

may be an element of confirmation bias in some of the data presentation and interpretation. This tendency is most evident in Evans' framing of the issue of female representation almost exclusively through the prism of All-Women Shortlists (AWS). Data that does not fit with her worldview that Liberal Democrats have a demand-side problem is heavily caveated: 'Liberal Democrats selected the largest percentage of women in their vacant (2010) seats; however it is important to note that this is on much smaller numbers, and following the election, the party has the lowest percentage of women MPs' (p. 9). In the last electoral cycle, without AWS, Liberal Democrats selected women in 37 per cent of the party's most winnable seats and four out of seven retiring incumbent seats. The fact that these women were not elected in the constituencies where they stood can hardly be attributed to a demand-side problem within the Liberal Democrats.

A more nuanced approach to the intersection between feminism and liberalism might have explored why women in winnable seats did not get elected and considered what mechanisms other than AWS Liberal Democrats could use to attract, retain and elect more women candidates. It might also have made more

of areas of success (until recently the European Parliament, where for several years there were more female than male Liberal Democrat MEPs) as well as exploring why successive party leaders have failed to use a mechanism wholly within their gift to appoint more women to the House of Lords.

Despite some shortcomings, Elizabeth Evans' book is to be strongly welcomed as the first serious scholarly analysis of female under-representation in the Liberal Democrats. For long-standing party activists it paints in forensic detail an all too familiar picture of intra-generational tensions, presentism, grinding low-level discrimination and egalitarian rhetoric unmatched by tangible outcomes. I hope Dr Evans will revisit the issue after the next election and find that the party's culture has improved. Meanwhile, implementing Helena Morrissey's recommendations would be a good start.

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of Liberal Democrat leadership to define himself as 'centre-left', established so little rapport with those in the party who defined themselves in the same way.

He was, as Torrance's account reminds us, politically ruthless, and that was not necessarily a fault when used to secure real political advances. But detachment was a fatal flaw when, for example, it came to negotiating the merger with the SDP. The SDP leadership went into the negotiations determined to promote an SDP position; David Steel failed to back his own team when they presented a Liberal case. That was how the problems arose with the famous 'dead parrot' policy document. The book quotes a suggestion that I was trying to set a trap for Steel. In fact I had assumed that we would, with difficulty, eventually arrive at an acceptable compromise by negotiation, but that if his own side told him it was not achievable he would back us. I should have realised that concluding the negotiations mattered much more to him than the content of a document that he had probably barely read. Incidentally, even if there was no other reason for buying this book – although there are several – it is worth it for another sight of the priceless photo

## It's Boy David

David Torrance, *David Steel: Rising Hope to Elder Statesman* (Biteback Publishing, 2012)

Review by Alan Beith

**T**HERE IS NOT a lot of scope for adding to the picture most Liberal Democrats have of David Steel, despite David Torrance's diligent examination of correspondence and papers, his interviews with politicians and his ability to put together a clear and thorough narrative. Indeed, the uncomplicated clarity of David Steel's personality makes new insights difficult to find. His political progression from Borders by-election star to presiding officer of the Scottish Parliament is detailed in the book, and it underlines the political courage of

his early campaigns on apartheid, on immigration and on abortion law reform, as well as the extent to which his considerable political skills benefitted the Liberal Party and the Liberal Democrats. His shortcomings are equally well known to readers of political biography: his impatience with policy and detail, his failure to turn his Liberal instincts into a more thoroughly Liberal analysis of political issues, and his detachment from the grassroots workers of the party he led. It was ironic that someone who was much more ready than the current generation

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which followed these negotiations, with several of us lined up behind Steel and MacLennan while they explained that the document would be ditched. As Paddy Ashdown put it – and the line up was his barmy idea – we looked like hostages about to be tortured. The facial expressions of Paddy, Malcolm Bruce, Alex Carlile, Charles Kennedy and Russell Johnston are the funniest thing since Monty Python.

A few things need correcting or qualifying for the record. The Ettrick Bridge meeting during the 1983 general election did indeed fail to secure agreement to drop the pretentious 'Prime Minister designate' status which had proved a liability in Roy Jenkin's uncharacteristically lacklustre election campaign; but the ensuing press coverage gave every impression that Steel had in practice taken over the role of campaign leader. Torrance claims that under Paddy Ashdown's leadership Steel was 'regularly deployed as an intermediary to prevent potential rows between Ashdown and his MPs': I have no such recollection. Steel was much more preoccupied with international politics and his plans for life after the Commons, including promoting the Scottish Parliament.

There is an interesting sidelight on Steel and the House of Lords. There was a proposal that peers

should be disqualified from sitting in the Scottish Parliament; Steel wrote opposing this restriction, seeing merit in an overlap 'pending reform of the Lords'. He has subsequently done his best to make sure that democratic Lords reform remains permanently in the pending tray, where it has been since 1911. Torrance describes his support for an appointed House as 'cautious' and 'realistic'. Others see it as wholly inconsistent not only with the platform on which he led the party but also with the reforming zeal on which his key earlier achievements were based.

David Steel helped to ensure Liberal survival in some very difficult times, and challenged the party to remember that its purpose is to achieve change, not merely to debate change. This book recounts the steps on the way, admits the flaws and the failings (including his problems with the cost of the Scottish Parliament building) and demonstrates that its subject is a good and able man, an extremely skilled communicator and a shrewd tactician who has given much to the party.

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individual human character and of social development. Ethology, the science of human character, was, says Rosen, at the centre of Mill's attempt 'to become a self-directing agent rather than a brute merely responding to internal or external stimuli' (p. 3). If this was the centre of Mill's intellectual concerns, it was because it also lay at the core of his personal ones. The internal brute instincts that Mill thought should be kept down were one's sexual urges. Self-direction required control of them as much as resistance to control by others. Mill's battle here was firstly against his father, who raised him to be the next generation's flag bearer for the Utilitarian creed; and then against Thomas Carlyle and Auguste Comte, both of whom sought to co-opt Mill to their respective campaigns. Mill managed to fight free against three opinionated and dominating men; against one attractive woman he did not. After one difference of opinion with his wife, he declared: 'As your feeling is directly contrary, mine is wrong and I give it up entirely'.<sup>1</sup>

The basic point of Mill's ethology was that the individual could be improved and so society itself could advance. This led him to discuss the laws by which society

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## Reassessing John Stuart Mill

Frederick Rosen, *Mill* (Oxford University Press, 2013)

Review by **Michael Levin**

JOHN STUART MILL'S *Collected Works* comprise thirty-three volumes, many of which are around 500 pages long. It is a massive collection. However three writings in particular are best known to students of Mill. Foremost is *On Liberty*, 1859, with its influential argument for freedom of speech. The other two writings appeared in 1861: *Utilitarianism*, Mill's attempt to modify the creed that he had been brought up with; and *Considerations on Representative Government*, with its advocacy of

proportional representation. Frederick Rosen's argument is that these famous works 'do not fit neatly together' (p. 1) and in any case misrepresent much of what Mill was really about. He suggests that putting matters right requires attention to two earlier works through which Mill originally attained fame: his *System of Logic* of 1843 and *Principles of Political Economy* of 1848.

Rosen believes that Mill was more concerned to be a scientist than a moralist. In the *Logic* Mill attempted a science of both

