

REVIEWS

Hattersley on Lloyd George

Roy Hattersley, *The Great Outsider: David Lloyd George*

(Little, Brown, 2010)

Reviewed by **Ian Packer**

BIOGRAPHIES OF LLOYD George all face the same difficulty: there is simply too much information. This is partly because Lloyd George left behind an enormous mound of papers (now mainly held at the Parliamentary Archives and the National Library of Wales). But it is also because his career stretched from the late-Victorian era through to the Second World War, with Lloyd George playing a central political role in British politics at least from the Boer War to the Great Depression.

Recent writers on Lloyd George have tended to tackle this issue in one of three ways: either they have written short books that concentrate on particular themes in Lloyd George's career, for instance Martin Pugh's biography of 1988, and Chris Wrigley's of 1992; or they have chronicled Lloyd George's private life, as in John Campbell's *If Love Were All* (2006) and Ffion Hague's *The Pain and the Privilege* (2008); or they have embarked on multi-volume studies, like those of John Grigg (1973–2002) or Bentley Gilbert (1987–92). Roy Hattersley is the first biographer, since the 872 pages of Peter Rowlands's *Lloyd George* (1975) stretched the book-binder's art to its limits, who has attempted to pack a comprehensive study of the 'Welsh Wizard' into one volume. Moreover, like Rowlands, Hattersley has aimed to write a book that will have a wide appeal, rather than just interest scholars. The scale of this task is truly intimidating.

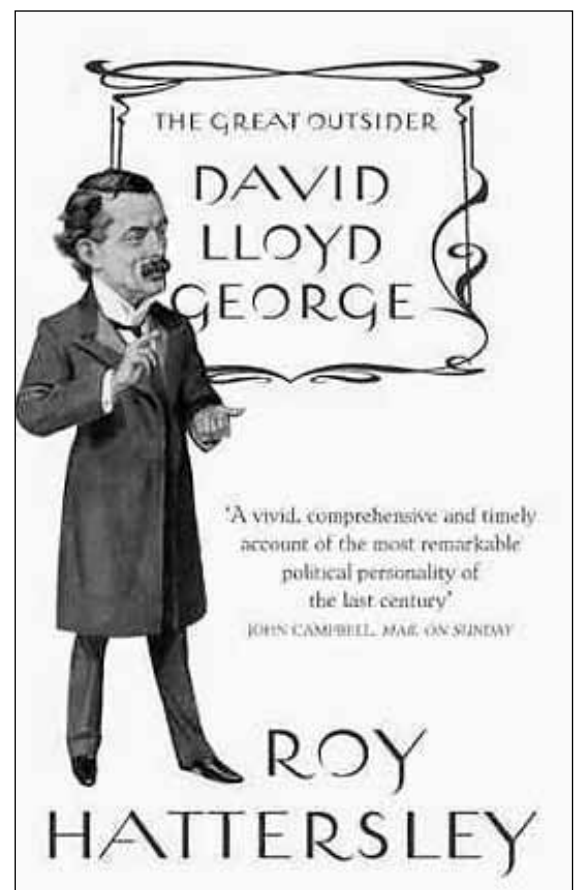
Hattersley's approach also presents further difficulties. Lloyd George's early life has been written about at length, as in his nephew, W. R. P. George's, *The Making of Lloyd George* (1976) and *Lloyd George: Backbencher* (1983); and after Lloyd George became a central figure in British life, how can a biography of him avoid just being a narrative of

well-known political events? How can it say anything new? Just looking at politics from a Lloyd Georgian perspective will not solve this problem, as there have already been over twenty biographies of the Welshman. One way is to delve for new information in the archives. But, while Hattersley has done some quarrying in the mountain of Lloyd George papers, it is difficult to spot anything that he has found to add to previous works. This absence is probably due to lack of time as much as anything else. Hattersley has a prodigious work-rate, but even by his standards he left himself little time for his book on Lloyd George. After finishing *Borrowed Time*, his history of the inter-war years, in 2007, he published another book while working on *The Great Outsider – In Search of England* (2009) – before announcing in 2010, even before his book on Lloyd George was published, that he had embarked on his next big project – a history of the Dukes of Devonshire, which will appear in 2013.

The alternative way of saying something new about Lloyd George is to furnish a different interpretation of his life, and the 'Acknowledgements' hold out a tantalising prospect in this direction. Hattersley states that 'It was Roy Jenkins who, many years ago, suggested that I write a biography of David Lloyd George – a politician he disliked so heartily that he could not contemplate writing the book himself' (p. ix). In some ways this was not a surprising suggestion. The urbane Jenkins may seem to have had little in common with Hattersley, who has always burnished his image as a bluff Yorkshireman. But they actually share a great deal: both were the only children of leading figures in local Labour movements (Arthur Jenkins, MP for Pontypool, and Enid

Hattersley, Mayor of Sheffield, respectively); after grammar school and university educations, both became right-wing Labour MPs for Birmingham constituencies; and both were disappointed in their highest hopes for political office, while pursuing respected careers as writers on politics and history. The crucial political distinction between the two men is that Jenkins became a founder of the Social Democratic Party in 1981, while Hattersley remained with Labour.

But there is a further layer of interest to Jenkins's suggestion that Hattersley should work on Lloyd George. Jenkins wrote a very fine, and admiring, biography, *Asquith* (1964), which remains the best study of Lloyd George's great Liberal rival. It is a book shot through with insight, which at least partly derives from Jenkins's identification with his subject and his worldview. It might almost be seen as an indication of Jenkins's future political direction. In taking up Jenkins's suggestion to write Lloyd George's life, Hattersley had the opportunity to write a response to Jenkins's *Asquith*, which would not only illuminate Lloyd George's point of view, but would also offer



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,