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- 1 Robert Harris, *Sunday Times*, 3 June 1990, Review Section, p. 8.
- 2 Dennis Outwin, *The SDP Story* (Hartwood, 1987), pp. 77–78.
- 3 Stephen Ingle, 'Liberals and Social Democrats: End of a Chapter or End of a Book?', *Talking Politics* Vol 1 No 2, Politics Assn 1988, pp. 47–51.
- 4 David Owen, *Time to Declare* (Penguin, 1992), p. 765.
- 5 Ivor Crewe and Anthony King, *SDP: The Birth, Life and Death of the Social Democratic Party* (Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 450–51.
- 6 David Owen, *Sticking with It* (Campaign for Social Democracy, 1987), p. 1.
- 7 David Owen, Letter to SDP members, May 1989.
- 8 See for example the article by Alton and John Cartwright, 'Unite, and Victory is Ours', in *The Times*, 25 February 1989, and the letter in the previous day's *Independent* from nine leading Liberal Democrats, headed by Shirley Williams and David Marquand, stressing the damage done by Owen, and the need for his supporters to join the Liberal Democrats outright rather than seek another alliance.
- 9 John Martin, Circular to CSD Representatives 20 March 1989, and earlier appeal.
- 10 Owen, *Time to Declare*, p. 745
- 11 See Andrew Grice, 'David Owen's failed SDP to be wound up today', *Sunday Times*, 3 June 1990.
- 12 For an early example, see Victor Smart, *Observer*, 25 February 1990.
- 13 David Denver, 'The Centre', in Anthony King et al., *Britain at the Polls 1992*, p. 116.

- 14 See David Marquand, *The Progressive Dilemma* (Heinemann, 1991).
- 15 Cited in Ingle, 'Liberals and Social Democrats: End of a Chapter or End of a Book?'.
- 16 David Denver and Hugh Bochel, 'Merger or Bust: whatever happened to members of the SDP?', PSA Elections, Public Opinion and Parties conference paper, September 1993.
- 17 See Grice, 'David Owen's failed SDP to be wound up today'.
- 18 Harris, op cit.
- 19 For confirmation of these and other poll figures below, see David

- Denver, Ivor Crewe, Pippa Norris, et al (eds), *British Elections and Parties Yearbook* (Frank Cass, 1991, 1992 and 1993).
- 20 Paddy Ashdown, *The Ashdown Diaries, Volume One 1988–97* (Allen Lane, 2000), p. 88.
- 21 Jo-anne Nadler, *William Hague: In his Own Right* (Politico's, 2000), p. 134.
- 22 Owen, *Time to Declare*, p. 765.
- 23 Owen, 'The Legacy of the SDP' in Brian Brivati and Richard Hefernan, *The Labour Party: a Centenary History* (Macmillan, 2000), p.166.

LETTERS

The Risorgimento and the Liberal Party

Piers Hugill's review of Beales and Biagini's *The Risorgimento and the Unification of Italy* (*Journal of Liberal History* 42, spring 2004), misses the opportunity to comment on the significance of Italian politics in the formation of the British Liberal Party.

Between 1846 and 1859, British political parties were in flux. In 1852, a coalition of Whigs and Peelites formed a government under Lord Aberdeen with the support of various independent and radical liberals but that government fell apart under the stresses of the Crimean War. From 1855 to 1859, infighting between these liberal factions prevented Lord Palmerston from forming a stable government and left room for Lord Derby to re-establish credibility for a Tory party that had remained in a minority throughout the period.

As the critical events in the Risorgimento unfolded in the late spring of 1859 they coincided with a British general election and wrong-footed the Conservatives who had played on fears of the imperial ambitions of Louis Napoleon of France in his alliance with the Sardinians

against Austria. When Austria took on the role of aggressor, Liberal sympathies for those Italians struggling to be a nation and to be free could be given voice.

The election did not give the Conservatives a majority but left Derby in government. Would the opposition be able to mount a challenge? The famous meeting in Willis's Rooms was held to test the willingness of the various factions to work together. In his scene-setting speech to the meeting, as reported in *The Times* on 7 June, Palmerston mentioned only two policy issues, franchise reform and Italy:

In adverting to the war in Italy, his Lordship dwelt on the signal failure which the Government had met with in their endeavours to maintain peace between the contending parties and contended that a Cabinet, which had manifestly lost all weight in the Councils of Europe upon so momentous a question as that of peace and war, was not fit to be any longer intrusted with the conduct of our foreign relations.

As is well known, the meeting decided to table a motion of want of confidence in Derby's government and Palmerston formed an administration which

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lasted until his death in 1865. William Gladstone had not attended the Willis's Rooms meeting, and had voted against the no-confidence motion; his dislike of Palmerstonian policies was pronounced. Yet he was offered and accepted the post of Chancellor of the Exchequer. Explaining this in a letter to Sir John Acton in 1864, Gladstone talked of the work to be done in finance and settling the franchise question but ended: 'And the overwhelming interest and weight of the Italian question, and of our foreign policy in connection with it, joined to my entire mistrust of the former government in relation to it, led me to decide without one moment's hesitation ...' (J. Morley, *Life Of Gladstone*, Vol 1 p. 628). The Liberal Party had been formed and had secured its future leadership on the Italian quest for nationhood.

Tony Little

Bringing about a beneficial change in the law

In spite of enjoying (more or less) an excellent education, my achievements have been modest indeed. Yet one of my activities brought about a change in the law of this country which has been of benefit to electors – enabling election candidates to have their political affiliation shown on the ballot paper, thereby letting the electors know which party the candidate for whom they are voting will support. The way this came about is of interest.

In 1967 London electors had the opportunity to elect a new council. The Greater London Council (GLC) had been set up under the London Government Act 1963. The first councillors had taken office in 1964. Now the seats were up for grabs.

At that time I was secretary of the South Battersea Liberal Association. The Association was reluctant to field a candidate in this election: they considered the ballot paper to be too confusing

for many electors, since it listed the names of all the candidates standing in the borough. When the legislation had passed through Parliament, an assurance had been given that before a second election for the GLC, boroughs would be divided into constituencies, or smaller areas, so that electors would not be faced with a long list of names – but this had not been implemented.

Despite the reservations of the Association, the London Liberal Party urged it to put forward a candidate who would be known in the constituency. Reluctantly, the Association agreed and invited me to stand. I had previously refused to stand as a candidate in the borough council elections because my law firm at times acted for the council and so, if elected, there might have been a conflict of interest. As my firm did not act for the GLC, I agreed to stand.

Our expectation that electors would be confused was justified. One local paper wrote before the election, saying: 'the electors will be faced with a bewildering ballot paper about eighteen inches long and containing the names of twenty-one candidates'. The only information the ballot paper gave to the electors was the name, address and occupation of each candidate.

One of the Labour candidates was Mr Norman Pritchard (subsequently knighted). He was a respected member of the retiring GLC and a former Chairman of the London County Council. His name was spelled without a 't' and therefore appeared immediately above my name on the ballot paper. His name was numbered twelve; mine was thirteen. The result of the voting was a landslide victory for the Tories. In Wandsworth there was a turn out of about 40 per cent of the electorate.

Norman Pritchard polled 31,672 votes, 4,612 lower than the lowest of the other Labour candidates. I polled 11,319 votes, 6,261 more than the highest of the other Liberal candidates.

Clearly confusion had played a part. Probably more Labour voters than Liberal voters voted wrongly because more Labour voters than Liberals turned out to vote.

I believe, however, that some Labour supporters voted for me deliberately. I was reasonably well known in the constituency, and I had been told by some people that they would be voting for me, although their three other votes would go to Labour. When considering which of the four Labour candidates they would not vote for they had thought that the easiest thing would be to leave out Pritchard and vote for Pritchard.

I was surprised that so many Labour voters should have voted for me by mistake simply because the ballot paper contained two similar, but not identical, names. If a person does not know which name to choose, why choose the name that is second on the list rather than the one which is first, and why choose the name numbered thirteen rather than the name numbered twelve? Furthermore, why vote for the candidate whose occupation is given as solicitor, when it is generally believed that most solicitors are Conservative?

After the election there was correspondence in *The Times* suggesting that it was clearly desirable for ballot papers to show the political affiliation of each candidate. I wrote supporting this but my letter was not published. As a result of this confusion, a Labour MP introduced a Private Member's Bill to authorise the showing of a candidate's political affiliation on ballot papers. The Bill received all-party support, and I believe that government assistance was given to it. It passed into law that year and I think it has been re-enacted in subsequent electoral legislation. So it was that my small political activity brought about a change in the law of this country which I believe has been of benefit to electors.

C. H. Pritchard