

REVIEWS

measures to deal with them other than improving education.

For me the most interesting article was Emma Sanderson-Nash's, which considers whether *The Orange Book* should be seen as an element in a strategic shift towards greater professionalism and centralisation in the party. She does a good job of tracing the story of organisational change within the Liberal Democrats since its formation in 1988, but whether a move to the right is an inevitable concomitant of increasing professionalisation – as she implies – is not discussed, and neither is the argument that any shift to the right in Liberal Democrat economic policy after 2007 was primarily a response to changing circumstances post-credit crunch rather than a wholesale revision of ideology. One interesting point highlighted by the article is the change in the composition of the parliamentary party, with a higher proportion of Lib Dem MPs now deriving from business backgrounds than in either of the other two main parties.

One would not expect short articles of this kind and in this journal to be self-critical, and mostly they aren't. Deregulation is the unquestioned – and only – solution

to problems of growth and prosperity; Papworth attacks the fact that the British state now accounts for 50 per cent of GDP while entirely ignoring the fact that this is largely the result of the implosion of a banking system that was not over-but under-regulated. (And actually, it doesn't account for 50 per cent – it's now about 43 per cent, the same as it has been, on average, for the last fifty years, though it was slightly higher when his article was written.) Problems of market failure, rather than government failure, are simply ignored, as is the impossibility of meeting rapidly more serious environmental constraints through deregulation, as are the social (and economic) consequences of growing inequalities of income and wealth – with

the exception of David Laws, who does at least recognise this last as a challenge.

Despite all this, the articles are worth reading as a contribution to the debate around the future direction of the party and the historical antecedents of the economic-liberal case. And despite its failings and limitations, *The Orange Book* did at least, as several of these authors point out, spark off a lively ideological debate within the party – which is unquestionably a healthy development.

Duncan Brack is the Editor of the Journal of Liberal History. In 2007 he co-edited, with Richard Grayson and David Howarth, Reinventing the State: Social Liberalism for the 21st Century, a riposte to The Orange Book.

2010 analysed

Robert Worcester and Roger Mortimore, *Explaining Cameron's Coalition* (Biteback Publishing, 2011)

Reviewed by **Mark Pack**

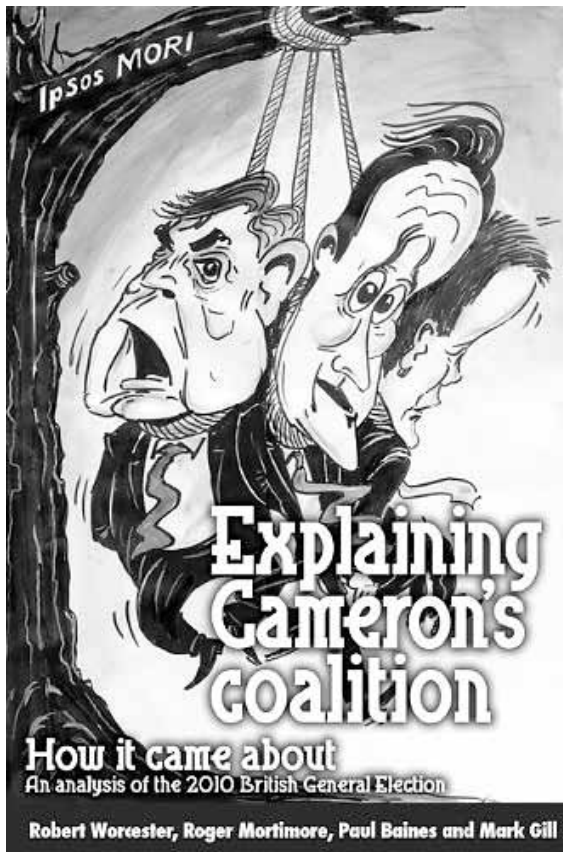
EXPLAINING CAMERON'S COALITION is the latest in the series of general election analyses by MORI's Robert Worcester and Roger Mortimore, this time joined by two other authors. The book is therefore very much the tale of the 2005–2010 parliament and subsequent general election seen through the eyes of MORI's opinion polling, with an often pungent analysis which allows Robert Worcester to point out happily where he got predictions right and others got them wrong.

Though there is a smattering of references to polling results from other firms, the great strength of the MORI data is that many of the questions have been asked regularly for decades, allowing the story of 2005–10 to be put into a consistent historical context, and polling results judged against previous ones that led up to victory or defeat. It also means that (as with Deborah Mattinson's excellent book, *Talking to a Brick Wall*, based on focus groups rather than polls) it is an account of politics in which the views of the public dominate rather

than the machinations and words of politicians, who usually take centre stage in post-election accounts.

The book is bulging with facts that make it hard to summarise them beyond 'go read the book', though a few do particularly stand out. The authors conclude that 'the nature of electoral support in Britain has changed, probably permanently ... the culmination of years of steady change ... British voters are ... less tribal ... and less polarised'. Yet geographic division, especially the decline of the Conservative Party in Scotland, has hardened even as other divisions have softened.

Somewhat paradoxically, the authors also very successfully model vote share in individual seats based on seventeen different characteristics drawn from the 2001 census. Factors such as the number of two- or more-car households are very influential in explaining the Conservative vote share, whilst factors such as the proportion of single-parent families do the same for Labour. Some factors do seem to divide, even if the old patterns no longer have the same power.



In addition:

... the old habit, whereby a predominant belief among voters that the economy was moving in the right direction was enough to ensure a government's re-election, no longer holds. So, despite having convinced an extraordinarily high proportion of the public that the economy was on the upturn ... Gordon Brown could not muster the votes he needed.

The authors also point out that Gordon Brown's ratings as Prime Minister, whilst very low, followed a simple extrapolation of Tony Blair's declining figures through his time as Prime Minister. The problem wasn't that Brown worsened the long-term trend; it was more that the decline had set in from the moment Blair became Prime Minister. At the same time, Blair was lucky enough to fight elections against unpopular Conservative leaders, while Brown was up against David Cameron, far more popular than his three predecessors. Indeed, the book points out that on their overall bundle of measures of leader image, Gordon Brown was in a slightly better position in May 2010 than Tony Blair had been, even pre-Iraq War in April 2001. But William Hague was no David Cameron.

At times the authors skirt with over-playing the determinism of Labour's long-time decline in popularity during its term in office. After all, John Major – a Chancellor succeeding a three-times

winning Prime Minister too – did pull off a slim victory against the odds. However, the authors also point out that the final result in 2010 was by such a fine margin (not many extra Labour seats would have transformed the possibilities of a non-Conservative coalition) that small events might have tipped the final outcome one way or the other. As it was, Labour went down to defeat with, as the book points out, 'more middle-class voters than working-class voters', for the first time in its history.

The book includes a useful introduction to how polls are conducted and how they are often misreported, with the warning to:

... think of polls as being like a barometer – barometers don't predict the weather; they measure something that is helpful to know if you want to predict the weather. But for that purpose, rather than relying purely on voting intentions the many other measurements that the polls regularly provide may be far more useful in developing an impression of what the future may bring.

Wise words from a good book that ends with a very welcome appendix – a survey of political cartoons during the 2010 election, an often overlooked form of commentary.

Dr Mark Pack is co-author of 101 Ways To Win An Election and ran the Liberal Democrats' online campaign for the 2001 and 2005 general elections

Liberal Sutton

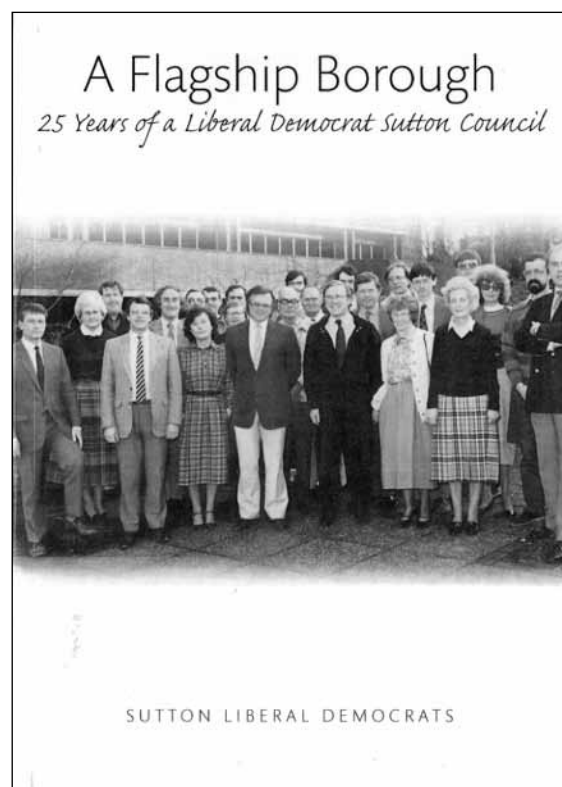
A Flagship Borough: 25 years of a Liberal Democrat Sutton Council (Sutton Liberal Democrats, 2012)

Review by **Mark Pack**

LOOK ROUND THE ROOM at the next Liberal Democrat event you attend and ask yourself how many people will have their names recorded in places that future political historians can find. A few, certainly, especially if they have been elected to public office. For most, however, their

contribution to a political party slips away through the cracks of the historical record, disappearing as the direct personal memories people have of them fade and then end with death.

Yet many of those whose fate is to dissipate into nothingness are crucial to a party's success, playing



roles as important – or even more important – than the few who have some fragments of information about them preserved. That is what makes the recently published history of Sutton Liberal Democrats – *A Flagship Borough: 25 Years of a Liberal Democrat Sutton Council* – so very welcome. Here, in this 317-page book, are remembered and preserved the names and deeds of numerous vital volunteers from over the decades.

Many people have contributed to the awesome electoral and political record of success that is Sutton Liberal Democrats: winning election after election, and being at the cutting edge of both green policies and local campaign tactics. Thanks to the book, many of them are now rightly honoured in print. Recorded too are the sorts of stories that entertain many a political reminiscence, such as the vomiting doll dressed as a superhero which a Conservative councillor brought to one meeting (see page 77 to find the full story!).

The book takes a fairly conventional narrative approach from the 1970s through to the current day, emphasising recording events over analysis. That makes it a comprehensive work, if at times a little bit of a dry read as one issue after another is briskly recounted. It also means that by the end of it the