

A SQUIRE IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS

- court, 1827–1904*. Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004.
- 26 In Lord Salisbury's eulogy in the House of Lords, he noted Kimberley's 'singular impartiality in public affairs.' 'I do not say that he was absolutely impartial – under our system of government that is impossible ... but if he was not absolutely free from all bias, he came as near it as, I think, any man whom we have listened to and followed in this house.' 4 *Hansard*, 106 (15 April 1902):260.
- 27 *Liberal by Principle*, pp. 23–24. See particularly George Leveson Gower, *Years of Endeavour* (London: John Murray, 1942), pp. 133–34.
- 28 *Liberal by Principle*, pp. 184–85; *Journal of Wodehouse*, pp. 366–67, 499.
- 29 Gladstone to Wodehouse, 28 April 1860, KP eng.c.4003, f. 52; *Liberal by Principle*, p. 44, n. 213.
- 30 Having city banker Raikes Currie as political mentor undoubtedly contributed to Kimberley's financial acumen, and to his desire in 1852 for appointment as Vice President of the Board of Trade.
- 31 Arthur Godley was Gladstone's principal private secretary, 1880–82; Permanent Under-Secretary at the India Office, 1883–1909; *Liberal by Principle*, p. 273. On the Colonial Office see the account, probably by Robert George Herbert, permanent under-secretary at the Colonial Office, 1871–92, in *Free Lance*, 19 April 1902, Kimberley Papers, Bodleian Library c.4484, f. 143.
- 32 Wolseley to Fleetwood Wilson, 22 September 1902, Wolseley Papers, Perkins Library, Duke University, 18-H.
- 33 Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, *India Under Ripon: A Private Diary* (London: T.F. Unwin, 1909), p. 18.
- 34 *The Times*, 9 April 1902, p. 3.

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Whiggery and the Liberal Party, 1874–1886 and *The Liberal Ascendancy, 1830–1886*). Introducing the meeting, our Chair, William Wallace (Lord Wallace of Salt-aire, President of the History Group and joint deputy leader of the Liberal Democrat peers), remarked on just how unstable a coalition the late nineteenth century Liberal Party actually was and how this instability was manifest in the career of Joe Chamberlain and the fate of the Unauthorised Programme.

Picking up on William Wallace's reference to instability, Professor Marsh began by saying how much, in his opinion, the Unauthorised Programme of 1885, and radicalism in general, was an unstable and destabilising phenomenon. This he described as the 'radical dilemma'. The Unauthorised Programme was a clumsy presentation of prescient policy because radicalism is the most difficult position to maintain in British politics while holding high office. Until Joe Chamberlain radicals either avoided high office, like Cobden, or proved innocuous in it, like Bright. This may be surprising because Professor Marsh went on to say that he saw radicalism as an essentially Liberal position, in the British (and Canadian) sense as opposed to the Continental or American. Radicalism in this interpretation was situated historically on the left flank of the Liberal Party and was not a socialist position. It was Chamberlain who was really the first Liberal to embrace radicalism and seek to implement it from the government front bench, while holding high, and seeking higher, office. It was not, however, until the Liberal governments after 1906 and Attlee's Labour administration of 1945–51 that radicalism was espoused and implemented by a British government. Interestingly, Professor Marsh thought we had been getting a version of it again since 1997 and he highlighted what he believed was a dilemma for Liberal Democrats

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Joseph Chamberlain and the Unauthorised Programme

Evening meeting, July 2005, with Peter Marsh and Terry Jenkins

Report by **Graham Lippiatt**

The cover design of the paperback edition of Denis Judd's study of Joseph Chamberlain published in 1993¹ shows a picture-postcard cartoon of the top-hatted, monocled Chamberlain wearing a patchwork coat, each segment of which contains a description of some aspect of his political life: 'socialist', 'republican', 'extreme radical', 'Gladstonian', 'Liberal Unionist', 'ordinary Conservative' and more besides. At the bottom of the coat are some unclaimed patches marked 'vacant', waiting only for the next shift in Chamberlain's career for a new label to be sewn into the fabric of this coat of many political colours.²

The theme of the History Group's summer meeting was an exploration of one of the most famous of Chamberlain's political personae – the provocative social-reforming campaigner, which earned him the soubriquet 'Radical Joe' – and an assessment of its impact on the party.

Our distinguished speakers were Peter Marsh (Honorary Professor of History at Birmingham University; Emeritus Professor of History and Professor of International Relations at Syracuse University, New York and author of *Joseph Chamberlain, Entrepreneur in Politics*) and Dr Terry Jenkins, (Senior Research Officer at the History of Parliament Trust; author of *Gladstone,*

today in the party's attempts to gain power, drawing a parallel with the problems Chamberlain experienced in 1885, trying to outflank the government of Tony Blair which he likened to that led by Gladstone (notably in its Middle Eastern foreign policy).

According to Professor Marsh, the Unauthorised Programme of 1885 was based on a number of illusions and was executed clumsily, but it did anticipate the need to implement policies that were not introduced until twenty years later. Its first articulation came in 1883. The Liberals had been back in office for about two years but expected to remain in power indefinitely. They thought the Tory election victory in 1874 was merely a blip; normal political service had been resumed after the Liberals' 1880 election win. However, by 1883 there was disappointment at the performance of the Liberal government, particularly among radicals. This led to one of the illusions referred to by Marsh. Radicals looked forward to the next item on the agenda of Liberal government being franchise reform. Chamberlain expected the widened franchise of the 1884 Reform Bill to open a new, democratic, era in political history in which social legislation would dominate the agenda – but he was wrong. This did not happen until some time later, when the forces that gave rise to the New Liberalism emerged. At this time it was moral and religious issues that continued to retain their dominant appeal to the electorate. There was also a direct personal connection between the Unauthorised Programme and the New Liberalism in the person of Lloyd George, described by Professor Marsh as a 'Chamberlain groupie' in 1885, who broke with his hero reluctantly in 1886 but retained his faith in the radical principles of the Programme and later found himself superbly placed to implement them.

The Unauthorised Programme was first announced in a series of articles in 1883–84

in the publication *Fortnightly Review*. Although Chamberlain did not write most of the articles, they were clearly stimulated and guided by his thinking and everything that Chamberlain later said in his speeches of 1885, the speeches that came to constitute his Radical Programme, had appeared already in the *Fortnightly Review* scripts. Apart from some interest within Liberal circles, the articles created no great public or political stir. This remained the case even when they were grouped together and published with an introduction by Chamberlain.

The Programme began with education, as Chamberlain himself had done as a crusader for free, secular, universal, compulsory elementary education. This was to cause a problem for the largely Liberal-supporting nonconformists, as to make education free would inevitably mean public grants to Anglican schools, an issue which would remain anathema for them into the twentieth century. But the core of the radical programme was socioeconomic, advocating a more equitable distribution of wealth, a tax on landowners and the carving of smallholdings out of land on aristocratic estates to increase property ownership among the rural poor. It also advocated slum clearance and the provision of decent housing by aristocratic landlords. What was prescient, new and contentious about this was the emphasis on the role and responsibility of government to correct the most offensive aspects of the maldistribution of wealth.

It was Chamberlain's speeches in January 1885 that transformed this agenda from an interesting set of policy issues into a true political sensation. In his first speech in Birmingham when talking about social and economic insurance, Chamberlain used the word 'ransom'. This missed the intended target. It did not appeal to the newly enfranchised electors but it did awaken the fears of the middle classes

about their own economic security. By his next speech at Ipswich, Chamberlain was using the word 'insurance', not 'ransom', but the genie was out of the bottle. It was also clear after Ipswich that the Birmingham speech was not a one-off but part of a succession of pronouncements, developing a prior, considered programme. Chamberlain introduced at Ipswich the issue of the use of taxation as an instrument of social and economic redistribution, highlighting the unfairness in local taxation of charging the same rates on the housing of the poor as on those of the wealthy. He suggested a graduated income tax on those whose wealth exceeded their immediate needs, exciting middle-class alarm. The speeches were clumsy rhetorically but explosive in their intrinsic content. What Chamberlain was trying to do was to move the central ground of British politics away from moral and religious affairs to socioeconomic issues and to redefine the role of the state in bringing about social and economic justice from within a government in which he was a high officeholder.

A further example of Chamberlain's political clumsiness in 1885 was his handling of Gladstone and his breaking of the boundaries, as Gladstone understood them, of cabinet solidarity. Gladstone was angry about this but Chamberlain only lectured the prime minister about what he saw as the changed political landscape brought about by the 1884 Reform Act. This only exacerbated the rivalries between the two men that were developing not just on domestic policy but, crucially, over Ireland and foreign affairs too.

In summarising, Professor Marsh painted a portrait of Chamberlain, holding high cabinet office in a Liberal government, trying radically to advance the basic principles of its domestic policy. Intrinsically, that was a virtually impossible task – even if it had been done

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with a far greater finesse than Chamberlain managed. But the programme did foreshadow the great Liberal socioeconomic reforms of the 1908 Asquith government, and the man who was the direct political descendant of Chamberlain and inheritor of the Unauthorised Programme was David Lloyd George.

Our second speaker, Dr Terry Jenkins, then turned the attention of the meeting to the impact of Chamberlain's programme on the Liberal Party itself, and in particular the role of the Whigs. For much of the Victorian era, the Liberals were the dominant force in British politics, remarkably successful in embodying the social and cultural aspects of the age. The party stood for political and religious liberty, free trade, small government, low taxation and individual self-improvement. It represented the new, dynamic forces in British society, which had been created by the processes of urbanisation and industrialisation. Crucially, however, it also combined the representation of the new urban, industrial Britain with traditional political forces, exemplified by the survival of the Whig aristocratic leadership within the Liberal Party. The Whigs continued to provide an administrative elite forming the backbone of most Liberal governments. For example, even in 1880, when Gladstone formed his second administration, there were thirteen cabinet ministers of whom six were peers and four others had aristocratic or landed connections – one being Lord Hartington, heir of the Duke of Devonshire. At the same time, an examination of the make-up of the Parliamentary Liberal Party in 1880 showed that about 43 per cent had close aristocratic or landed connections; they were sons of peers or baronets or were significant landowners, people listed in Burke's or other reference works of notable landowners. In a much-quoted speech to his constituents as late as December 1883, Lord Hartington provided a justification and

definition of the role the Whigs played in the Liberal Party:

I admit the Whigs are not the leaders in popular movements but the Whigs have been, as I think, to the great advantage of the country to direct and guide and moderate those popular movements. They have formed a connecting link between the advanced party and those classes which possessing property, power and influence are naturally averse to change. I think that I may fairly claim that it is greatly owing to their guidance and their action that the great and beneficial changes which have been made in the direction of popular reform in this country, have been made not by the shock of revolution and agitation but by the calm and peaceful process of constitutional acts.

Whiggery by the 1880s was virtually the same thing as moderate Liberalism, the phrases being used interchangeably. The term Whig had also by this time come to be applied to men who would not be described as Whigs in the normal social sense; men like George Goschen (who came from a London banking family of German extraction, not from a landed background). Nevertheless, although the Whig tradition was clearly a strong force in Liberal politics as late as the 1880s, it became an article of faith for later generations of Liberals (perhaps, noted Dr Jenkins, still around even among modern Liberal Democrats) that the Whigs had become merely a dead weight. It came to be widely accepted that the departure of Whigs such as Hartington and Goschen in 1886, when they rebelled against Gladstone's policy of home rule for Ireland, was a necessary process. In this analysis, the Liberal Party was obliged to shed its Whig incubus before it could evolve towards the New Liberalism of the Edwardian era. Essential to this assumption about what came to be known as the revolt of the Whigs in 1886

is that the revolt was not really about Gladstone's Irish policy at all. Ireland and home rule provided a convenient fig leaf to hide the ideological nakedness of the Whigs, a ready excuse to leave the party at a time when they were fundamentally out of sympathy with its modernising and radicalising views, the sort of views expressed in Chamberlain's Unauthorised Programme. A great wave of progressive Liberal thought swept them away and landed them on the shore of their natural home, the Conservative Party.

Examining the position that Hartington and other Whigs took in 1885 at the time of Chamberlain's radical programme, however, Dr Jenkins' view was that it was too simplistic to regard the Whigs as an obsolete remnant about to be washed away by historic forces. In fact, he argued, there was no causal link between the Unauthorised Programme and the revolt of the Whigs in 1886. It is true that 1885 was a time of great tension and anxiety for the Whigs but in the context of the usual struggles and disagreements inside the Liberal Party, enhanced by the franchise and redistribution reforms of 1884 which had transformed the electoral system, creating two million extra voters and a sweeping redistribution of seats. This had removed representation from many small boroughs, particularly in southern England, and created new seats in London and the provincial cities. This in itself undoubtedly weakened the electoral power of the Whigs as it reduced overwhelmingly the remaining 'nomination' seats, those in the gift of the great aristocratic families or the pocket of a great landowner. It also created some unease for the Whigs about how they were going to cope under this new system.

Then there was the threat from Chamberlain himself; his attempt, through the Unauthorised Programme, to

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seize the initiative and impose his policies as the programme that all Liberal candidates would have to adopt in order to find favour with the new electorate, against the background of not knowing much about what the new voters really believed or wanted. Despite this, however, Dr Jenkins said there were very few cases in 1885 of outright defection from the Liberal Party by Whigs. At best there are cases of abstentions or withdrawals of endorsement. For instance in Cheshire, two of the great Whig landowners, the Duke of Westminster and the Marquis of Crewe, refused to support candidates who followed the Radical Programme's ideas on land reform. This kind of action represented the limit of Whig disaffection from the Liberal Party in 1885; their attitude was instead to fight their corner and try to win the argument for the future inside the party, not defect from it. Typical was the action of Lord Everington, the heir of Lord Fortescue. In a letter to his father in February 1885, he explained why he wished to stand for Parliament after the reforms of the previous year. 'Moderate men will never have so good a chance as now with the new constituencies whose character will be affected for some time to come by their new members.'

Nor was it the case that the Whigs were devoid of policies of their own in the face of the Unauthorised Programme, and represented merely a dead weight trying to slow down the radicals without ideas of their own. Most obviously, Hartington, in his speeches during the long 1885 election, put great emphasis on the reform of local government through the creation of county councils. Local government for the counties was common ground for all Liberals, even though in the end the reform was introduced under a Conservative government. In a further irony, reform of local government was a starting point for a number of

Chamberlain's demands, as the Radical Programme called for the proposed county councils to have powers for the compulsory purchase of land so that the smallholding and allotment distribution plans could be put into effect. Hartington and other Whigs such as Albert Grey MP (the heir to Earl Grey) also went some way in the direction of land reform. They were sympathetic to measures designed to simplify the legal process involved in the transfer of land. They showed growing interest in alternative ways of providing smallholdings short of compulsory purchase and forcible redistribution. Grey was a promoter of organisations, along the lines of building societies, which could provide loans to enable agricultural workers to become smallholders. So, the debate between the Whigs and the Radicals in 1885 was about what was going to happen later after local government had been reformed, not a fundamental ideological dispute about the nature of Liberalism.

In September 1885, the position of Hartington and the Whigs was made considerably easier when Gladstone issued his election manifesto. Up to that point it was not entirely clear that Gladstone would lead the party through the general election, but his manifesto of 18 September reassured the Whigs. Gladstone showed no interest or endorsement in the policies being pushed by Chamberlain, who described the manifesto as a slap in the face. On land reform issues Gladstone's position was much closer to the Whig stance. For the remainder of the election campaign the Whigs were able to present themselves as party loyalists and paint Chamberlain and the radicals as the trouble-makers destabilising the party. Significantly, it was Goschen who in October 1885 coined the term 'Unauthorised Programme' to characterise Chamberlain's campaign, stressing that it did not represent the official policy of

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the Liberal Party or of the prime minister.

However, it was notable that even then Hartington never condemned the Unauthorised Programme, particularly once Chamberlain had backed down from his initial ultimatum speech at Lambeth on 24 September, when he rashly demanded that his programme must be adopted as the policies of the next Liberal government. Within a week Chamberlain had retreated from this position, stating only that he requested his policies be treated as open questions by the next Liberal administration. Hartington was always willing to accept that these were indeed issues requiring more debate and consideration, against the background of his severe practical doubts and his warnings of raising unrealistic expectations. He acknowledged that in some circumstances compulsory purchase of land was already right and possible and not original or revolutionary, refusing to make Chamberlain's position on land reform into a party-splitting issue of absolute principle. On another of Chamberlain's key policies, free education, Hartington raised doubts about certain practical considerations but again did not rule it out.

From the Whig perspective Chamberlain's campaign backfired in a number of ways as they saw him spending more and more of the later part of the election backtracking from the position he had taken early on. Free education, for instance, virtually disappeared from his speeches by the end of the campaign, as so many nonconformists objected to the prospect of Anglican schools receiving state funding. Chamberlain was also perceived as having misjudged the campaign, crassly pushing forward his demands and using inflammatory language to promote his views. Many Liberals blamed Chamberlain's approach for the setback the party received in the English boroughs in the general election, as the Conservatives won

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an unexpected majority of these seats. This came as a shock to the Liberals, many of whom, including Chamberlain, had anticipated a landslide for the party. It was assessed that the extreme language that Chamberlain and the radicals had used had frightened many moderate voters. The setbacks in the boroughs cut the Liberal majority and took the shine off the election victory.

This outcome demonstrated, in Dr Jenkins' view, that the Liberal Party as a whole, not just the Whigs, was not ready for the acceptance and implementation of Chamberlain's radical programme. The main lessons of the election drawn by the party were that there had been a rejection of radical policies and a justification of moderate and traditional Liberal approaches. Even after the 1885 election, therefore, the Whigs did not feel that their position inside the party was anachronistic or under serious threat of being swept away by a tide of progressivism. They believed that they were well placed to fight for their version of Liberalism in opposition to Chamberlain. When, therefore, the Liberal split came in 1886 it was, in Dr Jenkins' assessment, genuinely about Ireland and about Gladstone's style of leadership. There was no ideological divide between radicals and Whigs and the Whigs did not use Ireland as a smoke-screen under cover of which they could leave the party and join the Conservatives. The issue of home rule split the party in an entirely different way. It created a fault line that ensured that Hartington and Chamberlain were actually in alliance with each other in the Liberal Unionists. Of the MPs who rebelled over home rule, only about half were from aristocratic or classic Whig backgrounds; about 30 per cent were businessmen.

There is no doubt that the split of 1886 was immensely damaging to the Liberals,

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demoralising the party and undermining its ability to present itself to the nation as a truly national party; and of course it was a gift to the Conservatives who, with their new Liberal Unionist allies, were able to dominate politics for the next twenty years. While it is true that many of those who left the party in 1886 were from the Whig tradition, this did not have the effect of liberating the Liberal Party in the years immediately following, and allowing it to become a progressive party of welfare and social reform. For example, looking at the Newcastle Programme of 1891, while there were some elements of tax reform clearly inspired by Chamberlain's earlier ideas, the emphasis was on mainly traditional Liberal policies such as home rule, disestablishment of the Scottish church and temperance reform. Dr Jenkins thought highly questionable, therefore, the proposition that the Liberal Party had to divest itself of the Whigs before it could move on to the New Liberalism. By the 1890s and 1900s the political

agenda was changing and politicians of all parties were forced to confront a new landscape. Issues such as old age pensions or social insurance were new; they were not the policies being talked about by Chamberlain in 1885, although ironically Chamberlain was at that time trying to develop policy on these questions from within his alliance with the Conservatives.

In conclusion, Dr Jenkins said he would agree with the view expressed by the late Professor Colin Matthew, editor of the Gladstone diaries, when he speculated that if the Liberal Party had held together in 1886 on the Irish question, it could have become a party of positive social welfare.

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- 1 Denis Judd, *Radical Joe, A Life of Joseph Chamberlain* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press), 1993.
- 2 See also, Marji Bloy, *Joseph Chamberlain* in Duncan Brack et al, *Dictionary of Liberal Biography* (London, Politico's Publishing), 1998.

REVIEWS

The strange birth of social democracy

Gareth Stedman Jones, *An End to Poverty? A Historical Debate* (Profile Books, 2004)

Reviewed by **Frank Trentmann**

The battle for the next election has begun. So far, the main show in town to watch is not the conflict between parties but the contest between Brown and Blair. How to end poverty has become the battleground between rival egos and

rival views of social democracy. In this ambitious and thought-provoking book, Gareth Stedman Jones argues that it is fundamentally flawed to think that the future of social democracy lies with either New or Old Labour. *An End to Poverty?* offers a fresh