

REVIEWS

domestic and he writes well on them but he is following a well-gleaned path while neglecting the less well-harvested field of Palmerston's domestic policies, politics and achievements. Palmerston's period in the Home Office is briskly despatched, and if the first Palmerston government had domestic achievements they are little noticed. Palmerston's second government consolidated the existence of a Liberal Party and habituated its components to working together. This required considerable skill in the management of men and, in the case of Gladstone, almost superhuman tolerance. Yet this tricky exercise, so suggestive of the Blair–Brown relationship, and Gladstone's extraordinary management of the Treasury under Palmerston, the principal domestic achievement of the government, are passed briefly over. Indeed the whole of the second government is given only 10 per cent of the book's length.

Chambers subtitles his book 'The People's Darling' because Palmerston embodied the spirit of John Bull. In his most famous speech he ended by asserting 'as the Roman in the days of old, held himself free from indignity, when he could say "Civis romanus sum"; so also a British subject, in whatever land he may be, shall feel confident that the watchful eye and strong arm of England will protect him against injustice and wrong' (p. 322).^a Electors and non-electors alike recognised more readily than MPs that Palmerston put the interests of the nation first and foremost. But Palmerston was also the first premier to court popularity. Though at odds with his hostility to electoral reform after 1832, he sought to incorporate the working classes into the political nation through speaking engagements outside his own constituency. He was an early and skilled protagonist of press management. His wife's much-sought-after social entertainments were carefully designed to bind MPs to him and his cause.

Palmerston was a mass of apparent contradictions. A keen exporter of reforming Liberalism abroad and a fierce opponent of slavery, he felt little need to keep adding to the statute book at home. Not a religious man, his carefully thought-out ecclesiastical appointments, within the Church of England, rallied nonconformists to Liberalism; despising Irish Catholicism, he provided Catholic education on his Irish estates. Florence Nightingale was a neighbour of Palmerston and her admonition, 'though he made a joke when asked to do the right thing, he always did it ... He was so much more in earnest than

he appeared' (p. 431), captures an essential component of the man which leaves room for a more analytical approach than Chambers adopts. Nevertheless Chambers makes the most of his opportunities to provide a tempting introduction to an engaging character whom Clarendon described as having a 'jolly way of looking at disasters' (p. 437).

Tony Little is Chair of the Liberal Democrat History Group.

¹ For an extensive selection from the speech see Duncan Brack and Tony Little, *Great Liberal Speeches* (Politics, 2001), pp. 109–119.

What the voters saw

Emily Robinson & Justin Fisher, *General Election 2005*

– *What the Voters Saw* (New Politics Network, 2005)

Reviewed by **Mark Pack**

The 2005 general election has already seen a plethora of books published, ranging from the latest volume in the Nuffield election studies (Kavanagh and Butler, *The British General Election of 2005*) through to probably the most detailed polling analysis ever published of a campaign, the fruits of the extensive opinion polls commissioned (at a cost of hundreds of thousands of pounds) by Tory peer Lord Ashcroft (*Smell the Coffee: a Wake-up Call for the Conservative Party*).

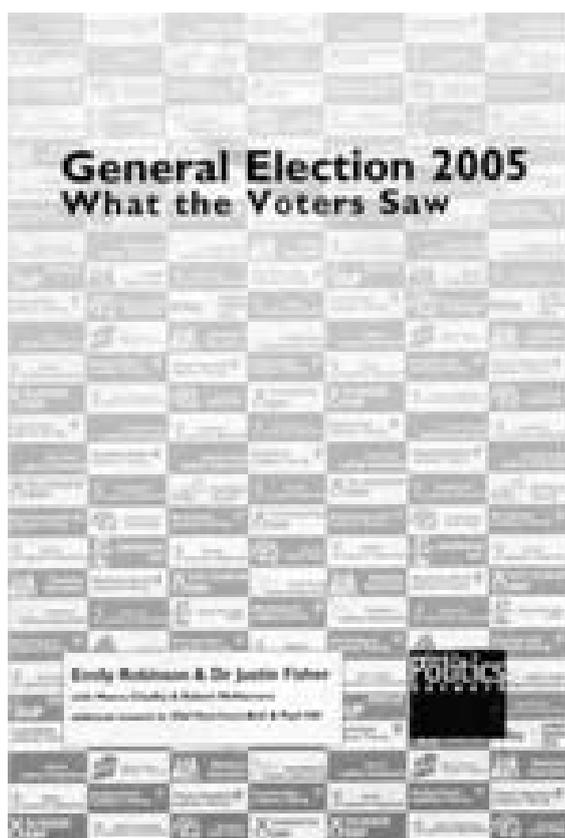
In this menagerie, Robinson and Fisher have found a distinctive and interesting niche as their work reports on a study, conducted by the New Politics Network and funded by the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust, into what electors really received through their letterbox, over the phone or in person on the doorstep during the election. A panel of 313 volunteers across 223 different seats recorded all the

contacts they received and this book analyses the results.

To Liberal Democrat campaigners many of the results will be less surprising, perhaps, than to others – but as it is a staple complaint of Lib Dem election organisers that academics and pundits do not understand how their local campaigns really work, that is not necessarily a bad thing (though doubtless quite a few eyebrows will be raised at the omission of the Liberal Democrats from the list of parties who it is said – on page 11 – 'have the capability to target different voters with different leaflets within the same constituency!').

The study provides very clear evidence for more leaflets bringing more votes, with the seats the Lib Dems gained often showing double-figure number of contacts for electors from the Liberal Democrats. One lucky – or unlucky, depending on your point of view – soul in Hornsey & Wood Green received no less

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than eighteen different leaflets from the Liberal Democrats. As the authors understandably conclude, 'the Liberal Democrats were determined to win this seat'. The result? A Liberal Democrat gain, with a swing of 15 per cent. Similar double-figure levels of contact were recorded in other dramatic wins in Manchester Withington and Westmorland & Lonsdale.

A more detailed reading of the figures shows some strong results for the Liberal Democrats on more modest campaigns, but the overall picture is a clear link between very heavy levels of Lib Dem contact and good Lib Dem results. What is also clear is that in many of these seats the 'classic ALDC' type campaign of four or five leaflets is now seen as barely breaking sweat. This is partly a reaction to the increasing difficulty of getting a political message across as advertising and marketing material have encroached more and more on every aspect of life (and through the letterbox). On the other hand, in many seats the Liberal Democrats clearly still struggle to

reach this level of intensive campaigning activity across a Parliamentary seat – and as a result across the country as a whole the Lib Dem leaflets come out as the least local due to the reliance on standard national artwork in many of the weaker seats.

The connection between activity and results appears much looser for the other parties, again a reflection of the wider world, in this case the higher core support and media coverage for Labour and the Conservatives.

The book is rounded off with a detailed analysis of what the parties said on immigration – the most contentious

issue of campaign ethics during the campaign – and a sketch of the campaign in five individual constituencies. At £7.50 for just forty pages the book is rather pricey, but there is enough interest in this brief book to make it worthwhile – and brevity does mean a busy political activist may actually have the time to read it!

Mark Pack works in the Liberal Democrats Campaigns Department and, in his spare time, wrote most of the eighteen letters and leaflets the lucky Hornsey & Wood Green resident received.

A Prime Minister speaks

Paul Richards (ed.) *Tony Blair: In His Own Words*
(London; Politico's Publishing, 2004)

Reviewed by **Mark Pack**

This collection brings together forty-three of Blair's speeches, articles and similar items stretching from 1982 to 2004.

The quote on the inner flap is typical Blair: 'I want us to be a young country again. With a common purpose. With ideals we cherish and live up to. Not resting on past glories. Not fighting old battles.' It has visionary rhetoric, displaying a real verbal oratorical style (so rare in politicians these days) with its sparseness with words and verbs – and not distinctively Labour in content. It has overtones of JFK but with a few small changes could have come from Mrs Thatcher.

Some of the speeches are heavily edited, with the extracts thereby losing their coherence and form, but fortunately those to suffer most are the conference speeches, which are available elsewhere. And Blair's political CV from 1983 is published in full and untouched, leaving in even the bizarre misspelling by Blair of his own name.

The editor, an ardent New Labour fan, argues that Blair's values come through the book as consistent and heavily based on his Christian views. There is no room here for criticisms of Blair's timidity after having won a large Parliamentary majority, nor of the Women's Institute speech that, due to its failure, is one of his most famous.

Perhaps the most interesting speech is Blair's 1982 lecture outlining the state of British politics. Some later themes of Blairism are already clear, including criticism of Tony Benn for divisiveness. Concerns about social exclusion and the scepticism of party activists ('the trouble is that they can end up with little or no time for meeting those with whom they disagree') are here too.

Blair was even then searching for an alternative to sterile right-left debates, albeit in a rather different form from his latter beliefs. In the early 1980s he was willing to praise the left for generating new thinking. And the 1982 Blair also criticised the