

REVIEWS

Friends and allies

Ian Hunter (ed.): *Winston and Archie: The Letters of Sir Archibald Sinclair and Winston S. Churchill* (Politico's, 2005)

Reviewed by **Richard Toye**

The publication of the private and official correspondence of Winston Churchill and Archibald Sinclair is greatly to be welcomed. During the First World War, Sinclair was Churchill's aide-de-camp when the latter served for a few months in the trenches after the apparent collapse of his political career. From 1919–22, Sinclair again assisted Churchill, first at the War Office and then at the Colonial Office. After the collapse of the Lloyd George coalition, he remained loyal to the Liberal Party, becoming its leader in 1935, whereas Churchill reverted to the Tories. However, in 1940 Churchill appointed Sinclair as Secretary of State for Air. Sinclair left the coalition government at the end of the European war, narrowly lost his seat in the ensuing general election, and took little part in politics thereafter. The letters cast light on what was for both men a significant relationship and, to a lesser extent, also provide evidence about the fate of Liberalism.

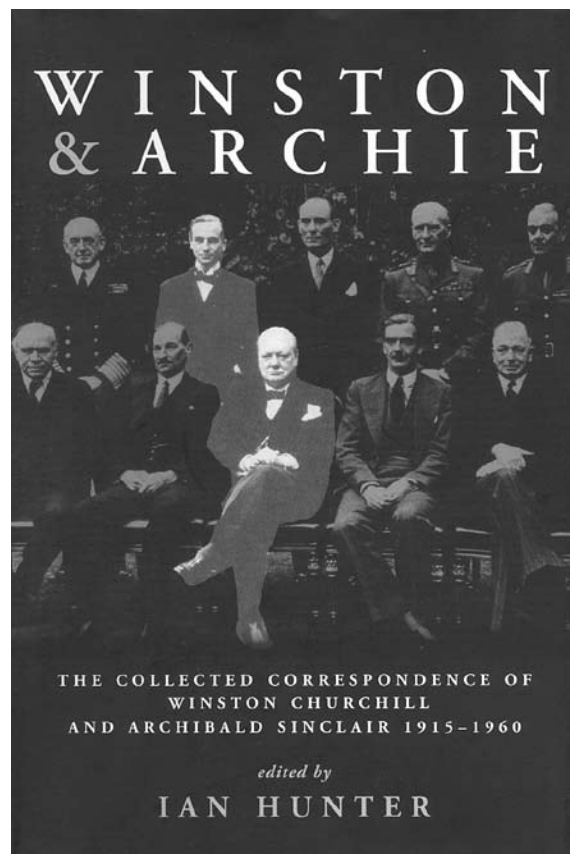
It should be noted that a number of the most interesting letters have been published before, in the companion volumes to the official biography of Churchill. However, this does not diminish the value of the book under review. Some of the First World War letters are extraordinarily raw and unguarded, and are well worth re-reading. In June 1915, having been moved from the Admiralty to a sinecure position, Churchill poured out his heart to the younger man (they had first

met prior to the war): 'I do not want office, but only war direction: that perhaps never again. Everything else – not that. Everything else – not that. At least so I feel in my evil moments. Those who live by the sword – ... I am profoundly unsettled: and cannot use my gift.' This level of candour suggests that Churchill at this time placed almost unlimited trust in Sinclair.

The letters for the immediate post-war period are, in emotional terms, considerably less revealing. This is a natural consequence of the change in their relationship, from comrades-in-arms to minister and private secretary. The correspondence takes on an official character, with Sinclair doing the bulk of the writing. The material is nonetheless important, especially in relation to British intervention in the Russian Civil War. Sinclair was as an enthusiast for the 'Whites', as Churchill was. There was a hint of anti-Semitism in the men's attitude towards the Bolsheviks. It must be said in their defence, though, that they repeatedly urged restraint on the leaders of the Whites, in (often unsuccessful) attempts to prevent pogroms.

The letters for the 1923–39 period are amongst the most valuable in the book, although they are by no means voluminous. A couple in particular stand out. The first of these is Sinclair's of 16 January 1929. This was an extended commentary on Churchill's draft of *The Aftermath* (the volume of his book *The World Crisis* dealing

with the immediate post-war period). Churchill was Chancellor of the Exchequer at the time, and a general election was in the offing. Sinclair, who as a Liberal was of course a political opponent, urged him not to give hostages to fortune. In particular, he warned him not to print an exchange of telegrams dating from 1919 in which Lloyd George (now the leader of Sinclair's own party) had urged restraint upon his errant War Secretary. Sinclair wrote: 'I cannot help thinking that it must have been the need ... of justifying your apparent opposition to Lloyd George's copy-book maxims which has led you to denounce with a strength of language which strikes me as perhaps a little excessive the policy which the Allies finally did adopt.' Interestingly, in Sinclair's private papers there is a draft of this letter containing a passage not quoted in this edition. In it, Sinclair observed that Churchill's pursuit of his controversy with Lloyd George 'has led you into a greater condemnation of the policy which was pursued



than you would at the time have thought justified or than you could now easily reconcile with your responsibilities for it as a Cabinet Minister and Secretary of State for War' (Thurso Papers II 85/3, Churchill College, Cambridge). Clearly, as regards self-censorship, Sinclair practiced what he preached.

Some letters from Churchill in 1931 cast important new light on his thinking about the Liberal Party as it entered its all-but-terminal phase. In the autumn of that year the party divided in three. Lloyd George and a tiny group of followers remained outside Ramsay MacDonald's newly formed National Government. Within the government there were two Liberal factions, one led by Herbert Samuel and the other (the Liberal Nationals) by John Simon. Churchill, in an undated letter, urged Sinclair to 'ruthlessly detach' himself from the Samuelites 'and establish solid Tory or Simonite connections'. Sinclair ignored this advice, and in September 1932 resigned from the government, along with the other Samuelite ministers, against Churchill's advice. The resignations were in protest at the government's confirmation of its abandonment of free trade. This issue seems to have been the crucial factor in Sinclair's attachment to Liberalism. It is difficult to see what, apart from this question, divided him from moderate Conservatives.

The Second World War correspondence is again of the largely official variety, but is no less fascinating for that. Churchill's style as Prime Minister was to prod away at his subordinates in an attempt to expose organisational weaknesses and stimulate action. This approach had defects as well as virtues. If he fell on a snippet of information without understanding its full context, he could fire off memoranda demanding explanations from his subordinates, which would force them to waste valuable time justifying themselves. It is not hard to understand why both

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Sinclair and Churchill at times felt frustrated with one another, although, perhaps inevitably given his superior literary skill, it was the latter with whom this reviewer ended up sympathising most. 'I am very glad to find that you are as usual completely satisfied', Churchill wrote sardonically on 29 September 1940, in relation to a point he had raised earlier about bombing targets. 'I merely referred the Foreign Office telegram to you in order to test once more that impenetrable armour of departmental confidence which you have donned since you ceased to lead an Opposition to the Government and became one of its pillars. Either you must have been very wrong in the old days, or we must all have improved enormously since the change.'

Sinclair did not forfeit Churchill's confidence but he

was no longer in his innermost circle. The slim post-war correspondence is full of expressions of affection but there is not much of substance. Sinclair was ennobled by Churchill as Viscount Thurso in 1952, but almost immediately suffered a major stroke. Although he outlived Churchill by five years, he was not able to take an active role in the House of Lords. This volume – on which the editor, Ian Hunter is to be congratulated – is a worthy testament to Sinclair's earlier importance to British politics. It also forms an at times touching record of a political friendship.

Richard Toye has published widely on many aspects of modern political history. His next book, Lloyd George and Churchill, will be published by Macmillan in 2007.

The strategy of the centre

Stephen Barber: *Political Strategy: Modern Politics in Contemporary Britain* (Liverpool Academic Press, 2005)

Reviewed by **Richard Holme**

This is an ambitious and unusual book, which ventures well outside the usual terrain of political publishing – memoirs and biographies, electoral studies and analyses of issues and identities.

Stephen Barber's chosen turf is strategy, the planned shaping of the political battle to achieve long-term goals and eventual victory. The military vocabulary is appropriate. Although there is scarcely a corporation or NGO, or indeed any other institution worth its salt nowadays, which does not boast a strategy, the inspiration and terminology – complete with 'missions', 'objectives' and 'battle plans' – comes from war. Indeed, Mr Barber quotes the fourth-century *Art of War* by Sun-Tzu in his first chapter.

In the decades after the Second World War, this battlefield jargon, translated back from the front into civilian life, increasingly infused every competitive marketplace, no doubt giving a macho thrill to the men in grey flannel suits, dreaming Walter Mitty-style that their 'counter-attacks' with 'targeted saturation advertising campaigns' on the toothpaste or toilet tissue markets put them in the swashbuckling tradition of General Patton.

And the master plan, the big picture, which would ensure that effort would not be wasted nor valuable resources dissipated, was, of course, the strategy.

For some time, politics seemed relatively immune to the strategic approach, content to bumble along from crisis to crisis, election to election,