George has been the subject of numerous biographical studies, monographs and journal articles, this work focuses on a comparatively neglected aspect of his career. By untying the

contradictions behind his multifaceted outlook and detecting a line of continuity in the Welshman's thinking, Rudman, through the prism of 'appeasement', explains how the enemy of the Kaiser became an admirer of Hitler without any fundamental change in outlook.

As peacetime Prime Minister, Lloyd George helped draw up the arguably punitive peace terms imposed upon Germany. He was seen at his 'anti-appeasing best' as he championed the League of Nations when Italy attacked Abyssinia in 1935 (p. 214). Then, during the celebrated 'Norway Debate' of May 1940, he delivered an indictment of Neville Chamberlain's wartime ministry. The debate led to the downfall of Chamberlain,

Lloyd George's peacetime premiership was also marked by his growing antipathy towards France. His conviction that the French desired continental hegemony encouraged further leniency towards Germany. Lloyd George began the process whereby Britain's position changed from an ally of France against Germany to that of a mediator between them.

After the collapse of his premiership in 1922, Lloyd George's pro-German outlook became more pronounced. During the deliberations over the future of Upper Silesia he wanted to construct a strong Germany rather than an enlarged Poland. This, he hoped, would help Germany pay reparations. During the remainder of the 1920s he advocated arbitration treaties so that Germany's territorial demands could be met. He believed that Germany could be satisfied and that any agreements would be honoured. Giving Germany the benefit of the doubt while a democratic structure existed was perhaps understandable, but the rise of Hitler's Nazis 'did not make Lloyd George more cautious' (p. 207). Although the appeasement of Germany began to threaten Britain's interests, not least the balance of power that Lloyd George had sponsored, he did not modify his stance. When Hitler ordered the remilitarisation

of the Rhineland in March 1936 the Welshman opposed retributive action. Five months later the 73-year-old travelled to meet Hitler at Berchtesgaden. The two men got on 'like a house on fire'. The 'spellbound' Lloyd George returned to London believing the Fuhrer was 'the greatest living German' and dismissing suggestions that Hitler planned large-scale conquests (pp. 224–27).

The Spanish Civil War (1936–39) marked a defining moment in Lloyd George's outlook. The shift in the Welshman's thinking related to France. After over a decade of suspicion, he now applauded the French for assisting the Spanish government. Nonetheless, he did not oppose Germany's annexation of Austria in March 1938, and his response to the Munich Agreement was ambivalent. His newfound faith in France, however, allowed him to advocate an Anglo-French-Soviet alliance to resist acts of aggression. In April 1939 he criticised the British guarantee for Poland, claiming that it was useless without Soviet involvement. Nevertheless, Lloyd George still believed that a peaceful settlement with Germany was possible. After the outbreak of war he criticised Chamberlain's administration and was sceptical of the prospects of a British victory, favouring a negotiated peace. He was not alone in his pessimism, but one gasps when reading that he refused office in Churchill's reconstructed government preferring to 'wait until Winston is bust', so that he could arrange peace with Hitler (pp. 257–58).

Rudman's account is readable and generally well-reasoned. Her discussion of the Hitler years, 1933–45, is the most original part of the study but it draws upon an increasingly narrow source base and occupies seventy pages, only a quarter of the book. Lloyd George's important intervention in the 'Norway Debate' is afforded just one paragraph. Rudman also offers a number of debatable conclusions. Few allowances are made for Britain's policy during disarmament negotiations or in the Abyssinian crisis. In the latter instance it is not immediately obvious from Lloyd George's remarks or Rudman's coverage what alternative course – short of provoking an unpopular and

risky war with Italy – would have stopped Mussolini or prevented a strengthening of the German-Italian axis.

Sympathy is also expressed for Lloyd George's 'Grand Alliance'. Rudman claims that this was 'more realistic' than Neville Chamberlain's approach. R. A. C. Parker's conclusion, that an anti-Nazi system embracing the Soviet Union should have been forged, is reaffirmed (p. 241). Yet, this is a complex issue. Stalin harboured suspicions of capitalist Britain and France, the Soviet Union had recently purged its General Staff and its military limitations outside its own frontiers were readily exposed during the Russo-Finnish Winter War of 1939–40. After the Prague coup, it was a simple geographic fact that a 'Grand Alliance' to restrict German expansionism depended upon Polish concurrence, and the Poles would not accept Soviet aid. Rudman uses Lloyd George's advocacy to suggest that there was a better alternative to Chamberlain's policy. On balance, the evidence suggests that there probably wasn't.

The study provides a mass of evidence which shows that Lloyd George 'had a blind spot where Germany, and especially Hitler, were concerned' (p. 261). In September 1939, after the partition of Poland, Lloyd George still thought the Fuhrer had 'limited ambitions and was a man of his word' and, even in 1940, he 'still believed that Hitler could be appeased' (pp. 252, 255). It is, therefore, surprising that Rudman sustains the argument of Anthony Lentin, her PhD supervisor, that if Hitler had offered peace terms Lloyd George could have made a lasting peace with the Fuhrer. If negotiations began, Rudman holds that Lloyd George 'might well have been the best man for the job' (p. 263). The evidence in this study, however, implies that the deluded 77-year-old negotiating with Hitler would have been a frightening prospect. The terms of such an agreement would surely have been intolerable and Lloyd George's previous experience of negotiating a peace treaty had not been a resounding success. At this stage Lloyd George was living in a fantasy world. It is a pity that Rudman does not say so.



REVIEWS

Although the ex-Prime Minister's influence is difficult to assess, this study shows that Lloyd George's support for Hitler's disregard for existing agreements did nothing to halt the Fuhrer's progress or reduce the likelihood of war. Lloyd George was an appeaser, not because he was compelled by Britain's dwindling resources combined with the multitude of threats facing the British Empire, but through a misplaced faith in German intentions, whoever held power in Berlin. While some of

Rudman's conclusions may be challenged, her thought-provoking study identifies more motives for appeasement and is a welcome addition to the historiography.

Dr Chris Cooper was recently awarded his PhD at the University of Liverpool. His doctoral thesis analysed the political career of Douglas Hogg, 1st Viscount Hailsham (1872–1950). He has published a number of journal articles on different aspects of modern British history and he teaches history at university.

Lloyd George and Leadership

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- 28 Keith Middlemas (ed.), *Thomas Jones: Whitehall Diary*, Vol. III (Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 60 (27 April 1921).
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- 30 David Lloyd George, *The Truth about the Peace Treaties* (Gollancz, 1938), Vol. 1, p. 232.
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- 35 *The Times*, 31 Oct. 1923.
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Lloyd George's Coalition Proposal of 1910

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David Lloyd George, Nonconformity and Radicalism

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