World War and as Head of the British Mission to de Gaulle during the Second World War; some political papers and military maps; speeches and articles; manuscripts of books and short stories, with literary correspondence and original and copied source material from Spears's work as Churchill's personal representative to the French Government in 1940; press cuttings; family photographs; business papers, mainly relating to ELS's chairmanship of the Ashanti Goldfields Corporation and the Institute of Directors.

The archive also includes the papers of ELS's first wife, Mary Borden, particularly her correspondence with ELS, and her letters and diaries relating to her First World War hospital and the work of the Hadfield-Spears Mobile Hospital Unit during the Second World War.

THURSO, Archibald Henry Macdonald Sinclair, 1st Viscount (1890–1970)
Leader of the Liberal Party, 1935–45; Secretary of State for Scotland, 1931–32; Secretary of State for Air, 1940–45.
Includes papers, 1913–63; political correspondence, 1923–39; Scottish Office correspondence, 1923–36.
THRS 223 boxes

The collection held at Churchill Archives Centre includes correspondence (including general, official, political, constituency, parliamentary and family correspondence); speeches; Liberal Organisation and Scottish Liberal organisation and Federation material; press cuttings; business papers; and Scottish Office, Scottish Board of Health and Secretary of State for Scotland material.

For the most part, the collection is made up of constituency, parliamentary and Liberal Party correspondence of the 1920s and 1930s. There is very little wartime material but Section IV contains correspondence (arranged alphabetically by correspondents' names) and press cuttings from 1945 on into the 1950s. The papers transferred from the Scottish Record Office form a separate and coherent group, consisting of papers of 1923–37 relating to the Scottish Office, the Scottish Board of Health and Thurso's period as Secretary of State for Scotland. The papers in the first box of Section I are also particularly noteworthy as they include Thurso's correspondence with Winston Churchill from 1915 to 1920.

Contact details
Churchill Archives Centre is open from Monday to Friday, 9am–5pm. A prior appointment and two forms of identification are required.

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Dr J. Graham Jones is Archive Sources Editor of the Journal of Liberal History*, and was formerly Senior Archivist and Head of the Welsh Political Archive at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.*

Reviews

The Pact

Jonathan Kirkup, *The Lib–Lab Pact – A Parliamentary Agreement, 1977–78* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015)
Review by **Michael Meadowcroft**

The first thing to say about this book is that it is an important addition to modern British political history. Following the enabling of access to the crucial parliamentary documents in 2008, under the thirty-year rule, a mature assessment of this political episode has become possible and full marks should go to Jonathan Kirkup for undertaking it. However, it soon becomes evident from the style and structure of the book that it derives from an academic thesis. A little research does indeed show that the Dr Kirkup completed a PhD in 2012 on this subject. Clearly it is perfectly legitimate to use all one's detailed academic research to produce a book on the same subject, but it should be in a very different style. A book is a narrative and a thesis is an academic exercise. The book's editor should have insisted on stylistic changes but then, given more than a score of typographical errors, more could also have been expected from such a reputable publisher as Palgrave Macmillan. Quite apart from annoying misspellings and errors of date perhaps someone can explain what the following comment means, on industrial democracy in the Post Office:

> [I]n some ways this issue encapsulates one of the structural problems of a parliamentary arrangement only the lines of the Pact.

Also the author twice calls the Joseph-Rowntree-Reform-Trust-funded, and politically independent, Outer Circle Policy Unit, the 'Liberal Outer Policy Unit'.

However, setting these solecisms and its overly academic style aside, this is an important book and the best analysis and commentary on the pact and on what was certainly an interesting period. The Liberal Party's response to the pact's formation in March 1977 was singularly different from the reaction to Jeremy Thorpe's discussions with Edward Heath on the possibility of a

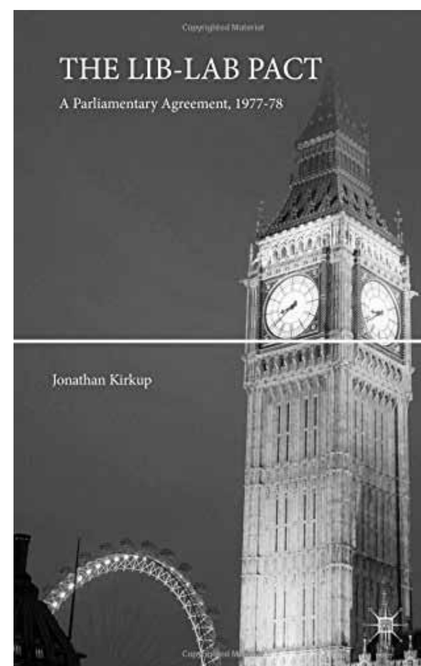
Liberal–Conservative coalition after the 1970 general election. In 1970 my telephone went berserk with furious calls from Yorkshire Liberals protesting at Thorpe's action, whereas in 1977 I had just one worried enquirer. The difference was both because the party felt itself instinctively to be anti-Conservative – nota bene 2010! – and also because the political situation in 1977 clearly had more potential leverage for us, albeit being also high risk. The pact lasted only for sixteen and a half months, though at the time it seemed much longer; and although there was the inevitable slum in poll ratings, from 13 per cent to 6 per cent during the life of the pact, the ratings returned to 13 per cent in the ten months after its termination leading up to the 1979 general election. Perhaps if the Liberal Democrats had ended the coalition in August 2014 there might have been a corresponding recovery by the 2015 election.

Kirkup shows that, although some of the Liberal spokesmen – Richard Wainwright, for instance – achieved changes in legislation, the results of the pact were visible rather more in what the Liberals had stopped Labour from enacting. It is clear from Kirkup's careful narrative that specific policy achievements were less important to David Steel than the fact of the pact and to the establishment of a formal Joint Consultative Committee between the two parties – an arrangement that was only reluctantly conceded by Jim Callaghan.

The circumstances of the pact are interesting. In a real sense, the felicitous conjunction of the necessary planets at the right moment, coupled with the frailty of the Labour government, enabled the Liberals to grasp the parliamentary arithmetic and also remained crucial to the pact's establishment and continuance. David Steel had been in office as leader for less than nine months, and it is hard to imagine that Jeremy Thorpe would have been capable of taking and seeing through any such initiative. It is also unlikely that had John Pardoe won the Liberal Party leadership election he would have taken the same initiative, though he loyally supported Steel throughout. Also Jim Callaghan had been leader of the Labour Party for only a couple of months longer than Steel's tenure in the Liberal Party, and it is inconceivable that Harold Wilson would have envisaged such a pact for an instant. It was similarly crucial that the machine-man Bob Mellish had been replaced recently by the much more personable and astute Michael Cocks as Labour chief whip. The Liberal chief whip, Alan Beith, also a great fixer, had an excellent relationship with Michael Cocks, twisting his arm to move the writ for the by-election in Liverpool Edge Hill at the very last minute to ensure polling day, and a victory for the then Liberal, David Alton, and thus a very much needed boost for the party just thirty-five days before the general election. Kirkup's access to cabinet papers shines a welcome light on the important roles played by Freddie Warren, private secretary to the chief whip, and Kenneth Stowe, the prime minister's principal private secretary. Stowe in particular had Callaghan's full confidence and played a very proactive role in keeping the show on the road.

Under the pact every government department had a Liberal 'shadow.' This inevitably required the use of a number Liberal peers, some of whom – such as Nancy Seear and Desmond Banks – were acknowledged to be knowledgeable and influential. Other partnerships were not as fruitful. Jo Grimond and Tony Benn were hardly soulmates, and I recall Jo regaling colleagues with accounts of their less-than-meaningful sessions. 'We had a note presented of the current energy issues and we had a very pleasant chat about the main ones. We then had mugs of tea and five biscuits and I then left.' Benn was permanently infuriating for Callaghan and Cocks and on occasion had to be threatened with dismissal from his cabinet post. When the confidential draft agreement was circulated and handed back at the end of the meeting, Benn secretly retained his copy. I am reminded of Stephen Wall's comment on Benn in his official history of Britain and the European Community: 'Tony Benn's capacity for disingenuous naiveté was inexhaustible.' Interestingly, party favourite Russell Johnston was regarded as a poor negotiator, which I would attribute to Russell's lack of interest in detail, as opposed to his superb perorations in set speeches.

The issue of proportional representation for the direct elections to the European Parliament looms large throughout the book. Thirty-five years later, with PR (albeit of an inferior variety) adopted by consensus for these elections as well as for the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly and for the London Assembly, it seems rather paltry. It was, however, a totem pole for the pact. In some respects it was a case of an irresistible force



meeting an immovable object. The Liberals were absolutely determined to achieve PR for the MEP elections as an important act in itself but also as a tangible sign of the value of the pact. Callaghan and Foot were equally intransigent on the impossibility of whipping their parliamentary colleagues to support it. The argument still continues as to whether it could have been won by more determination on the part of David Steel. He thought not and his style has always been not to confront the obvious. On the other hand, David Owen and Chris Mayhew, a defector to Liberal from Labour three years before, believed that Labour's fear of being turned out by a Thatcher-led Conservative Party would have made it possible. The most David Steel achieved was an undertaking from Callaghan that he personally would support PR for Europe and state so in advance, thus recommending it to cabinet colleagues and Labour MPs. The key vote in the House was lost by 321 to 224. It was a great disappointment to those who had set so much store on winning it but, in fact, it was a considerable step forward in the eternal struggle for electoral reform. Steel's biggest disappointment was over the lack of Conservative support which, he admits, he was naive in relying on. There was no way in which Conservative MPs were going to do anything to prop up the pact. Even so, sixty-one Conservative MPs did vote for PR.

The pact was very much David Steel's creation and it was always clear that he was going to 'manage' it and to undertake its key negotiations personally, often without any colleague present.

Kirkup's use of official papers exposes more than was known at the time of how far Steel ignored party decisions and votes that were aimed at strengthening his negotiating position. It is recorded that, in his negotiations with the prime minister on the renewal of the pact 'he once again did not raise any of the Party Council or Steering Committee recommendations.' This brings us right to David Steel's relations with his party. These were, alas, consistently bad, not just during the pact but also later during the Liberal–SDP alliance and the negotiations over merger with the SDP. He was permanently exasperated with the party and even put his disparagement with it on record. I am sure that this simply provoked negative reactions from a party that wished cooperate and which those in charge worked hard to make helpful and supportive. Certainly he suffered ill-timed and uncalled for vicious personal attacks from Cyril Smith, supported by David Alton, at the first meeting of the parliamentary party following the 1983 election. Party officers were always conscious of the severe electoral consequences of open disloyalty to the leader and, however provoked and disparaged, they swallowed hard and maintained public solidarity.

This was apparent at the special Liberal assembly towards the end of the pact. The September 1977 assembly, faced with the impending renegotiation, agreed to leave it to the party president, Gruff Evans, the party chair, Geoff Tordoff, and the assembly chair, myself, to call a special assembly as and when needed. (We inevitably became known as the Three Wise Men and I recall receiving a phone call midway through December when the familiar nasal tones of Clement Freud asked, 'Can I speak to a wise man before Christmas?') We called this assembly for 21 January 1978 and carefully worded the motions for debate to enable the 'for' and 'against' cases to be fully presented and debated. The motion 'for' was carried by more than a two-thirds majority, which was an excellent example of the judgement and maturity of the party when faced with a potentially disastrous open revolt against the party leader. At the time I regarded it as demonstrating why the leader should leave party management to the party officers and should cooperate and accept advice on party matters. This lesson was not learnt as was shown by the debacle of the 1986 Eastbourne defence debate, the alliance struggles and the 1987 merger negotiations, all of which were avoidable.

Jonathan Kirkup is excellent in analysing the special assembly and, particularly, in emphasising the positive role played by Chris Mayhew which was not recognised at the time. Kirkup is right to conclude that, although there were many good things for politics to emanate from the pact, 'Steel's strategy was ultimately flawed,' but he is, however, I think, wrong in his contention that the pact had no effect on future inter-party relations. It established good relations between a number of Liberal and Labour politicians and created Labour respect for a good number of their Liberal counterparts. Lessons from the pact may indeed well have been in mind when, virtually alone of the party's senior figures, David Steel's support for the coalition in 2010 was couched in the shrewdest possible terms: 'The coalition is a business arrangement born of necessity to clear up the country's dire financial debt. It should never be portrayed as anything else.' Had that judgement been heeded we might have avoided the Rose Garden love-in and the back slapping of Osborne's budget performance and maintained a more winsome appeal to the electorate.

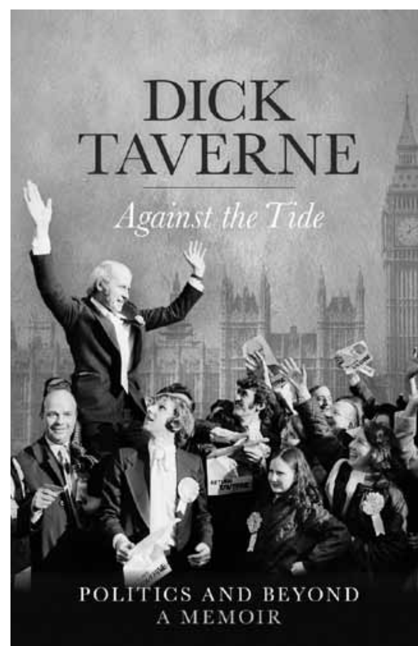
Michael Meadowcroft was MP for Leeds West, 1983–87.

The straight line deviationist

Dick Taverne, *Against the Tide* (Biteback Publishing, 2014)
Review by **Tom McNally**

There is an old Polish joke from Poland's era of Communism and Soviet domination. A political commissar is teaching a political education class. 'This', he says, drawing a squiggly line on the blackboard, 'is the Party line'. He then draws a perfectly straight line on the board. 'And these are the deviationists.'

In a way, the joke sums up the story Dick Taverne has to tell in this immensely readable book. With his



usual candour, he makes it clear from the start that this is not a standard autobiography or political memoir. It is very sparse about Dick's personal life. Which is a pity, since in many political autobiographies it is the details of the early years which are often the most interesting. Certainly, someone who began life born in a house on stilts in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) in 1928 and ended up nearly seventy years later in the House of Lords has a back story which would be worth telling. But this is not that kind of book. It is a book about ideas. It is a book about some of the ideas Dick has had and how he went about putting those ideas in to practice.

Politics can often be a series of grubby compromises and achieving anything needs a willingness to master the art of the possible. If a political life is to be judged by the high number of great offices of state held, then Dick Taverne has only modest achievements to his name. If a political life is judged by consistency of purpose and principle along with an ability to influence the political weather, then this is a story of solid achievement. It is a book which will be of particular interest to Liberal Democrats who come from the Liberal tradition in our party or who have only ever been Liberal Democrats. For, in telling his story, Dick reminds us of the origins of the SDP in the early attempts to reform and modernise the Labour Party under Hugh Gaitskell and how and where our social democratic roots sprang from and developed. In doing so he reminds us how difficult it has been