

of a third candidate. It concluded, 'What is clearly wanted is a policy of accommodation between Liberal and Labour which will reproduce in the constituencies the cooperation which obtains at Westminster.' It would be useful today for both parties to consider how many constituencies were won by the Conservatives in 2015 where the victory could be attributed to the presence of a 'no-hope' candidate – Lib Dem in some cases, Labour in others.

A few conclusions seem to emerge. There is no future for a party which aspires to no more than junior partnership in a coalition dominated by others, though tactical arrangements in some constituencies may well be useful. The job of Lib Dems today is to decide on policies aimed not just at dealing with short-term problems but at producing a long-term Liberal future. It will be necessary to give

much more attention than in the recent past to strengthening local organisations. Lib Dems should, however, keep in mind the prospect of eventually participating in a major political realignment. There are people in the Labour Party and there are people in the Conservative Party too, who are already thinking on truly Liberal lines.

These and many other objectives are suggested by the actions and policies of Liberals in the historic past. Whether Lib Dems have any future will depend on how well they learn from the past.

Dr Roy Douglas is Emeritus Reader at the University of Surrey, a former Liberal parliamentary candidate, and the author of fifteen books, including The History of the Liberal Party 1895–1970 (1971) and Liberals: The History of the Liberal and Liberal Democrat Parties (2005).

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The Great War and the Liberal Party (1)

Michael Steed in his very interesting article, 'Did the Great War really kill the Liberal Party?' (*Journal of Liberal History* 87, summer 2015) writes of the belief of the historic Liberal Party 'that reason, trade and moral principles could together bring peace' as 'close to a *raison d'être*' and as 'an important constituent in the glue that held together the disparate elements making up the party'. Two letters in the *Manchester Guardian* in August 1916 seem to provide sharp confirmation of this analysis.

Mary Toulmin, wife of Sir George Toulmin, Liberal MP for Bury, wrote to the *Manchester Guardian* on 5 August 1916:

It is difficult for a life-long Liberal like myself – and one growing more Radical with years – to write with moderation of the present position of Liberal politics. The members of the Liberal Party in the House of Commons, with a few noble exceptions, have slavishly obeyed the dictum of the Prime Minister – 'Wait and See'. They have waited and they have seen! They see a unity of parties indeed but how achieved? By the continuous surrender by the Liberal Party of all those things it held most dear – a voluntary army, right of asylum, respect for conscience, education, Home Rule, and international law as touching the rights of neutrals.

The President of the Yorkshire Council of Women's Liberal Associations, Mary Isabel Salt, wrote on 10 August 1916:

The letters appearing in your columns from Lady Toulmin, Sir William Byles, and others, undoubtedly express the opinion of thousands of sincere rank-and-file Liberals who have hitherto remained dumb under the impotence of the present situation, but who are none the less eagerly awaiting the first opportunity to battle effectively for the old principles which formed the bedrock of their political faith. Some of us are asking ourselves whether we can honestly remain associated any longer with a party whose official

LETTERS

Labour and the Liberals; questions for readers

Anent James Owen's article 'The struggle for representation: Labour candidates and the Liberals, 1886–1895' (*Journal of Liberal History* 86, spring 2015), Keir Hardie was refused the Liberal nomination for the Mid-Lanarkshire by-election in 1888. He then left the Liberals and unsuccessfully contested the by-election as Independent Labour. John Sinclair, a protégé of (Sir) Henry Campbell-Bannerman and a future Secretary for Scotland, was offered the Liberal nomination but refused, as he did not want to oppose Hardie.

In 1901, Sinclair, then Scottish Liberal Whip, supported, with Sir Henry's approval, the unsuccessful Scottish Workers Representation Committee (SWRC) candidate at a by-election in North-Eastern Lanarkshire, rather than the Liberal Imperialist candidate who was also unsuccessful. The intervention of SWRC candidates resulted in the defeat of Liberal candidates in North-Western Lanarkshire and

Ayrshire Northern at the 1906 general election.

Anent the report of the meeting on 'The Liberal-Tory coalition of 1915', why did Bonar Law, the Tory leader, who joined the Cabinet in May 1915, not have to submit himself to a ministerial by-election? Such were not suspended during the war, as Harold Tennant, Asquith's brother-in-law, had to submit himself to an unopposed ministerial by-election in Berwickshire when appointed Secretary for Scotland in July 1916.

And one more question for your readers. Some biographers of William E. Gladstone state that his brother, Robertson (born 1805) was educated at Eton and Glasgow Academy. However, Glasgow Academy was not founded until 1845. Can any of your readers advise where in Glasgow he was educated? Incidentally, one of the original directors of the Academy was Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman's uncle, William Campbell.

Dr Alexander S. Waugh

sanction is given to active work against Liberal principles and to the repudiation of Liberal principles one by one ... Could not a Radical party be formed even now which would pledge itself to adhere to Liberal principles? If the leaders would come forward the members would roll up in their thousands. One feels the tragedy of the present situation, inasmuch as it is so infinitely easier to lose our hard-won liberties than to regain them, and if the consolidation of a really liberal party is left until after the war it may be too late to achieve much in our own generation.

As indicated, there were other letters along these lines.

Duncan Marlor

The Great War and the Liberal Party (2)

Professor Otte's excellent article on Sir Edward Grey ('The long shadow of war;', *Journal of Liberal History* 87, summer 2015) throws light on a puzzle which has vexed many historians. How did it happen that a man of high intelligence, complete probity and a deep love of peace nevertheless played an important part in involving Britain in a war which most people would now consider unnecessary and almost wholly destructive?

When I was looking at a different problem, I encountered memoranda sent to Grey by the two most senior Foreign Office officials, Sir Arthur Nicolson and Sir Eyre Crowe, shortly before Britain became committed to action which made involvement in the 1914 war inevitable. Both were obviously trying to stiffen Grey, urging that – as Crowe put it – 'in a just quarrel England (sic) would stand by her friends'. [FO800/94, fo.522] At a time when Belgium had not yet been invaded, or even directly threatened, both were much more concerned that Britain should support France and Russia than that

she should take whatever action was possible to avert the catastrophe.

This set me wondering. To what extent had Foreign Office officials, unknown to the public and probably to most MPs, gradually manoeuvred Britain into policies which led to war? Were there perhaps similar people in the background in Vienna, Berlin, Paris and St Petersburg who played a major part in impelling sovereigns and statesmen who did not want war into that avoidable conflict? And may it be that similar people still lurk in the various Foreign Offices of the world?

Roy Douglas

LIBERAL HISTORY QUIZ 2015

The 2015 Liberal history quiz was a feature of the History Group's exhibition stand at the Liberal Democrat conference in Bournemouth last September; the questions were drawn from our new book, *British Liberal Leaders*. The winners, each with 19 marks out of 20, were David Hughes and Richard Sanderson. We also included anyone answering at least five questions correctly in a draw for a second prize: the winner was James Sanderson. Below we reprint the questions – the answers are on page 39.

1. On hearing that Nick Clegg was going to join the Liberal Democrats who said: 'Oh, for heaven's sake, joining the Liberal Democrats is like joining an NGO!'
2. From which city's Town Hall in 1901 did David Lloyd George have to flee a pro-Boer War mob disguised as a policeman?
3. Which Liberal leader fell foul of the man who devised the rules of boxing and was consequently mentioned in the trial of a famous playwright?
4. CB acquired his surname well after his birth; why and when did he do it?
5. Which Liberal leader became the first ever British High Commissioner for Palestine?
6. What was the name of the baronetcy inherited from his grandfather by Sir Archibald Sinclair in 1912?
7. Which seat did Roy Jenkins fight unsuccessfully at the 1945 general election?
8. In what year was David Owen first elected as an MP for a Plymouth constituency?
9. Which leader defeated a sitting Liberal MP when he entered Parliament and later sat together with that opponent in the House of Lords?
10. What was the name of the quarterly journal, founded in 1993 and edited by Charles Kennedy, which advocated preparation for a Lib-Lab coalition?
11. Which Liberal leader introduced the targeting strategy known as the Winnable Seats scheme?
12. Criticised as ready at ten minutes' notice to assume the roles of a surgeon, an architect or an admiral, which leader was compared to a Venetian magistrate by a later leader in a mock obituary?
13. Which prolific leader, better known for a cuppa than his policies, fathered an illegitimate child by an aristocratic canvasser for Fox?
14. Who was Home Secretary at the time of the Tolpuddle Martyrs?
15. He held the offices of Secretary for War, Foreign Secretary (three times) and Home Secretary and was the MP who waited longest to become Prime Minister; who was he?
16. Whose maiden speech in the first reformed parliament professed a qualified opposition to the abolition of slavery?
17. Which leader had four children, three of whom died at the age of 23, all in unrelated incidents?
18. Which Liberal Prime Minister earned the nickname 'the last of the Romans'?
19. As a young man he was bowled over by Skittles; later he created a double duchess, led the Liberals and turned down the top job three times. Who was he?
20. Who were Menzies Campbell's two opponents in the leadership contest of 2006?

Coalition and the Liberal Democrats (1)

The last edition of the *Journal of Liberal History* (issue 88, autumn 2015) was excellent, the first serious look at the coalition from a Lib Dem point of view.

Comprehensive though it was, however, it did miss something essential in my opinion: the ideological convergence between the Liberal Democrats and the Conservative parties driven by the leadership of both parties. David Laws, for example, is on record as saying that the coalition would not have been possible without the contribution made to the ideology of the party by the *Orange Book*.

There were policies that the Liberal Democrats agreed to in coalition with the Tories that it is hard to imagine that any other previous leader of the party would have agreed. Out of a long list of policies where that applies, one that sticks in my mind was the bedroom tax (albeit the other benefit cuts were perhaps even more devastating to those who had to endure them). References were made to how George Osborne pushed through the worst benefit cuts, but surely these were agreed by the Quad? If so, not only did Nick Clegg and Danny Alexander fail to say no, they actively supported the policies afterwards.

I will assume that they genuinely believed the policies would not increase poverty and increase misery. But for them to believe that they would have to disbelieve organisations like CPAG who campaigned against the policy, and who were later to have been proved right to do so. So the question is: when did we as Lib Dems stop believing in CPAG, and agree with the Tories instead? As I write, with apparently no debate the party seems to have returned to where it was before, supporting radical anti-poverty policies.

Maybe this is something the *Journal of Liberal History* should look at?

Geoff Payne

Editor's note: we plan a second special edition of the *Journal* on the coalition, in autumn 2016,

analysing the difference the Liberal Democrats really made to government policy across a range of key policy areas – a topic we couldn't cover for lack of space in issue 88.

Coalition and the Liberal Democrats (2)

The Coalition and the Liberal Democrats issue (*Journal of Liberal History* 88, autumn 2015) contained much fascinating detail that will be pored over by historians, and others, for a long time to come. While reading through it, I was struck by one particular comment, in the highly critical assessment by John Pugh ('Coalition history – our follies and our fortune').

He noted that 'The blunders we made were utterly de trop and born of political inexperience and hubris', going on to note that 'people with previous experience of coalitions and pacts and experience in a British context ... were either ignored or kept on the margins and advice sought instead from selected continental sources and special advisers.'

A lack of knowledge of other aspects of the party's history was apparent at times, too. I recall the important Parliamentary occasion, on 9 December 2013, when tributes were paid to Nelson Mandela. While regretting the fact that he 'never had the privilege of meeting Nelson Mandela,' Nick Clegg praised 'the British campaigners in the Anti-Apartheid Movement in London who showed unfailing loyalty to and support for Nelson Mandela during his bleakest days,' adding 'I, too, pay tribute to Mr (Peter) Hain and all his fellow campaigners for what they did at that time.'

There was no mention in Clegg's speech – as perhaps there should have been – of the determined opposition to apartheid of two of his predecessors, Jeremy Thorpe and David Steel, both associated with the Anti-Apartheid Movement, the latter as its President for a while, during a period when their stance required real political courage

to be associated with their undoubted liberalism. Nor was there a mention, as there might have been, that Peter Hain – rightly praised in that debate – was then an active Liberal, although Menzies Campbell, Simon Hughes and Martin Horwood, all with a far better grasp of party history, did so in their speeches.

Instead, we learned merely that 'As a student, I was one of the thousands of people who flooded into Wembley stadium for the "Free Nelson Mandela" concert to mark his 70th birthday.' If ever there was an appropriate time for a leader of the Liberal Democrats to recall the Liberal role in the opposition to apartheid, this Parliamentary occasion was it.

Was this failure to make this point, too, born of 'political inexperience and hubris'? And of a lack of knowledge of, and interest in, the history of Liberals and liberalism? Perhaps. In any case, a politely-worded note of regret and complaint I sent at the time to the relevant address failed to receive even the most perfunctory reply.

Peter Hellyer (former YL Vice Chairman and former member of the AAM Executive)

Coalition and the Liberal Democrats (3)

There is an, in my view serious, historical inaccuracy on p. 10 of *Journal of Liberal History* 88.

Before 2010, there were many other referendums under the Blair government beside the two mentioned by Adrian Slade. There was the referendum on establishing the London mayor, the referendum on the Good Friday agreement and the referendum on North-East devolution. There were also many referendums on the establishment or removal of local mayors, far more than on any other issue in the whole of British history.

I think the implication that referendums became common during the coalition is just inaccurate; it was Blair who established them as a regular part of the British political system.

Richard Gadsden

Coalition and the Liberal Democrats (4)

Undoubtedly the electoral catastrophe of May 2015 was compounded by fabricated panic that a Labour-SNP alliance would ravage England's green and pleasant land; but the fatal damage was done in 2010, not by the fact of the coalition but by the hasty vote to raise tuition fees. Time did not heal this wound. In summer 2014 I marked an A-level paper that included a question about how political parties engage with the public; the one thing that every candidate knew was that the Lib Dems – often personified as Nick Clegg – break their promises.

Once Lib Dem candidates pledged themselves to vote against in the 2010 campaign, that had to be a red line in coalition negotiations; anyone who thought this little promise was trumped by the bigger commitment to work constructively with the largest party deceived themselves. Nor could the raising of fees be justified by impending financial crisis. In the short run it made no difference whether student fees were granted or loaned.

Returned unopposed as a Lib Dem district councillor in May 2015, I was fortunate to avoid the pain inflicted on so many fine, talented people. But the moral of the disaster is clear: (1) don't make promises unless you are sure you can keep them; (2) don't make a long-term alliance in a tearing hurry.

Andy Connell

Asquith and the Lords

It's interesting how often historians chance on a 'nugget' whilst looking for something else.

I was recently researching the National Liberal Club archives to answer a query and in the minutes for the General Committee of 4 March 1925 it was recorded that the Committee's Chairman, Lord Beauchamp, had asked for the Committee's starting time to be varied to accommodate his duties in the House of Lords, as 'Lord Oxford would

not assume the daily duties of a Leader.’

There is a great deal of valuable historical material in the Club’s archives and efforts are at

last being to make them available, including an initial programme of digitisation.

Michael Meadowcroft (Hon. Archivist, National Liberal Club)

REPORTS

Community Politics and the Liberal Revival

Conference fringe meeting held jointly with the Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors, 13 March 2015, with Gordon Lishman and Paul Clark; chair: Sarah Boad

Report by **Graham Lippiatt**

THE FAMOUS COMMUNITY politics resolution, adopted by the Liberal Party at its 1970 Assembly, helped to lay the foundations for revival after the party’s loss of half its seats in the 1970 general election. This fringe meeting explored the community politics approach, what it meant and how might be of help to Liberal Democrats in the future. Leading the discussion were Gordon Lishman (co-author of *The Theory and Practice of Community Politics*) and, substituting for Mike Storey, former leader of Liverpool Council, who was at the last moment unable to attend, Paul Clarke who was a Liverpool councillor for thirty-four years.

Gordon introduced his talk by referring to the context in which the idea of community politics came to be born and looking forward to a debate on how that idea should be developed and used politically in the future. Community politics was adopted by the Liberal Party because there was a big gap to fill. After the 1970 general election the party did not have much of an answer to the question, ‘What do we do next?’ Neither did the party have an answer to the question from individual members, ‘What can I do next?’ This question, Gordon suggested, was likely to be on the lips of party delegates in Bournemouth, the first federal

conference after the 2015 general election, more than ever since 1970. And it was also important now to revisit other aspects of the amendment passed at Eastbourne in 1970, such as how to put into practice the dual approach of working inside and outside parliament and about how to build a base in big industrial cities.

One of the issues which Gordon and the co-author of *The Theory and Practice of Community Politics*, Bernard Greaves, debated at the time of writing was whether or not to include in the book a chapter linking the idea of community politics to the wider history of Liberalism; the notion that approaches to political action and political ideas are indivisibly part of the same thing. Gordon then quoted from Bernard Greaves – ‘community politics is not a technique for winning local elections’ – and went on to place community politics in the context of the idea of ‘positive liberty’ or the use of freedom. This is an idea originating in J. S. Mill’s thought, and Gordon next quoted from *Considerations on Representative Government*, where Mill says that people are not just allowed to participate in politics but that it is good that they should do so, for themselves and for wider society.

Now turning to the *Little Yellow Book*, a recent publication by Nigel Lindsay and Robert Brown for

the Scottish Liberal Democrats, Gordon commended the section that declares that political thought is not just something that happens in universities, think tanks or party policy committees but that everyone thinks about fairness, responsibility, power or how they want their lives to go. Politics has become disengaged from this vibrant, everyday way of thinking and it is the job of liberal community politicians to re-establish the link between political theory and the everyday thinking about politics that people do without really realising it.

Another big area of context for the birth of community politics was the massive spread of all sorts of grassroots community action – sometimes associated with political organisations, but often not – that built on the work of people like George Clark of the Notting Hill Community Workshop who were interested in helping a community to find its own voice and to campaign to bring about the things it wanted. It was the job of the politician to add their own views to a debate with the wider public (usually on a local level) about how to bring about change and take charge of their own lives and communities.

But this era of grassroots action did not last; the election of Margaret Thatcher signalled that change was coming. Partly it was because those who had been employed to facilitate the work were no longer paid to do so, but there was also a gradual disengagement perhaps aided by the spread of television and other socio-cultural factors. We realised that there was a disconnect between the issues that we were campaigning about at university, such as anti-apartheid or UDI in Rhodesia, and the topics that people were raising on the doorstep as we canvassed for Michael Winstanley or Richard Wainwright. The challenge therefore became one of how you started from where the electorate was and turned that into a wider political debate. The thing that Liberals got wrong was not in starting where people were but in stopping at that point. So we never got beyond those everyday issues to the point where we could engage people in a wider political

The famous community politics resolution, adopted by the Liberal Party at its 1970 Assembly, helped to lay the foundations for revival after the party’s loss of half its seats in the 1970 general election.