She points out that had there been a subtle difference in the way in which abstentions were counted, Benn would indeed have won the contest for Labour's deputy leader.

As to be expected in a collection of twenty-one alternative histories, there are varying degrees of plausibility. Anne Perkin's account of Gaitskell rather than Bevan dying in 1960 results in a remarkably harmonious outcome for the Labour Party overall, which, given the many vituperative personalities of the time, is a little difficult to believe. Probably the most disappointing chapter is Bernard Ingham's on Westland, which is more a justification of himself and of Mrs Thatcher than a counterfactual. An entertaining read, but not really the right chapter for this book.

Several other chapters highlight one of the conundrums of 1980s British politics. In many different ways Labour might have done better in the short term (e.g. if Scargill had called and won a strike ballot amongst the NUM) or have done worse (e.g. if the Alliance had squeaked past it in terms of vote share in 1983). But doing worse in the short run was arguably better for Labour in the long run, by providing the necessary shock behind Kinnock's modernisation programme. The counter-factuals that have Labour doing better in the short run largely also paint a worse longer-term picture for the party.

This fundamental pessimism about Labour in the 1980s contrasts with the optimism about British politics in the counterfactuals of the 1960s and 1970s, where the twists usually results in events turning out for the better rather than for the worse, from the perspective of the chapter's author. For this period, the counterfactuals are extremely positive – imagining that a few changes in events could have heralded a happy moderate government without serious economic crises. That several different authors – with the exception of Greg Rosen – believe their own twists could wipe away the long-term economic problems facing the country, and in particular the poisonous hostility of much of industrial relations, is as striking as it is surprising.

The collection tries to steer a careful course between academic respectability, with the serious list of contributors and defensive introduction, and playful marketability, illustrated by the quote from Chairman Mao on the cover.

The collection tries to steer a careful course between academic respectability, with the serious list of contributors and defensive introduction, and playful marketability, illustrated by the quote from Chairman Mao on the cover (when asked what would have happened if Khrushchev rather than Kennedy had been assassinated, he said: 'Well, I'll tell you one thing, Aristotle Onassis wouldn't have married Mrs Khrushchev').

Some of the contributors occasionally fall prey to this lure of tweeness, as with John Charmley's reworking of the succession to Chamberlain. His account of Halifax as Prime Minister takes some of Churchill's most famous quotes and puts them in the mouths of others with their opposite meaning in a rather groan-inducing sequence of too-clever plays on words.

But it is an all the more enjoyable read for that.

Mark Pack works in the Liberal Democrats' Campaigns & Elections Department, mainly on IT and legal matters. He has a doctorate in nineteenth-century Yorkshire elections from the University of York.

1 To complete the set, one of the contributors is the chair of the Labour History Group.
2 Though the insiders are just occasionally not as knowledgeable as perhaps they should be – as with Iain Dale's implausible account of Michael Portillo not knowing his election result until the public announcement from the Returning Officer. In reality, candidates and agents are told the figures before being put on public parade for the formal announcement.

The paperback edition of *Prime Minister Portillo* will be available from late September 2004.

LETTERS

Sir Clement Freud

As someone who was considerably involved in Sir Clement Freud's successful by-election campaign, I would like to comment on Daniel Crewe's observation that 'although he was knighted in 1987, Freud did not get a peerage' ('One of nature's Liberals', biography of Freud, *Journal of Liberal History* 43).

I regard this as a shameful blot on the party's record. Cle well deserved a peerage, having held his seat for eighteen years and having displayed conspicuous loyalty to the leaders of the party. He would have been an asset to the party and to the House if he had joined us.

As I understand it, Cle was top of the list to be nominated for a peerage when Stephen Ross, MP for the Isle of Wight until 1987, lobbied to be given priority and was given it by the powers that be. Subsequently he slipped off the list completely as others were given more priority.

It might be suggested that Cle was a little lightweight in national policy matters, but he was considerably less lightweight, and a great deal more reliable, than Stephen who, I remember when I was Director of Policy Promotion, for his infuriating indecisiveness and futile attacks of conscience. Cle has also lived considerably longer!

Lord Beaumont of Whitley