

# Journal of Liberal

# HISTORY



## Election 2017

John Curtice

**The 2017 election** A missed opportunity?

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Vince Cable

**Old heroes for a new leader** Vince Cable's political hero

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Chris Wrigley

**The Nonconformist mind of Lloyd George**

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Michael Steed

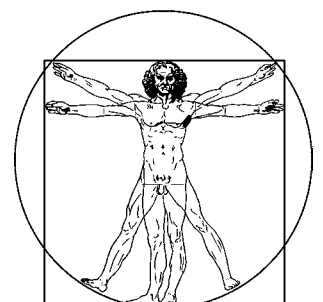
**En Marche!** A new dawn for European liberalism?

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Tim Bale, Monica Poletti and Paul Webb

**The same but different** Lib Dem members in 1999 and 2015

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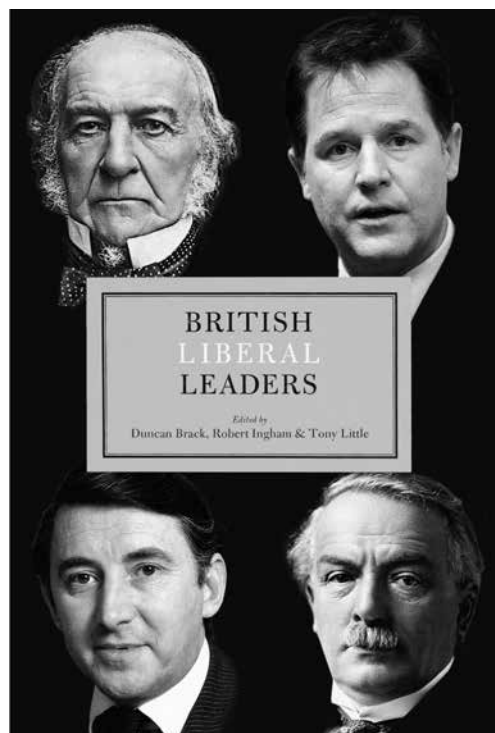
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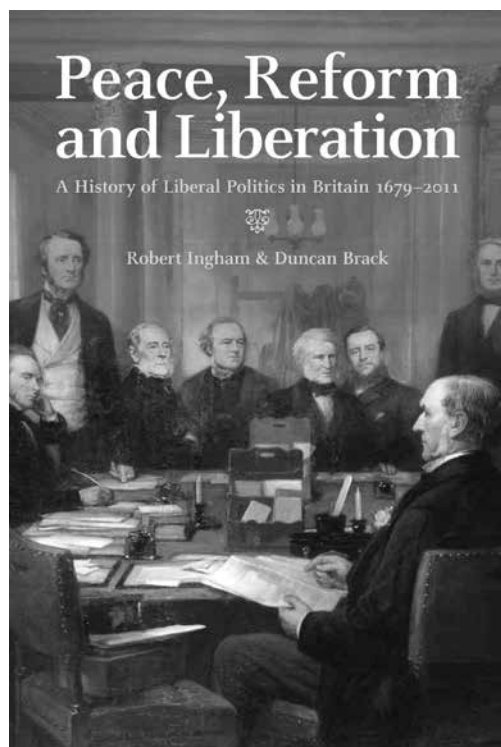
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Cover photo: Tim Farron launches the Liberal Democrat manifesto for the general election, 17 May 2017 (photo: Liberal Democrats)

### Liberal Democrat History Group

The Liberal Democrat History Group promotes the discussion and research of topics relating to the histories of the Liberal Democrats, Liberal Party, and SDP, and of Liberalism. The Group organises discussion meetings and produces the *Journal of Liberal History* and other occasional publications.

For more information, including historical commentaries, details of publications, back issues of the *Journal*, and archive and other research resources, see: [www.liberalhistory.org.uk](http://www.liberalhistory.org.uk).

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Chair: **Tony Little** Honorary President: **Lord Wallace of Saltaire**

# Liberal History News

## Autumn 2017

### Directory of election candidates updated for 2017 election

As reported in issue 94 (spring 2017), the Liberal Democrat History Group's website now features a major new resource for students of post-war Liberal history: a comprehensive directory of all election candidates at every Westminster election from 1945. The first comprehensive biographical index to appear of the individuals who have contested a UK parliamentary election under the designation Liberal, Liberal Democrat and Social Democrat, the directory has now been updated to include candidates at the June 2017 general election. It also includes a considerable number of additions and corrections kindly sent in by individuals who contacted the compiler of the

directory, Lionel King, after we put it on our website in April, together with the results of his own further research.

The directory is presented in separate files covering eleven English regions (Devon and Cornwall, East of England, East Midlands, Greater London, North East, North West, South Central, South East, South West, Yorkshire, West Midlands), and Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales (Westminster elections only, including Alliance Party of Northern Ireland candidates).

A typical entry includes details of birth and death, where known, education (school/college/university), career(s), elected local government

offices held, party offices held, noteworthy distinctions/achievements, honours, publications etc, etc. Information on previous (or subsequent) activities with respect to other political parties is often included. Spouses and family often receive notice. Entries vary in length and presentation, reflecting the scale of the contribution which an individual made to the party and political life in the region or nationally, to parliament or his/her achievements in wider spheres of activity. Opinions expressed with regard to some of the more colourful personalities listed are those generally held.

As before, the History Group would like to express its sincere thanks to Lionel

### On This Day ...

Every day the History Group's website, Facebook page and Twitter feed carry an item of Liberal history news from the past. Below we reprint three. To see them regularly, look at [www.liberalhistory.org.uk](http://www.liberalhistory.org.uk) or [www.facebook.com/LibDemHistoryGroup](https://www.facebook.com/LibDemHistoryGroup) or follow us at: **LibHistoryToday**.

#### September

*4 September 1825:* Birth of Dadabhai Naoroji in Khadka near Mumbai. He became the first Indian professor of mathematics and served as Prime Minister of Boroda in the 1870s and was three times President of the Indian National Congress. Naoroji first visited England in 1855 and returned in the early 1880s. He was chosen to fight Holborn for the Liberals in the general election of 1886. He lost, but secured nomination for Central Finsbury and at the election of 1892 gained the seat from the Tories by five votes, becoming the first non-white person to be elected to parliament. Although he lost his seat in 1895, his influence both in the UK and India was and remains considerable.

#### October

*18 October 1990:* David Bellotti wins Eastbourne for the Liberal Democrats in a by-election caused by the murder of sitting Conservative MP Ian Gow by the IRA. Bellotti gains the seat with a majority of 4,550, on 50.8 per cent of the vote. Liberal Democrat Leader Paddy Ashdown celebrates, describing the win as his best day as Leader of the Liberal Democrats. Just a week before, at the Conservative Party conference, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher had used Monty Python's 'dead parrot' sketch to mock the Liberal Democrats' newly-designed bird of liberty logo. After the by-election, Conservative Party Chairman Kenneth Baker commented that: 'the parrot twitched'. Six weeks later Conservative MPs removed Mrs Thatcher as their leader.

#### December

*5 December 1916:* Herbert Asquith resigns as Prime Minister. The crisis that led to the Prime Minister's resignation had been building for over a month. Concern at the military weakness in the British army at the Battle of the Somme led Lloyd George to call for a restructuring of the War Council with himself as chairman. Although not completely opposed to Lloyd George's proposals, Asquith could not accept that the Prime Minister would not chair the Council not continue to be a member of it. Protracted negotiations ensued until Lloyd George forced the issue by tendering his resignation. The Unionist ministers sided with Lloyd George and indicated their preparedness to serve in a government headed by Lloyd George. This was the last straw for Asquith and at 7pm he saw King George V to offer his resignation. British politics – but his rivalry with Asquith split the Liberal Party and contributed to its post-war eclipse by Labour.

King, who was himself a parliamentary candidate (Kidderminster 1964, Sutton Coldfield 1970, Walsall South 1987).

Any further corrections and additional information from readers will be most welcome; please send emails to Lionel King on [lionelking1964@btinternet.com](mailto:lionelking1964@btinternet.com).

The directory can be found at <http://www.liberalhistory.org.uk/resources-type/election-candidates-directory>; or, just navigate to the 'Resources' section of the Liberal Democrat History Group website.

### Obituaries

Many thanks to Nigel Lindsay and his colleagues for supplying the obituary of Sandy Waugh (below). Remembering the lives of long-standing activists such as Sandy is just as important to Liberal history as are the records of the achievements of MPs and peers on whom we publish longer biographical articles. The *Journal* is always happy to publish obituaries of the foot soldiers of Liberalism such as Sandy.

This is not restricted to activists who have died recently. If any readers have collections of the former party newspapers, *Liberal News*, *The Social Democrat* and *Liberal Democrat News*, reprints of similar pieces would be of interest. Please contact the Editor.

### Future meetings schedule

- Sunday 17 September, Liberal Democrat conference, Bournemouth: **Liberals in Local Government, 1967–2017** (see back page for full details)
- Monday 5 February 2018: History Group AGM and speaker meeting – **Election 2017 in historical perspective**, with Professor Phil Cowley and James Gurling (chair, Liberal Democrat Federal Campaigns and Elections Committee)
- March 2018, Liberal Democrat spring conference, Southport: details to be announced
- June / July 2018, London: details to be announced

### Corrigenda

The review of Dick Leonard's book *A History Of British Prime Ministers: Walpole to Cameron*, in *Journal of Liberal History* 95 (summer 2017), incorrectly stated that there were no illustrations in the

paperback edition. In fact the same 53 portraits that are included in the hardback version do appear, between pages 433 and 434. The only difference is that

### In memory of Sandy Waugh, 1934–2017

Readers will be sorry to learn of the death, on 28 July, of Dr Alexander (Sandy) S. Waugh. Sandy joined the Liberal Party in 1950, and must have been one of the longest serving members of the party at the time of his death. He played a major part in the revival of Liberalism in Scotland, first in Glasgow and then in West Aberdeenshire. He was instrumental in the election of James Davidson as MP for West Aberdeenshire in 1966, in Nicol Stephen's 1991 Kincardine & Deeside by-election win, and in a number of other triumphs in Westminster and Holyrood elections.

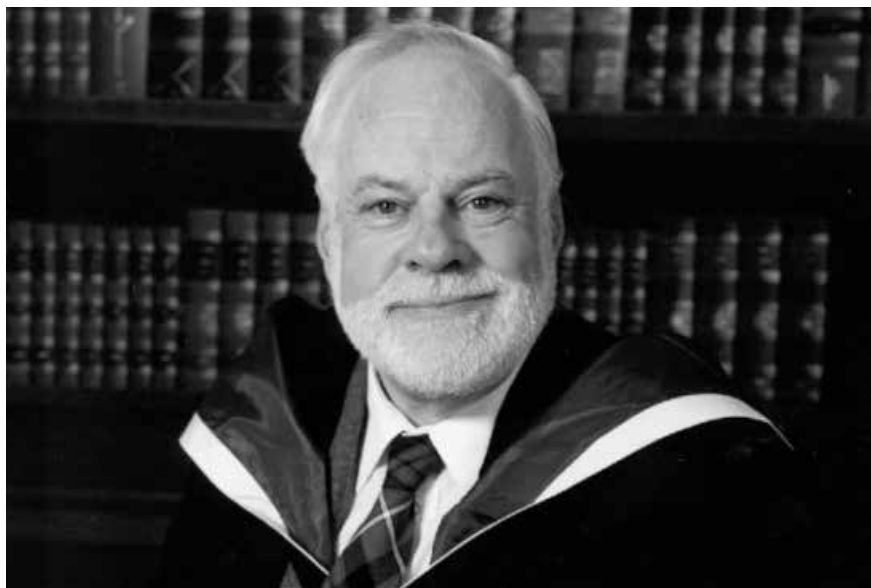
Sandy Waugh was born in Glasgow and attended the High School of Glasgow. He was always proud that this had also been the school of the most Liberal of Prime Ministers, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman. While there, he met Edwin Donaldson, who had been a Liberal candidate in the 1922 and 1923 general elections. Sandy attended his first meeting of the Scottish Liberal Party's General Council in 1955, preparatory to a general election in which Liberals fielded only five candidates in Scotland, but set to work with other Liberals in the Glasgow area to build the party's capacity. That work bore fruit in 1961 when, as secretary of the campaign committee in the Paisley by-election, Sandy contributed to an astounding result in which the late John M. Bannerman almost took the seat, gaining

the illustrations are not printed on plates, but on the same quality paper as the rest of the book. Our sincere apologies to Mr Leonard, and our readers, for the error.

41.4 per cent of the vote for the Liberals. In the following year he played an important part in the Glasgow Woodside by-election, where the writer and broadcaster Jack House polled a remarkably high 21 per cent of the vote.

Sandy moved to the Aberdeen area in 1965, to take up a post as personnel manager of Aberdeen Journals Ltd, just in time to apply his management skills in West Aberdeenshire. There James Davidson had taken second place in 1964, despite the seat not having been contested by Liberals at the previous general election. With others, Sandy ensured the financial and organisational preparedness of the constituency association. By the time the snowy polling day of 1966 arrived, there was great optimism in the Liberal camp, eventually justified by a vote of 43.2 per cent, which sufficed to unseat the Conservative and elect James Davidson.

Soon after that, Sandy became constituency chairman and was embroiled in the difficult matter of selecting and campaigning for a successor when Davidson decided not to contest the seat again. Laura Grimond was selected, with Sandy of course chairman of the meeting. A colleague remembers him telling the audience to listen carefully to the words of the motion which he was to put to the meeting to avoid any reference to her selection as a candidate. These were: 'This Association thanks Mrs Grimond



for her speech and expresses the hope that, at the appropriate time, she will make herself available to be adopted as the Liberal candidate for West Aberdeenshire'. This was typical of Sandy's attention to detail and propriety.

He went on to campaign actively for EU membership in the 1975 referendum, before moving house to what was then the North Angus & Mearns constituency later that year, where he threw himself into work for his new political home. Selected a few years later as Liberal-Alliance candidate for the newly-created constituency of Kincardine & Deeside in the 1983 general election, Sandy gained a creditable 29.4 per cent of the vote. He gave generous support to the candidate who succeeded him at the 1987 general election, Nicol Stephen, who went on to take the seat at a famous by-election in 1991. Sandy instead stood in the 1986 elections for Grampian Regional Council. He polled 46.5 per cent of the votes, just 179 votes behind the well-established Tory.

Like Gladstone (of whom, incidentally, he did not much approve) Sandy Waugh was as keen a churchman as a politician. He was an Elder and the Session Clerk of his Parish Church, and in retirement took up academic study of divinity and theology at the University of Aberdeen, graduating with honours in 1999 and going on to gain a PhD with a thesis on church history, focusing on the Disruption of 1843 – a rich source of Liberal as well as ecclesiastical activity.

Dr Waugh (as he now was) continued his political activities, though by now ill-health meant these were more literary than organisational. He had his first letter to a newspaper published in 1953, and by the time of his death had averaged one letter published each month in various newspapers, magazines and periodicals (including the *Journal of Liberal History*). Always pithy, accurate and well-aimed, they usually contained an element of humour as well. He remained happy to share his learning.

This work was supplemented by monographs on many Liberal subjects, each of which is scholarly but readable, and any one of which would make an interesting contribution to the *Journal*. Subjects included 'The Gladstone Political Dynasty', 'The Bright and McLaren Political Dynasties', 'William Mather Rutherford Pringle', 'Lloyd George vs. the Exchange Telegraph Company', 'Glasgow High School Parliamentarians', 'Liberal Hegemony in Scotland, 1832–1918' and 'The Liberal and Labour Parties to 1929'.

Sandy also wrote and made presentations on church matters and Liberal topics to a surprising range of audiences. He made a memorable presentation on 'Aspects of Scottish and Welsh Liberalism' to the Lloyd George Society in Llandrindod Wells in 2012, not long after preparing and presenting a learned paper on the quatercentenary of the King James Bible to friends and scholars in his home town.

Sandy Waugh succeeded in combining political activism with a sense of history. An account of the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314 was to him incomplete without links to the crusaders of Acre in 1271, and his doctoral thesis on the Disruption of 1843 went back to thirteenth-century Scotland and King William the Lion. I recall him giving an address to Aberdeen University Liberal Club fifty years ago in which – only partly in jest – he traced the origins of the Vietnam War back to Charlemagne.

Much though he enjoyed exploring historical byways, the chief subject of Sandy Waugh's Liberal academic interest was Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman whom, in common with many Scottish Liberals, he regarded as the greatest of Liberal Prime Ministers. Like Sandy, Sir Henry was a Scot, a Radical, a former pupil of the High School of Glasgow, and a man who was forthright in word and deed. At the time of his death, Sandy had completed a major work on CB: 'Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman – A Scottish Life and UK Politics 1836–1908'. This scrupulously researched and comprehensive book is now being prepared for publication and is expected to be available early in 2018.

Sandy Waugh's Liberalism was unflinching in thought and deed. He will be remembered fondly by Liberals who knew him not only as an effective colleague but as a good and reliable friend.

*Nigel Lindsay*

# Think history

## Can you spare some time to help the Liberal Democrat History Group?

The History Group undertakes a wide range of activities – publishing this *Journal* and our Liberal history books and booklets, organising regular speaker meetings, maintaining the Liberal history website and providing assistance with research.

We'd like to do more, but our activities are limited by the number of people involved in running the Group. We would be enormously grateful for help with:

- Improving our website.
- Helping with our presence at Liberal Democrat conferences.
- Organising our meeting programme.
- Publicising our activities, through both social media and more traditional means.
- Running the organisation.

If you'd like to be involved in any of these activities, or anything else, contact the Editor, **Duncan Brack** ([journal@liberalhistory.org.uk](mailto:journal@liberalhistory.org.uk)) – we would love to hear from you.

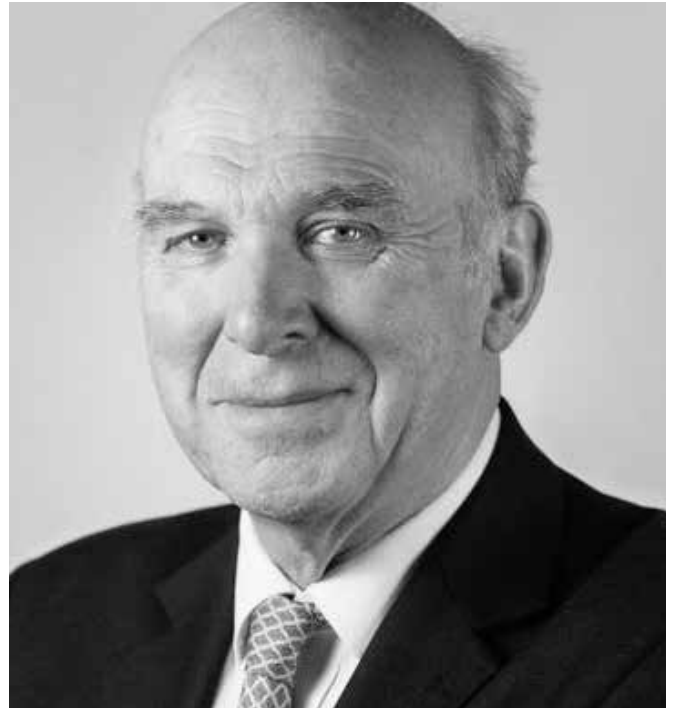
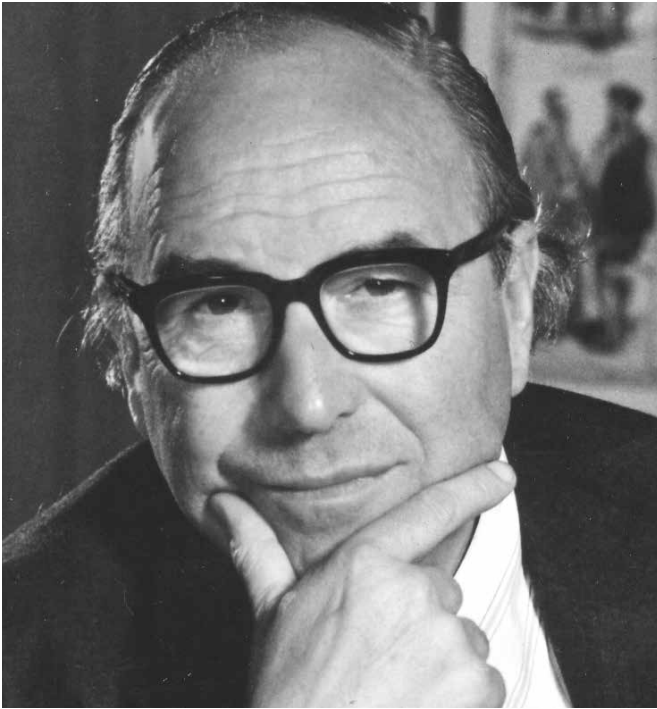


## Political heroes

Vince Cable describes why Roy Jenkins is his political inspiration

# Old Heroes for a New Leader

As we have in each of the last four Liberal Democrat leadership elections, in 1999, 2006, 2007 and 2015, in July this year the Liberal Democrat History Group prepared to ask the candidates for the Liberal Democrat leadership to write a short article on their favourite historical figure or figures – the ones they felt had influenced their own political beliefs most, and why they had proved important and relevant. In the end the election was not contested, but the sole candidate, Vince Cable, kindly provided us with the following article.



I CHOOSE ROY JENKINS as my political hero since his lifetime political journey from Labour social democrat to Liberal Democrat – strongly European, liberal, a believer in the power of government to shape things for the better – reflects and inspired my own journey.

He wasn't my first choice. I originally opted for Anthony Crosland, whose thought and writings made a bigger impact on me at an earlier stage. But Crosland died prematurely, in 1976, and never completed the political journey; nor can we be sure he would have, had he lived. But, reading about Jenkins' history, I realised that in choosing him I was getting two for the price of one. Crosland was Jenkins' friend and political mentor – indeed, subsequent biography has established that they were lovers as students; their intimacy was political, intellectual and physical. The two of them represented that fusion of social democrat and liberal ideas, and pro-European identity, which came to dominate the centre ground of British politics.

Jenkins was Labour aristocracy. His father was a former miner, a mining union official who served time in prison after speaking at a

demonstration which turned violent, and then became an MP. The leaders of the Labour Party – Attlee, Morrison, Dalton – were family friends who encouraged Roy's political interest as a teenager and smoothed his path into parliament and his early career. He was academically bright and went to Balliol, Oxford, to read PPE, fraternising with such political contemporaries as Edward Heath, Denis Healey and Mark Bonham Carter, debating in the Union and falling under the spell of Anthony Crosland.

His politics were mainstream Labour and he became part of the post-war, idealistic generation which believed passionately in the model of socialism enacted under Attlee's government. He first became an MP in a by-election (Central Southwark) in 1948, aged 27: an economist, a loyalist and clearly destined for higher things. He described himself then as a socialist, without awkwardness.

Cracks started to appear after the Labour government fell in 1951, exhausted, and Labour took to feuding between the supporters of Hugh Gaitskell and Nye Bevan. Jenkins was clearly in the former camp. His writings became less

socialist, more eclectic. Then in 1956 his friend Crosland produced *The Future of Socialism*, which was a clear intellectual break from the left: nationalisation was increasingly seen as largely irrelevant; what mattered was economic competence leading to faster growth financing improving public services, consumer goods for the working class and increasingly liberal, and European, lifestyles. Crosland's work inspired a generation of social democrats, including Jenkins – and also me (I read the book for the first time aged 18 and together with the contemporaneous writings of J. K. Galbraith in the US and the speeches of Jo Grimond, it helped to frame my own approach to politics, on the fault line between Labour and the Liberals).

Jenkins developed this social democratic thinking in his 1959 book, *The Labour Case*, albeit amidst many of the Labour orthodoxies of the time. This book also opened up a new strand of radical reforming liberalism, making the case for abolition of the death penalty, reform of the law on homosexuality, divorce and abortion, humanising immigration, decriminalising suicide and much else.

As the battles within the Labour Party became more bitter – over nationalisation and nuclear weapons – Jenkins discovered the cause that, more than any other, defined him: Europe. Harold Wilson was, however, initially able to bridge the gap between left and right and get Labour into government, after thirteen years' absence, in 1964. Jenkins was (after a delay) given the Home Office, where he embarked upon the purpose of social reform which cemented his reputation as a true liberal.

Jenkins' long goodbye to the Labour Party revolved around disagreements about Europe in the second Wilson government after 1974. A referendum secured Britain's position in the EU but the Labour Party was seriously divided over the issue, as it was over NATO, industrial

relations policy and the austerity measures that followed from the intervention of the IMF. Jenkins embraced exile in the form of chairmanship of the European Commission, a perfect position in which to establish his credentials as a European statesman and to develop serious thinking about Britain's position in Europe.

Brussels was also where Jenkins began to prepare the split from Labour in the form of the SDP and to build bridges to David Steel's Liberals, which later became the SDP–Liberal Alliance and, thence, the Lib Dems. His finest hour was probably the Hillhead by-election in 1982 where he showed courage in taking on a massive challenge in a city with its own distinctive political culture and of which he had no experience. He gambled and won, giving the SDP enormous credibility (having been a councillor in Glasgow and fought the Hillhead seat myself, for Labour, I can attest to the scale of the task he took on).

The Hillhead campaign also helped to defuse the criticism that he was becoming rather grand and aloof. His critics pointed to the fact that he had developed a taste not just for fine wines but for the company of socialites and the seriously rich. He developed a mannered, rather pompous, style of speaking which became something of a liability in TV interviews (though he could be brilliant with live audiences, as I experienced as a candidate in the 1983 election in York).

He was, flaws and all, one of the most important and influential figures in post-war politics. His copious and brilliant biographical writing would, by itself, mark him out for distinction. He did not just write about but gave substance in office to what we mean both by social democracy and liberalism. And he launched a new political party which, in the form of the Lib Dems, I am now privileged to lead. What would, however, have broken his heart would be to see his legacy of Britain as a European nation trashed today by lesser political mortals.

# Liberal Democrat Leadership

In the summer 2014 edition of the *Journal of Liberal History* (issue 83), a special issue on the first twenty-five years of the Liberal Democrats, we included an article on 'Liberal Democrat leadership' by Duncan Brack. The article included a table comparing the performance of the four Liberal Democrat leaders until 2014 in terms of their personal ratings and party ratings in the opinion polls, performance in general, European and local elections and numbers of party members, at the beginning and end of their leaderships.

Although these statistics of course ignore the political context of the leader's period in office, and can mask large swings within the period – and other, non-quantitative, measures of a leader's performance may be just as, if not more, important – these figures do have value in judging the effectiveness of any given leader.

We have therefore reproduced the table in this issue, extended to include the end of Nick Clegg's leadership, and the whole of Tim Farron's leadership. We hope readers find it of interest.



Leadership performance										
	Ashdown (1988–99)		Kennedy (1999–2006)		Campbell (2006–07)		Clegg (2007–15)		Farron (2015–17)	
<i>Personal ratings (net score satisfied minus dissatisfied (per cent) and date)<sup>a</sup></i>										
When elected	-4	Aug 1988	+11	Aug 1999	+5	Mar 2006	-3	Jan 2008	-7	Sept 2015
Highest during leadership	+58	May 1997	+42	June 2001	+6	May 2006	+53	Oct 2010	-1	Dec 2016
Lowest during leadership	-24	July 1989	+8	June 2004	-13	May 2007	-45	Oct 2012, Sept 2014	-19	May 2017
When stood down	+39	July 1999	+20	Aug 2005	-11	Sept 2007	-21	April 2015	-19	May 2017
Range (highest – lowest)	82		34		19		98		18	
<i>Party poll ratings (per cent and date)<sup>b</sup></i>										
When elected	8	July 1988	17	Aug 1999	19	Mar 2006	14	Dec 2007	10	Sept 2015
Highest during leadership	28	July 1993	26	Dec 2004, May 2005	25	Apr 2006	32	Apr 2010	14	Dec 2016
Lowest during leadership	4	June – Aug, Nov 1989	11	Oct 99, July 00, Jan, May 01	11	Oct 2007	6	Feb 2015	6	Feb, Apr, Sept 2016
When stood down	17	Aug 1999	15	Jan 2006	11	Oct 2007	8	May 2015	7	June 2017
<i>Westminster election performance: Liberal Democrat MPs and vote (%)</i>										
MPs when elected	19		46		63 <sup>c</sup>		63		8	
MPs when stood down	46		62		63		8		12	
Highest election vote (% , date)	17.8	1992	22.0	2005	n/a		23.0	2010	7.4	2017
Lowest election vote (% , date)	16.8	1997	18.3	2001	n/a		7.9	2015	n/a	
<i>European election performance: Liberal Democrat MEPs and vote (%)</i>										
MEPs when elected	0		10		12		12		1	
MEPs when stood down	10		12		12		1		1	
Highest election vote (% , date)	16.7	1994	14.9	2004	n/a		13.7	2009	n/a	
Lowest election vote (% , date)	6.4	1989	n/a		n/a		6.6	2014	n/a	
<i>Local election performance: councillors and vote<sup>d,e</sup></i>										
Councillors when elected	3,640		4,485		4,743		4,420		1,810	
Councillors when stood down	4,485		4,743		4,420		1,810		1,803	
Highest election vote (% , date)	27	1994	27	2003, 2004	25	2006	25	2009	18	2017
Lowest election vote (% , date)	17	1990	25	2002	24	2007	11	2014	15	2016
<i>Party membership<sup>f,g</sup></i>										
Membership when elected	80,104		82,827		72,064		64,728		60,500	
Membership when stood down	82,827		~72,000		~64,000		45,455		~102,000 <sup>h</sup>	
Change (per cent)	+3.4		-13.1		-11.2		-29.8		+68.6	

a Ipsos-MORI series on ‘satisfaction with party leaders’. Ratings are given for the nearest available date to the leader’s election or resignation.

b Ipsos-MORI series on ‘voting intention trends’.

c Willie Rennie was elected in the Dunfermline & West Fife by-election during the 2006 leadership election.

d Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher, Elections Centre, Plymouth University. For voting figures, years in which local elections coincided with general elections are excluded.

e The total number of councillors has been falling since the mid 1990s, as unitary authorities

have replaced district councils in some areas; from 1994 to 2013, for example, the total number of councillors fell by about 15 per cent.

f Mark Pack. ‘Liberal Democrat membership figures’, <https://www.markpack.org.uk/143767/liberal-democrat-membership-figures/>; Liberal Democrat HQ.

g Ashdown and Farron each announced their intention to resign in advance, and actually stood down on the election of their successor; the membership figures for the end of their period in office and the start of their successor’s are therefore identical. Kennedy, Campbell and Clegg all resigned with immediate effect; the exact membership figures are not

available for those dates (with the exception of Clegg’s), so figures given here are approximate. While we know that membership increased sharply after Clegg’s resignation, in the run-up to the 2015 leadership election, it is not known whether this happened after Kennedy’s resignation in 2006 or Campbell’s in 2007.

h Since no leadership election took place, there is no confirmed party membership total for July 2017. Liberal Democrat Voice reported on 3 May that membership had reached 101,768, and it is likely that it rose further during the general election campaign.

## Election analysis

Professor John Curtice examines the Liberal Democrat performance in the general election of June 2017.

# The 2017 Election: A



**T**HERESA MAY'S UNEXPECTED announcement on 18 April 2017 that she wanted to hold an early general election must have seemed to the Liberal Democrats at the time like a heaven-sent opportunity. The party's success in the Richmond by-election, held in December 2016, and some improvement in its position in the opinion polls after the June 2016 EU referendum suggested that its distinctive policy position on Brexit – that the UK should not leave the EU until a second referendum has been held on the outcome of the withdrawal negotiations – was capable of winning over some of the substantial body of Remain voters who are not reconciled to the prospect of the UK no longer being part of the European club. Consequently, the early election, called explicitly by the prime minister to secure a mandate for her vision of Brexit, looked like an unexpectedly early opportunity for the Liberal Democrats to reverse some of the catastrophic electoral damage the party had suffered two years previously in the 2015 general election.

Yet in the event the election, held on the 8 June, saw the party make very little progress. Indeed, at 7.6 per cent, the party's share of the Britain-wide vote was actually half a point below what the party secured in 2015. It represented the lowest share of the vote for the Liberals/Liberal Democrats at any election since 1970 – and in 1970 the party fought only just over half of all the constituencies, rather than, as in 2017, all bar three. Indeed, once we take into account the number of seats fought, the performance in 2017 was probably second only to the 1951 election in the league table of worst Liberal/Liberal Democrat performances. True, the party did secure a modest increase in its tally of seats, from eight to twelve, but, 2015 apart, this still left the party with fewer seats than at any election since 1970. No less than half of the seats the party was defending were actually lost, as was the by-election gain in Richmond. Meanwhile, although a collapse in UKIP support meant that the party was restored once more to its position as the third largest party in

# Missed Opportunity?

England, it still found itself conceding to the SNP the position of third largest party in the House of Commons.

Any analysis of the party's performance in the 2017 election is thus essentially a study in apparent failure – why did the party do little more than tread water rather than achieve a significant advance? Of course, explaining why change did not happen is more difficult than accounting for a trend that actually did occur. We have to try and identify what was missing in the campaign that might otherwise have made a difference, an inevitably somewhat speculative enterprise. Still, as we shall see, there is certainly no shortage of potential candidates.

## The backdrop

After five years in coalition with the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats' vote fell precipitously in the 2015 election from 23 per cent to just 8 per cent, with the number of seats falling from fifty-seven to eight. Many a voter never seemed to forgive the party either for forming a coalition in 2010 with the Conservatives in the first place or else for making a dramatic U-turn in the autumn of 2010 on the question of English university fees. Meanwhile, as the country headed immediately after the 2015 ballot into a referendum on its membership of the European Union, there was little immediate sign of recovery. The party's rating in the polls continued to hover at around the 8 per cent mark. At the same time, although, latterly at least, less unpopular than his predecessor, Nick Clegg, had been, the party's new leader, Tim Farron, seemingly struggled to make much of an impression on voters. Moreover, although the party was more successful than either the Conservatives or Labour in persuading its much-diminished band of supporters to vote to remain in the EU, it was still the case that as many as around one in four voted to leave.<sup>1</sup>

However, in line with its long-standing position as the most pro-European of the parties in Britain, the party reacted to the narrow vote in favour of leaving the EU by adopting the position that the UK should only leave the EU following a second referendum held on completion of the

negotiation of the terms of the UK's withdrawal. If a majority of voters were to reject those terms, the UK would stay in the EU. That, of course, meant that those who voted against the proposed deal on the grounds that the terms were inadequate (rather than because they opposed withdrawal) would find themselves voting to stay in the EU. It thus looked like a device designed to favour the status quo – and the Liberal Democrats' preferred option – of EU membership. The party was evidently hoping and anticipating that this second referendum would serve to reverse the initial decision to leave the EU.

By the autumn this distinctive stance on Brexit looked as though it was beginning to reap dividends. The party's poll rating began to climb into double figures, albeit only just; this progress was both underlined and reinforced by the party's success in winning a by-election in Richmond Park – a seat in which it had long been relatively strong and where nearly three in four had voted to remain in the EU. The increase in support in the polls occurred almost wholly amongst those who voted to Remain, amongst whom, according to YouGov, support for the party increased from 13 per cent in the summer of 2016 to 19 per cent by January 2017. (In contrast, support amongst those who voted to Leave stayed constant at just 3 per cent.) This progress, which seemed to be made primarily at the expense of a Labour Party that had adopted a much more ambiguous stance on Brexit, was then maintained during the winter. By the beginning of April one-fifth of Remain voters in YouGov's polls said that they were now backing the Liberal Democrats.

True, the party was seemingly aiming for a niche market of those who were most opposed to leaving the EU. At the turn of the year, polls conducted by ComRes, Opinium and YouGov all suggested that only around a third of all voters – and no more than two-thirds of those who voted to Remain – supported the idea of a second referendum. But, if the party could attract the support of just half this group, that would enable it to double the share of the vote it won in 2015 and put it discernibly back on the road to recovery. Given many of these pro-second referendum voters were young, socially liberal graduates, a demographic

Left: Tim Farron with Layla Moran (candidate for Oxford West & Abingdon) and supporters, 3 May 2017 (photo: Liberal Democrats)

## The 2017 Election: A Missed Opportunity?

group amongst whom the party has always performed relatively well, and given too that the party typically thrives on the oxygen of the extra publicity that it secures in a general election campaign, such an ambition seemed not unreasonable.

### The campaign

But if this strategy was to work voters needed not only to approve of the party's position but also to recognise it. In this it is far from clear that the party was successful. Table 1 shows where, in the course of the election campaign, those who voted Remain thought the four main GB-wide parties stood on Brexit. Only just over a quarter of the Liberal Democrats' target audience recognised the party wanted a second referendum, albeit that another quarter recognised that it was opposed to Brexit. Meanwhile almost two in five (39 per cent) either felt that the party did not have a clear policy or said they were not sure what it was.

True, many a Remain voter was none too clear where Labour and the Conservatives stood either. But more Remain voters recognised that the Conservatives were in favour of a 'hard Brexit' and, equally, more such voters identified Labour with a soft Brexit position than stated that the Liberal Democrats were in favour of a second referendum. Given that the second referendum was meant to be the party's central message in the

campaign, this was potentially a serious weakness in its attempts to win over Remain voters.

Perhaps, just as importantly, Remain voters did not necessarily recognise where the party stood on one of the central issues in the Brexit debate, immigration. In the same YouGov poll, just 34 per cent of Remain voters said that the Liberal Democrats wished to maintain the current level of immigration, considerably less than the 45 per cent who reckoned that was where Labour stood, let alone the 62 per cent who associated the Conservatives with a reduction in immigration. No less than 48 per cent said that they either were not sure what the party's stance on immigration was or that it was not clear. It seems as though one of the central reasons why the party wanted the UK to stay in the EU – to retain freedom of movement – was not appreciated by many voters. In those circumstances, it is perhaps not surprising that the party's stance on Brexit did not have the resonance that the party anticipated.

In practice, of course, elections are rarely about one issue, as indeed Theresa May discovered to her cost during the election campaign. If they were to win voters over, the Liberal Democrats would need some other popular tunes too. These were largely notable by their absence.

In Table 2 we show how both Remain voters in particular and all voters in general reacted to some of the key proposals in the party's manifesto

**Table 1: Perceptions of the Brexit stances of the parties amongst Remain voters (percentages)**

	<i>Conservatives</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Lib Dems</i>	<i>UKIP</i>
They are opposed to Brexit and would like Britain to remain in the European Union	4	12	26	1
They opposed Brexit and would like to have a second referendum once negotiations are complete	2	9	28	0
They accept Brexit, but would like Britain to have a 'soft Brexit' and retain the benefits of the single market	21	37	6	1
They support Brexit and would like Britain to leave the European Union completely and negotiate a new trade deal	41	4	1	70
They do not have any clear policy.	20	23	11	14
Not sure	11	15	28	14

Source: YouGov 9–10 May 2017

**Table 2: Attitudes towards Liberal Democrat manifesto policies (percentages)**

	<i>Remain voters</i>		<i>All voters</i>	
	<i>Good idea</i>	<i>Wrong priority</i>	<i>Good idea</i>	<i>Wrong priority</i>
Increase the basic rate of income tax from 20% to 21% and spend the money raised on the NHS and social care	66	22	56	28
Ban the sale of diesel cars and vans by 2025	45	36	35	42
Allow cannabis to be sold legally through licensed outlets	40	47	35	52
Hold a second referendum on the EU after negotiations are complete, to decide if Britain accepts the deal or wants to remain in the EU after all	58	31	34	54
Reduce the voting age to 16	42	47	29	60

Source: YouGov 18–19 May 2017

shortly after it was published in the middle of the election campaign. One proposal that does appear to have been relatively popular was to increase the basic rate of income tax by a penny in the pound in order to spend more on health, a proposal that was first aired at the party's autumn conference in 2016. Even so, it might have been thought to represent a rather sharp gear change for a party that had spent its time in coalition pushing for reductions in income tax. Otherwise, although rather more popular amongst Remain voters than amongst voters in general, none of the party's other policy positions was backed by a majority of voters. In contrast, when YouGov undertook a similar exercise in respect of the Labour manifesto, four of the six policies that were tested had more supporters than opponents, including increasing income tax on those earning more than £80K and nationalising some public utilities. The Liberal Democrats seem to have been outperformed by Labour when it came to finding a medley of popular policy tunes.

Meanwhile, elections are not just about policy. They are also about personnel. Britain's third party has long been reliant on charismatic leaders and effective communicators, such as Jeremy Thorpe, Paddy Ashdown and (in the 2010 election at least) Nick Clegg, to grab the attention of the media and thereby the public. However, Tim Farron struggled to make an impression. In five polls conducted by Opinium between the beginning of the year and the calling of the election, on average just 15 per cent said that they approved of his performance as Liberal Democrat leader, while 34 per cent indicated that they disapproved. A half simply said that they neither approved nor disapproved. The increased exposure that came with the general election did nothing to turn these numbers around. In eight polls that the company conducted during the election campaign, the proportion who told Opinium that they approved of Mr Farron's leadership simply oscillated between 14 per cent and 18 per cent and in the company's final poll stood at 16 per cent, little different from what it had been before the election was called. Meanwhile the proportion who said they disapproved, which varied between 35 per cent and 40 per cent and ended up on 37 per cent was, if anything, slightly higher than it had been immediately before the election. This was not a backdrop that was conducive to a Liberal Democrat revival.

### The dynamics of the campaign

Indeed, far from reviving, the party's support actually fell back during the campaign. An initial average poll rating of 11 per cent had by the end of the campaign fallen to just 7 per cent, only a little below the party's actual tally in the ballot boxes of 7.6 per cent. This was the first time since 1987 that the party had seen its support end up lower at the end of an election campaign than it had been at the beginning. The drop was not the result of

### It was Labour, not the Liberal Democrats, who gained ground amongst Remain voters during the campaign.

Leave voters taking fright at its support for a second independence referendum. According to a large poll conducted by YouGov immediately after the election, at 3 per cent the party's level of support amongst such voters was exactly the same on polling day as it had been when the election was called. Rather, the party lost ground amongst the very group to which it was trying to appeal, that is, those who voted to Remain in the EU. Just 12 per cent of this group voted for the party, well down on the 20 per cent who, according to YouGov, were minded to do so when the election was first called. ICM identified much the same pattern, with support for the party amongst Remain voters falling from 16 per cent in March and early April to 12 per cent during the last fortnight or so of the campaign.

It was Labour, not the Liberal Democrats, who gained ground amongst Remain voters during the campaign. When the election was called, just 35 per cent of Remain voters (according to YouGov) said they intended to vote Labour. By polling day that figure had increased to no less than 55 per cent. Although Labour also made gains amongst those who voted to Leave, the increase in support amongst this group, at eleven points, was little more than half the 20 point increase amongst Remain supporters. Moreover, Labour's successful pitch to Remain voters appears to have had a direct impact on Liberal Democrat support. At the outset of the campaign, just 11 per cent of those who said they voted for the Liberal Democrats in 2015 indicated that they would now vote Labour; by polling day, no less than 34 per cent had decided to make that switch. Equally, whereas when the election was called 13 per cent were minded to switch from having voted Labour in 2015 to voting Liberal Democrat this time around, in the event just 5 per cent did so.

In short, it was not just Theresa May's hopes for the election that were scuppered by the dramatic increase in Labour support during the 2017 election campaign – so also were those of the Liberal Democrats. Labour, who we have seen was quite widely regarded as being in favour of a relatively soft Brexit, made a successful pitch for the very kind of voter that the Liberal Democrats had been targeting. Indeed, it looks as though during the campaign Labour reclaimed from the Liberal Democrats much of the support amongst Remain voters that Jeremy Corbyn's party had seemed to lose to the Liberal Democrats during the previous autumn. The hopes generated by the Richmond by-election were well and truly dashed.

### The outcome in perspective

Indeed, in the event, the party proved to be barely any stronger amongst Remain voters than it had been amongst such voters in 2015. According to YouGov the 12 per cent support that the party secured amongst Remain voters was just one point above what it had secured amongst the same

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group of voters two years previously, while the 3 per cent support registered amongst Leave voters represented just a two-point drop. Similar polling conducted on and around polling day by Lord Ashcroft suggests the party made even less relative progress amongst Remain voters. His data suggest the party had the same level of support, 14 per cent, amongst Remain voters as it had had in 2015, while its popularity slipped just a little, from 5 per cent to 4 per cent, amongst Leave supporters.

Much the same pattern emerges if we look at the party's relative performance in different kinds of constituency. On average its share of the vote fell back by 1.1 points in seats where it is estimated that 55 per cent or more of the EU referendum vote went to Leave, its vote dropped a little less, by half a point, in seats where the Leave vote was between 45 per cent and 55 per cent, while it just increased – by 0.3 of a point, in the most pro-Remain constituencies where Leave won less than 45 per cent. Although, as we shall see below, there were some kinds of pro-Remain constituencies where the party did make a notable advance, across Britain as a whole the party made no more than slightly more progress in Remain voting areas.

In other respects too, the party's vote looks much as it did two years earlier. There is, for example, little consistent evidence that it made particular progress in those demographic groups, such as younger voters and university graduates, where support for Remain was highest. True, Ipsos MORI's collation of all the polls they conducted during the election campaign suggests the party's vote increased by a point or two amongst the under-35s, while falling back slightly amongst those aged 45 and over, but none of the exercises conducted by Lord Ashcroft, Opinium or YouGov on or shortly after polling day replicate this finding. The party did perform relatively well amongst university graduates, but the 11 per cent support amongst this group registered by YouGov is exactly the same as the company obtained in an equivalent exercise immediately after the 2015 election – as is the 5 per cent support registered amongst those whose highest qualification is a GCSE or less. Equally all the polling evidence suggests that the party performed rather better amongst middle-class voters than their working-class counterparts, but again to no greater extent than it had done two years previously.

That said, the party did perform relatively well in seats with relatively large numbers of graduates. On average its vote increased by 1.6 points in constituencies where more than a third of the adult population have a degree (according to the 2011 census), whereas elsewhere it fell on average by just over a point. In part (though only in part) this reflects the fact that such constituencies were also more likely to have registered a relatively large Remain vote in 2016. In addition, as Table 3 shows, the party also performed relatively well in London and the South East – and to a lesser extent in the South West and the Eastern region too

– regions with relatively large numbers of graduates and of Remain voters (especially so in the case of London), though none of these regional differences can simply be accounted for by the distinctive demographic composition or referendum histories of the regions in question. These regional patterns help illustrate why all four of the seats that the party lost were in North West, Yorkshire or Wales, while five of the eight that it gained were in London, the South East and the South West, with the remaining three gains coming in Scotland where the party was able to profit from a sharp decline in SNP fortunes.

### Gains and losses

However, the key to understanding why the party won some seats but lost others is to be found above all by looking at the political character of the seats in question. The first clue lies in the fact that all five of the gains that the party made in England were at the expense of the Conservatives while two of the three losses were to Labour. This suggests that perhaps the party prospered relatively well in constituencies where the Conservatives were strong. This is confirmed by Table 4 which breaks down the change in the Liberal Democrat vote between 2015 and 2017 by (a) the outcome of the EU referendum and who won the seat in 2015, and (b) the proportion of graduates and who won the seat in 2015. In both cases the party performed relatively well in seats that were being defended by the Conservatives as compared with those with a similar demographic mix or referendum vote being defended by Labour. However, this is above all the case in seats with a relatively large number of graduates and, above all, those with a large Remain vote in 2016. The party may not have advanced much in general in seats with large numbers of Remain voters, but it did do so in Conservative-held seats that contained many a Remain voter.

This distinction between Conservative and Labour held seats also proves to be important when we look at the impact of another phenomenon that we might expect to be important in accounting for where the party was and was not able to win. Votes won on the basis of the personal popularity of the local candidate have long been important to the party's ability to win and defend seats. Although in the event the personal popularity of its incumbent MPs only helped the party to retain a handful of seats in 2015,<sup>2</sup> the drop in the Liberal Democrat share of the vote in seats that it was defending at that election was still markedly lower than it was in seats where the party had put in a strong performance in 2010 but where the local party candidate was not the incumbent MP – in these seats the party's vote often plummeted.<sup>3</sup> We thus might anticipate that in seats where the former incumbent Liberal Democrat MP was trying to regain a seat they lost in 2015 – as nineteen of them were trying to do – the party might

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**Table 3: Liberal Democrat performance by government region**

	% vote 2017	Change in % vote since 2015
Scotland	6.8	-0.7
North East	4.6	-1.9
Yorkshire & Humberside	5.0	-2.1
North West	5.4	-1.1
East Midlands	5.3	-0.3
West Midlands	4.4	-1.1
Eastern	7.9	-0.2
London	8.8	+1.1
South East	10.5	+1.0
South West	15.0	-0.1
Wales	4.5	-2.0
Great Britain	7.6	-0.5

*Note: The party did not contest two seats in the South East (one in 2015) and one in Yorkshire & Humberside*

**Table 4: Change in Liberal Democrat share of constituency vote 2015–17 by proportion graduates and EU referendum vote**

Mean change in % Liberal Democrat vote 2015–17	Con seats	Lab seats	All seats
<i>Leave vote 2016</i>			
Less than 45%	+5.0	-1.6	+0.3
45–55%	-0.1	-1.3	-0.5
More than 55%	-0.5	-2.0	-1.1
<i>Graduates</i>			
Less than 25%	-0.5	-1.9	-1.1
25–33%	-0.4	-1.6	-1.1
More than 33%	+3.4	-1.3	+1.6
<i>All seats</i>			
	+0.3	-1.8	-0.5

*Con seats: Seats won by the Conservatives in 2015. Lab seats: Seats won by Labour in 2015.*

The presence of a substantial Remain vote, the existence of a large number of university graduates, and the presence of a current or former Liberal Democrat MP all only proved conducive to a relatively strong Liberal Democrat performance in seats where the party was in competition locally with the Conservatives.

perform relatively well, thanks to the ability of the ex-MP to register once again their local, personal support (especially as they had only stopped being the local MP quite recently). Equally, the party might also be expected to perform relatively well in the seven constituencies where the current incumbent Liberal Democrat MP was seeking re-election. Conversely, the party might struggle to maintain its vote in seats where a former incumbent Liberal Democrat MP was no longer trying to retain their seat after having lost it in 2015, or indeed in the one seat (Southport) that was no longer being defended by the existing Liberal Democrat MP.

However, these expectations were only partially realised (see Table 5). In seats where the party was battling things out locally with Labour, both incumbent and ex-incumbent Liberal Democrat MPs struggled to maintain their share of the vote. Indeed, in seats that the party lost to Labour in 2015, the Liberal Democrat vote fell heavily irrespective of whether or not the former Liberal Democrat MP was trying to regain the

seat. In contrast, in seats where either a current or former Liberal Democrat MP was doing battle with a Conservative challenger, the party's vote on average increased by between three (in the case of incumbent MPs) and six (ex-incumbent MPs) points. In both cases this performance was much better than it was where a new candidate was attempting to recapture a seat from the Conservatives; in these instances the party's vote on average fell back slightly (and, indeed, especially so – by 3.2 points – where the incumbent Liberal Democrat MP had defended the seat in 2015), while in the one seat (Southport) in which a new candidate was attempting to defend a seat the party already held, the party's vote fell back by 4.6 points.

So, the presence of a substantial Remain vote, the existence of a large number of university graduates, and the presence of a current or former Liberal Democrat MP all only proved conducive to a relatively strong Liberal Democrat performance in seats where the party was in competition locally with the Conservatives. Perhaps this means that the party was at least able to win over

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**Table 5: Mean change in Liberal Democrat share of the constituency vote 2015–17 by status of Liberal Democrat candidate and the Liberal Democrats' principal challenger**

Mean change in % Liberal Democrat vote 2015–17	Principal challenger		
	Conservatives	Labour	All seats
Seat being fought for Lib Dems by:			
Incumbent MP	+3.3	-3.6	+0.4
Ex-incumbent MP	+5.7	-11.2	-1.4
New candidate in seat lost in 2015	-0.6	-10.6	-4.7
New or old candidate in seat not won in 2010	+0.1	-1.2	-0.3

*Principal challenger: the party that won the seat in 2015 or which was second to a Liberal Democrat victor at that election.*

**Table 6: Mean change in parties' share of the vote 2015–17 by status of Liberal Democrat candidate and the Liberal Democrats' principal challenger**

Seat being fought for Lib Dems by:	Change in % vote since 2015 in Lib Dem/Con battlegrounds			Change in % vote since 2015 in Lib Dem/Lab battlegrounds		
	Con	Lab	Lib Dem	Con	Lab	Lib Dem
Incumbent or ex-incumbent MP	+4.6	+4.1	+5.2	+4.9	+14.9	-9.5
New candidate in seat won in 2010	+7.8	+8.5	-0.8	+6.8	+16.2	-10.6
New or old candidate in seat not won in 2010	+4.5	+10.1	+0.1	+5.8	+10.6	-1.2

some disaffected, pro-Remain Conservatives, in places where it was locally credible? However, Table 6 casts doubt on this explanation. On average the Conservative vote increased just as much in Liberal Democrat/Conservative battleground seats where an existing or former Liberal Democrat MP was standing as it did in Conservative-held seats that the Liberal Democrats did not win in 2010. Rather it is Labour that made relatively little progress in seats where the Liberal Democrats were primarily in competition with the Conservatives. At just over four points the average increase in the Labour vote in these seats was some six points below what it was in seats that the Liberal Democrats did not hold before the 2015 election.

There were then, it seems, some circumstances in which the Liberal Democrats were able to stem the advancing Labour tide: that is, seats where potential Labour supporters faced a choice between voting for a Labour candidate who was starting in third or fourth place and a relatively well-known local Liberal Democrat standard bearer who might be able to defeat the local Conservative. Here the Liberal Democrats were able to take advantage of their strategic position locally (and to do so even in seats where there was a large Leave vote in 2016). Further analysis also suggests that the party's relative success more generally in Tory held seats in which there was a relatively large Remain vote and/or many graduates was also founded on being able stem the extent of the Labour advance locally. But the fact that the party's relative successes was often the product of a weaker Labour performance underlines our earlier argument that the party found itself at this election primarily in a battle for votes with

Labour, a battle that in all but limited circumstances the party lost.

The ability of ex-MPs to stem the Labour tide locally was crucial to the party's ability to recapture Kingston and Eastbourne. It was also central to the party's success in gaining a strongly pro-Remain seat, Oxford West and Abingdon, that had been lost as long ago as 2010. The advance in the Labour tide was also stemmed in Twickenham, also recaptured by an ex-MP, Sir Vince Cable, though in this case what proved to be a fall in Conservative support (a common occurrence in seats with a large Remain vote) would have been enough to deliver the seat to the Liberal Democrats anyway. This is also the position in Bath where the seat was regained even though the ex-MP was not defending the seat (but, equally, had not done so either in 2015).

Of course, the party was not just attempting to win seats from the Conservatives and Labour. In Scotland all of its hopes rested on winning seats from the SNP, while Plaid Cymru were the principal challenger in the party's remaining Welsh fiefdom, Ceredigion. In both cases their nationalist opponents shared the Liberal Democrats' antipathy to leaving the EU. In practice, current and former Liberal Democrat MPs neither did particularly well nor particularly badly in these circumstances; on average their vote fell by 1.3 points, just a little below the 0.6 point increase the party enjoyed in nationalist-held seats in Scotland and Wales that it did not hold before 2015 – but well above the average 9.8 point drop that the party suffered where a former incumbent was no longer representing the party in a seat lost to a nationalist in 2015. But given that SNP support was falling quite heavily, even hanging on to the



party's 2015 vote could be enough to win back a seat. It is this pattern that accounts for the party's ability to gain three seats in Scotland (one secured by an ex-MP and another by an ex-MSP) on the back of what were no more than modest increases in support, while a seven point drop in support in Ceredigion was enough to ensure the seat was lost to Plaid Cymru.

### Conclusion

The outcome of the 2017 election must be regarded as a considerable disappointment for the Liberal Democrats. Far from marking the beginning of a recovery from the severe electoral fall-out from the 2010–15 coalition, in many respects the party actually went backwards. Its attempt to win over Remain voters who were upset at the prospect of Brexit by promising a second referendum largely fell flat. Too few voters were aware of a policy stance that, perhaps, focused too much on process rather than substance. Meanwhile, the party had little else to offer that the electorate regarded as attractive, and was hampered by a leader who, despite his best endeavours, proved unable to make much impact on the electorate. As a result, many of the voters whose support the party hoped to gain switched to a Labour Party that was thought to favour a soft Brexit, had a range of popular policies, and a leader who did succeed in showing during the election campaign that perhaps he was not so bad after all. Only in very limited circumstances – seats where Labour locally was weak and where there was a large

pro-Remain constituency and/or one a current or former Liberal Democrat MP was standing – did the party enjoy some apparent measure of success in stemming the Labour tide. Still, that limited success did help provide a silver lining in the form of a slightly enlarged parliamentary party, including the swift return to the Commons of three MPs with extensive experience of government, Sir Vince Cable, Edward Davey and Jo Swinson. It is in their hands that responsibility for the very considerable task of reviving the party's fortunes now lies.

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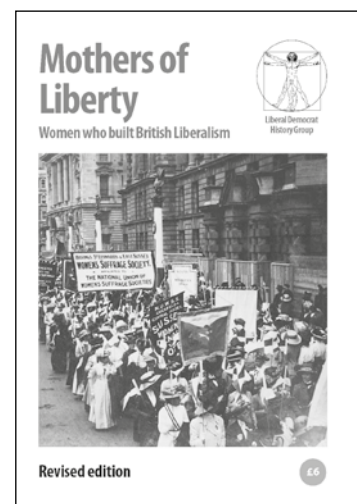
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## Mothers of Liberty Women who built British Liberalism

Even before they gained the right to vote and to stand for election, women played many key roles in the development of British Liberalism – as writers and thinkers, campaigners, political hostesses, organisers and, finally, as parliamentary candidates, MPs and peers.

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# The Nonconformist Min

DAVID LLOYD GEORGE has often proved to be an elusive figure to pin down, both for his contemporaries and, later, for historians. Like Disraeli, he was not part of the English public schoolboys' milieu; nor was he aided by family connections in the way that Arthur Balfour was by the 'Hotel Cecil', the term used to describe Lord Salisbury's governments with its many places for his relatives. Lloyd George was, as he liked to put it, a 'cottage-bred man' or, as opponents put it in doggerel verse, a 'bounder from Wales'.<sup>1</sup> He reached Westminster through grass-roots activism, not family or social connections.

Keynes famously wrote:

Lloyd George is rooted in nothing; he is void and without content; he lives and feeds on his immediate surroundings; he is an instrument and a player at the same time which plays on the company and is played on them too; he is a prism ... which collects light and distorts it and is most brilliant if the light comes from many quarters at once; a vampire and a medium in one.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, Lloyd George was rooted in Nonconformity, and in radical Welsh politics. Whether he remained a believer in redemption through faith is debateable, but he did continue to be embedded in Nonconformist culture. This was shown in many ways, not least in his rhetoric, which was rich in Biblical, historical and literary allusions drawn from a Nonconformist perspective.

Lloyd George was born in January 1863, a little short of midway through Queen Victoria's reign. He grew up in north Wales in the era of Disraeli and Gladstone. He eagerly walked from his home in Llanystumdwy to Robert's shop at Portmadoc to buy his uncle, Richard Lloyd, a London newspaper so they both could read the detailed reports of the major speeches of Gladstone, Disraeli, Chamberlain, Parnell and other leading politicians. Later, he vividly remembered that, when an articulated clerk in Portmadoc, he stood outside the shop reading 'the great news about Gladstone' returning to the premiership in 1880.<sup>3</sup>

As Colin Matthew argued, the period from 1872 was 'the era ... [of] the growth of regular

extra-parliamentary speechmaking' which made for a national political debate. He further commented:

The decline of Whiggery and the loss of Chamberlain meant that the upper levels of the Liberal Party increasingly depended on rhetoric as their link with the party as well as the electorate. Men such as Gladstone, Morley and Asquith had no base for power within their party save their rhetoric and their legislative achievements. They controlled no machine, they spent no money on politics, they had no base in the localities, no real patronage except when in office.<sup>4</sup>

Lloyd George was different in so far as he did have a base in north Wales and more broadly in Nonconformity, at least until the First World War but arguably later. He nurtured his Welsh base directly as well as through his wife, Margaret, his uncle Richard Lloyd, his brother, William George and such colleagues as J. Herbert Lewis. He also carefully cultivated the local press. He assiduously maintained strong links to Nonconformity through leading Nonconformists such as Dr John Clifford and through being on the executive board of the Liberation Society (which sought to disestablish the Church of England) and on the National Council of the Evangelical Free Churches.

Like most other leaders, Conservative and Liberal Unionist as well as Liberal, Lloyd George made his name by his skills in speaking on public platforms as well as debating in the House of Commons. Once he was established as a major politician, he made major speeches that were intended to be read as well as heard. Like Gladstone, Lloyd George arranged the timing of his speeches to accommodate the press. When, as a major politician, he spoke at 2.30 pm, his speech was available on the streets by 4.30 pm. Lloyd George was inordinately impressed by the press. He helped in the 1901 takeover by George Cadbury of the *Daily News* and the reversal of its pro-Boer War stance.<sup>5</sup> He and Sir George Riddell were friends for a long time and he cultivated other newspaper proprietors, recommending Riddell, Harold Harmsworth and Max Aitken

# d of David Lloyd George



for peerages. He also put Beaverbrook and Rothermere in to his wartime government and made Northcliffe Director of Propaganda. In October 1918, Lloyd George took over the *Daily Chronicle*, which had become supportive of military figures critical of him, and so controlled until 1926 a major London newspaper.<sup>6</sup> The historian A. J. P. Taylor commented, 'Editors of *The Times* have often thought that they were more important than the Prime Minister. Lloyd George was the only prime minister who apparently agreed with them.'<sup>7</sup>

Lloyd George's Nonconformist roots were deep. Yet with John Grigg's otherwise excellent volumes, it became almost an orthodox view for some years that Lloyd George was not a believer. Grigg observed of Lloyd George emerging as the national Nonconformist champion that he had

done so 'with a strict economy of sincerity, undetected at the time and, more surprisingly overlooked by historians.' Grigg also argued,

In reality, his instincts were more secularist than Nonconformist. He rejected dogmatic Christianity of every kind, and had a special dislike for the Nonconformist kind, because he had more direct experience of it than of any other and because its moral atmosphere was in many ways so alien to him.<sup>8</sup>

David, his sister Mary Ellen (known as Polly) and his brother William were brought up by their uncle, Richard Lloyd, an unpaid pastor in Criccieth of the Disciples of Christ, a sect which believed that the New Testament was a reliable and sufficient guide to a godly life. Founded by

## The Nonconformist Mind of David Lloyd George

Alexander Campbell, a Scotch Baptist who emigrated to the United States, it was a breakaway Baptist group which had a small membership, some 200 in Wales, when Lloyd George was born. More generally, Welsh Baptists remained wedded to beliefs in eternal punishment and rejected the new theology which was undercutting fundamentalism in England. The Welsh religious revival of 1904–5, strongest in Welsh speaking areas, was very much fundamentalist.<sup>9</sup> Mary Ellen remained a devout believer in the values of the Disciples of Christ and was critical of her brother David's moral lapses.<sup>10</sup>

It seems to me that a key question is what was the faith that Lloyd George lost? Was it Christianity generally or was it the faith of his uncle? It seems that Lloyd George felt major doubts before or on the day he was baptised in 1875. He doubted the certainties of the Campbellite Baptists. In this he was far from unusual. In the 1860s and 1870s there was a great turning away from belief in eternal damnation. Charles Haddon Spurgeon defended the verities of hellfire for those not converted to his fundamentalist form of Christianity, but by 1888 a majority of the members of the Baptist Union had moved in favour of a gentler and more liberal Christianity.<sup>11</sup> This approach, characterised by Dr John Clifford, was more to Lloyd George's taste. Lloyd George's loss of faith was with the fundamentalism of the Disciples of Christ, and this was lasting. His son recollected, that his father 'found it difficult to accept ... one of its cardinal tenets ... the literal interpretation of the Bible'. Lloyd George later recalled that when he was eleven 'he suddenly came face to face with the fact that religion, as he was taught it, was a mockery.' At this age, his was a general loss of faith, a belief 'that there was no one at the other end of the telephone'.<sup>12</sup> He vividly pointed to the exact spot on the road from Llanystumdwy to Criccieth where his loss of faith occurred, when later he was with Frances Stevenson, his mistress and later second wife. Yet he also told her that he remembered 'the exact moment – he was in bed – when the whole structure and fabric of religion fell before him with a crash, nothing remained.'<sup>13</sup> He talked about this experience to his uncle, who expressed understanding. Other members of his family appear to have been more stern and puritanical, notably his grandmother Rebecca Llwyd, who died when he was five, his sister, who was two years older than him, and his younger brother, William.<sup>14</sup> However, it seems clear that he recovered belief, albeit not in his grandmother's and uncle's certainties.

Lloyd George lost the faith he was raised in when he was between 11 or 12 and about 20, but found peace of mind with a more liberal Baptist belief. Lloyd George's son Richard, who was a severe critic of his father, stated in his memoir of his father, 'My father's religious beliefs fluctuated, and there were periods in his life when he lost faith'. Professor Ian Machin, a notable expert on

**Lloyd George lost the faith he was raised in when he was between 11 or 12 and about 20, but found peace of mind with a more liberal Baptist belief.**

Victorian and later religion in Britain, accepted this view, and commented, 'It would seem that Lloyd George did not, like Joseph Chamberlain, move from belief into agnosticism, but fluctuated between periods of belief and doubt, like Parnell.' Machin concluded, 'Lloyd George can best be described as a broad and speculative Baptist.'<sup>15</sup>

Visiting London for a court case in 1888, he visited the scenes of the Jack the Ripper murders with a policeman from Caernarvonshire on a Saturday night, but on the Sunday morning he heard Charles Haddon Spurgeon preach in the Metropolitan Tabernacle, in the afternoon he listened to Frederick Harrison at the Positivist Hall and, in the evening, he went to hear the Wesleyan Hugh Price Hughes on 'The Words of Life' at St James's Hall. Elected to parliament in 1890, Lloyd George spent many Sundays in London going to hear leading Nonconformist preachers in their chapels, drawing on the lists of 'preachers for tomorrow' from Saturday newspapers. On Sunday morning 20 April 1891, for example, he went to Westbourne Grove chapel. In the afternoon, he chaired a meeting at which John Clifford gave a lecture on gambling. In a letter home, Lloyd George's sister wrote that Dr Clifford was very pleased with her brother's address from the chair. As for her brother, 'I never saw him more taken with anyone than he was with Dr Clifford. His sermons were so practical, he said, and yet so refined and cultured.'<sup>16</sup> On another occasion, in response to an angry and highly critical letter from his wife, Lloyd George defended himself from not going to a chapel meeting but going on the Thames to Kew Gardens by hitting back with a much-quoted sneer that in Criccieth he would have had 'the pleasure of being cramped up in a suffocating malodorous chapel listening to some superstitious rot'.<sup>17</sup> Most probably, this was him ignoring his mother's sound marriage advice to not say harsh things to Margaret if he lost his temper rather than giving a considered religious view, though he did express similar views on another occasion.

Lloyd George had a notable taste for reading Nonconformist sermons and other literature. These books were a substantial part of his private library which was sold by his son Gwilym (then Lord Tenby) in 1964 to the library of the University of Kent. Riddell wrote in his diary in 1908 of a dinner held at his house with Lloyd George and Charles Masterman as his guests. He called at Downing Street for Lloyd George: 'Found there an old Welsh parson who had been turned out of his farm ... because he had proposed a Radical candidate in opposition to his landlord's nominee'. Lloyd George took with him to Riddell's house 'a small Welsh book, the life of a well-known minister. He entertained us by translating passages from the minister's sermons – very homely and amusing: the sermon on Jonah, for example – but how much is due to the original and how much to L.G., I cannot say.'<sup>18</sup> Frances Stevenson recalled,

‘One of the things’, he would say, ‘that I would like to enjoy when I enter Paradise is a Preaching Festival, with John Elias, Christmas Evans, William [Williams] of Wern and others occupying the pulpit.’<sup>19</sup>

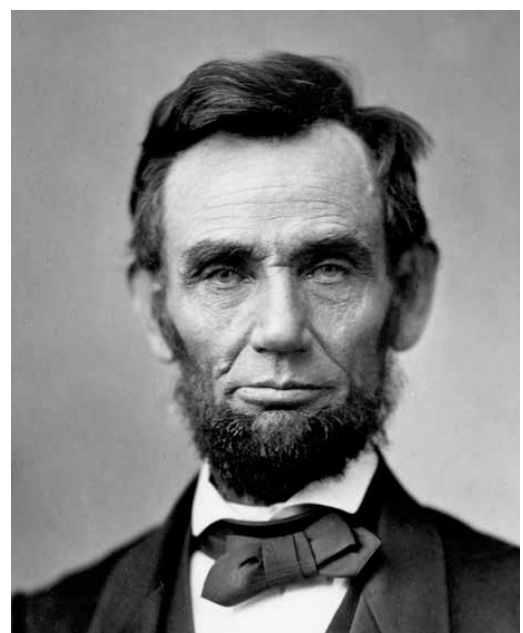
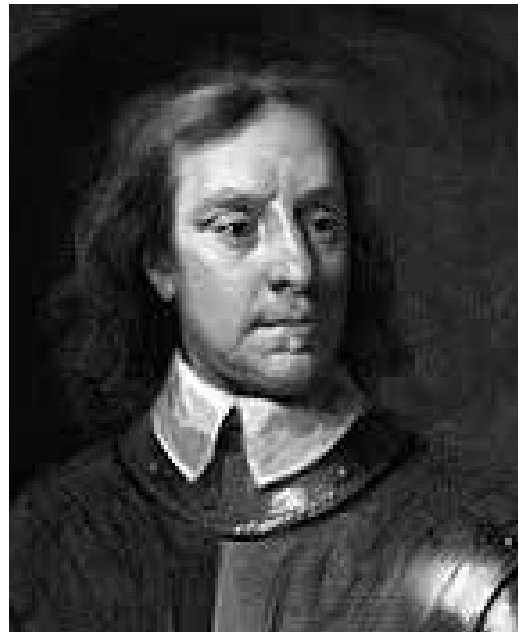
His other favourite Welsh preachers included Herber Evans (Caernarvon), John Jones (Talsarn), Edward Matthews (Ewenni) and Robert Roberts (Clynnog). Frances Stevenson observed that ‘there was no subject more dear to L.G.’s heart’ than ‘the subject of the old Welshmen who had achieved fame as preachers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.’ Lloyd George collected material on outstanding Welsh preachers with the intention of writing a book about them.<sup>20</sup>

Lloyd George was also embedded in another major aspect of Welsh Nonconformist culture: hymn singing. He had a very good voice and in his youth often began the singing at the ‘Little Bethel’ of the Disciples of Christ at Criccieth.<sup>21</sup> In March 1913 Riddell went to 11 Downing Street for a Welsh hymn singing evening with Welsh professional singers. Riddell noted, ‘Lloyd George himself sang fervently and vigorously. Sitting on the arm of my chair and translating the words for my benefit, he gave vivid descriptions of the hymns and the lives of their authors and composers.’<sup>22</sup>

The notion of Lloyd George being ‘rooted in nothing’ was also attached to his reading or lack of reading. G. M. Trevelyan, a Liberal and from 1927 Regius Professor of History at Cambridge, joked, when criticising Lloyd George’s *War Memoirs* for attacking Sir Edward Grey, ‘Mr Lloyd George’s great gifts are not strictly historical. He lives so heavily in the present that he cannot recall his own past ...’<sup>23</sup> Yet Lloyd George did read widely, including history and literature, as well as theology.

Lloyd George’s use of history is instructive. He was interested in history (contrary to Trevelyan’s comment) and used it to further his Nonconformist causes. Not surprisingly, Oliver Cromwell was a particular favourite, especially in the decade 1895–1904 when he was working hard to be the political leader of British, and not just Welsh, Nonconformity. Without making an exhaustive search I have found fourteen speeches in that decade where Lloyd George invoked Cromwell, all but one at public meetings and only one at a specifically Nonconformist meeting. Cromwell was brought into play for the major Nonconformist issues of education and temperance, but also as a soldier who knew when to make peace, unlike the Conservatives and Unionists during the Boer War. The choice of Cromwell was two sided. While appeals to the memory of Cromwell and Hampden were norms of Nonconformist and radical oratory in many areas of Britain in the nineteenth century, Cromwell had many other connotations, and not just to Thomas Carlyle.

Lloyd George’s heroes included Oliver Cromwell, Maximilien Robespierre and Abraham Lincoln



After launching the Welsh Disestablishment campaign at Pontypridd in the autumn of 1891, Lloyd George was reported in a local newspaper. He instanced the example of Cromwell as a pattern of procedure. Cromwell had put forward his guns and had smashed the castle walls before negotiating terms. They might do the same with the Established Church; smash the encampment first, and then enter into the question of terms.<sup>24</sup> The Cromwell allusions gave a message of militant Protestantism, and while the enemy was the Established Church, his vigorous condemnations of the priesthood had a wider significance.

In the later 1890s Lloyd George positioned himself as a politician sympathetic to the most ardent anti-ritualists at a time when Nonconformity was roused to oppose the Conservatives' 1896 Education Bill and the revised 1897 Education Act.<sup>25</sup> On 24 May 1898 he moved the motion setting up the Nonconformist Parliamentary Council, and that motion complained of 'recent legislation seriously affecting the interests of Nonconformists and the efforts now being made by organisations connected with the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches to carry the nation in the same direction.'<sup>26</sup> Vigorous action then was being taken by John Kensit, the founder in 1889 of the Protestant Truth Society and in 1898 of 'Wickliffe preachers', who disrupted Established Church services if they deemed them ritualistic. Lloyd George spoke warmly of Wycliffe in several speeches. He appears to have been influenced by the Congregationalist Robert Forman Horton, whose book of sermons entitled *England's Danger* (1898) warned of the danger from Rome. At a meeting of the Baptist Union on 29 September 1898, Lloyd George was reported as saying that 'they were face to face with the most resolute, pertinacious and best organised attempt to re-establish the power of the priesthood in this country since the days of the Reformation.'<sup>27</sup> Lloyd George had no love of Anglicanism or Catholicism, but given his moving away from the beliefs of his uncle, his vigorous taking up of such views, after the fading of his nationalist endeavours through Cymru Fydd, seem at the very least partly opportunistic.

He returned to these themes when attacking Arthur Balfour's Education Bill. Speaking in Swansea on 25 April 1902, he stated:

There was a famous scripture reader with Welsh blood in his veins of the name of Oliver Cromwell. He had mastered all the revolutionary and explosive texts in that Book, and the result was destructive to that State priesthood. The bench of bishops was blown up; the House of Lords disappeared; and the aristocracy of this land rocked as though an earthquake had shaken them.<sup>28</sup>

After the Irish Parliamentary Party voted with the Conservative government over the 1902 Education Bill, Lloyd George was again emphatic

that the Nonconformists' enemies were priests, Catholic or Established Church. At a huge Free Church demonstration against the London Education Bill, held in the Albert Hall, London, on 11 July 1903, Lloyd George asked, 'Should England, the refuge of the slave, the land of Wycliffe and of Oliver Cromwell, put on now the manacles of the priest?'<sup>29</sup>

Although Lloyd George went out of his way to identify himself with the most anti-ritualist groups, he wrote to *Freeman's Journal*, in response to comments by Cardinal Vaughan, 'I would appeal to Irishmen whether they have not found less racial and religious bigotry amongst Nonconformists than amongst the classes who are promoting the Education Bill.'<sup>30</sup> However, he had support for his opposition to the Education Bill elsewhere. The local press report of a speech he made in Bangor noted, 'The Protestants of the North of Ireland, who were against him on Home Rule and the war question, had written to him to say that Ulster was agreed against the measure.'<sup>31</sup>

Lloyd George was loyal to Gladstonian Liberalism's commitment to Irish home rule, though Joseph Chamberlain's Home Rule All Round had appealed to him. Yet his Nonconformist roots left him with residual Orange sympathies. After Lloyd George's death, when Tom Jones was collecting recollections for his biography, Professor W. G. S. Adams, head of his prime ministerial secretariat, wrote, 'I remember feeling as I talked with him that when I got below the surface of his mind there was this deep primitive "No Pope here" of Ulster – something that stirred depths in his makeup and that explains despite all his efforts to get over it ... the settlement with Ulster.'<sup>32</sup> Adams might have added also Lloyd George's willingness to use the Black and Tans in Ireland.

Lloyd George liked to claim that in this he was following the precedent of Gladstone's phase of coercion in Ireland in the early 1880s, and surprisingly Gladstone's former lieutenant, John Morley, agreed with Lloyd George. Lloyd George could have claimed Cromwell's horrendous massacres in Ireland as a precedent. Yet despite Ireland and his treatment of the Levellers, Cromwell appealed to some Radicals for his overturning of some aristocrats, the bishops and the monarchy. Lloyd George's enthusiasm for Cromwell can be contrasted with Winston Churchill's views. The historian Maurice Ashley, who drafted the Cromwell section of Churchill's *History of the English Speaking Peoples* (1956–8) recalled that when he read the book,

I was astonished to find some of my facts and phrases embedded in it, but the whole draft had been stood on its head. For Churchill was convinced that Cromwell was a dictator of the stamp of Adolf Hitler, and though a few things might be said in favour of the Lord Protector (he was, after all, a patriot) he was none the less, Churchill thought, a bad man.<sup>33</sup>

**In the later 1890s Lloyd George positioned himself as a politician sympathetic to the most ardent anti-ritualists at a time when Nonconformity was roused to oppose the Conservatives' 1896 Education Bill and the revised 1897 Education Act.**

Lloyd George's other heroes were often lawyers or Nonconformist businessmen. The lawyers included Abraham Lincoln and Maximilien Robespierre. He admired Lincoln for his oratory, especially his Gettysburg address, as well as for his career. When he was preparing a speech for the unveiling of a statue of Lincoln in the Canning Enclosure, Parliament Square on 28 July 1920, Lloyd George expressed the view that Lincoln was 'the biggest man ever thrown up by American politics – a much bigger man than Washington, who was always so correct that he was uninteresting.'<sup>34</sup> He used Lincoln in his appeals to the American people during the First World War. Somewhat bizarrely, after that war Lloyd George tried to justify Britain holding on to the north of Ireland by reference to Lincoln and the southern states.

As for Robespierre, Lloyd George deemed him 'a great man'. He told Riddell, 'If you read his speeches you will see that he adumbrated and foretold most of the modern reforms. They are all in his speeches.' Lloyd George also admired Robespierre for the way that he, like himself, had come up the hard way. 'It is a terrible struggle,' he told Riddell, 'the struggle to secure recognition.'<sup>35</sup> Lloyd George had arrived in parliament through his grass-roots endeavours, a contrast with several of his leading political contemporaries such as Arthur Balfour and Winston Churchill whose entries in to politics were aided by family connections. Moreover, as Lloyd George commented, when he arrived in parliament he 'never dreamed that he would become a Cabinet minister', in contrast with someone like Churchill 'who started in politics with the object and intention of getting high office.' He added in best 'pot calling the kettle black' manner, 'Winston was a very nice man, but self-centred.'<sup>36</sup>

Lloyd George was enthusiastic about the French Revolution, which he dubbed on one occasion 'the biggest event since the crucifixion.'<sup>37</sup> He eagerly read widely about it, from Thomas Carlyle, who saw the French Revolution as a continuing process, to the anarchist Prince Kropotkin, whose *The Great French Revolution* was published in English in 1909. His enthusiasm for the principles of the revolution was real, unlike Winston Churchill who only consistently admired Napoleon. Like Lord Rosebery, Lloyd George also admired Napoleon, and even put Napoleon's hat on to see if it fitted when in Paris in 1919 at the Peace Conference. This trying on of the hat had added significance given Lloyd George's belief in phrenology.

Lloyd George's choices in reading included Whig or Liberal historians. When articulated in Portmadoc, he was noticed spending his lunch hours in the office reading Henry Hallam's *Constitutional History of England* (1828) while eating. Hugh Edwards also wrote of Lloyd George reading and eating, 'He read without ceasing' and he read quickly.<sup>38</sup> He read Edward Gibbon's *Decline*

*and Fall of the Roman Empire* several times. In 1902, when on a Swiss holiday, Lloyd George went to Lausanne out of a 'keen desire to honour' Gibbon, but was bitterly disappointed to find that the site of his home had been cleared for a Post Office.<sup>39</sup> In old age, Lloyd George observed, 'I was brought up on Macaulay, Carlyle, Dumas and, later, Ruskin.' He often read Macaulay's essays, sometimes out loud to guests. He said approvingly of the essays, 'his first object was to be interesting. His second was to hit hard.' He also liked to read J. A. Froude's essays for mental stimulation.<sup>40</sup>

Lloyd George was well read in literature as well as theology and history. He read George Eliot and Dickens, Carlyle and Ruskin, and Disraeli as well as Robert Louis Stevenson and Alexandre Dumas. Nevertheless, he was aware, and others made sure he remained aware, that he lacked public school and Oxford or Cambridge university education. He said he loathed Eton and Balliol types, but excluded Asquith from this condemnation. He also disliked the superior airs of many barristers, but again exempted Asquith from this criticism. His comment to A. J. Sylvester, his principal private secretary for twenty-two years, is revealing:

The worst thing Asquith had ever done, said L.G., had been to join the Church of England. He had been the son of a Nonconformist minister ... He himself had always belonged in the Church of Christ and had become associated with the Baptists. He held no great belief in their doctrines, but he had been brought up amongst them and having progressed among them, he would never have it thought that, once he had made his position, he had let them down by transferring to some other faith.<sup>41</sup>

Lloyd George stayed all his life a member not just of the Disciples of Christ in Criccieth but also of his Baptist Church in London. In 1939 Watkin Davies, who lived most of his life in Criccieth and knew the family well, observed:

In his allegiance to the religious interests of his boyhood he has never wavered; and although his theology would no longer be considered orthodox by the old Llanystumdwy neighbours, there has been no falling away on his part from any of the essentials of the Free Churchman's creed. Chamberlain was lost to Unitarianism, as Asquith was to Congregationalism; but Lloyd George is still in every sense of the term a Baptist.<sup>42</sup>

Similarly, for all his political opportunism, Lloyd George remained a Liberal. He held to many causes for most or all his career including remedying unemployment, land reform, disestablishment and free trade. It was when he was prime minister that Welsh Disestablishment was achieved (on 31 March 1920), the 1914 Welsh Church Bill needing

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## The Nonconformist Mind of David Lloyd George

the provisions of the 1911 Parliament Act, and, like Irish home rule, being suspended during the war. Unlike Joseph Chamberlain, after being in coalition with the Conservatives, he returned to the Liberal Party and promoted fresh ideas in the 1920s. He also looked to Nonconformity for support. It helped provide him with a seat in the House of Commons into his eighties, long after Liberalism in other parts of Britain had diminished. The weakening of religion in politics was one of the causes of the decline of the Liberal Party after the First World War.<sup>43</sup>

Lloyd George tried to rally the forces of Nonconformity for a last time in 1935. Lloyd George and the Council of Action for Peace and Reconstruction secured much newspaper coverage and big audiences at meetings around the country but its impact on the 1935 general election was very limited. The National Liberal and Transport Minister Leslie Hore-Belisha was perceptive when he commented to W. P. Crozier, editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, that Lloyd George was assuming the existence of ‘a “Nonconformist vote” of the old kind’. He added that Lloyd George had talked a great deal of what had happened in the days of Gladstone ... and seemed to think things had not changed.<sup>44</sup>

Lloyd George had shown flair and imagination in his years of office (1905–22) and in the 1920s. Yet his career owed much to his Nonconformist base. Other than his extraordinary laxity with adultery, he remained grounded in the Nonconformist culture of north Wales. He did not seek to be buried in some prestigious English place but instead chose to be buried beside the River Dwyfor at Llanystumdwy.

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12 Earl Lloyd George, *Lloyd George* (Frederick Muller, 1960), pp. 20–1.

13 Frances Lloyd George, *The Years That are Past* (Hutchinson, 1967), p. 19; Diary entry, 24 Nov. 1915, A. J. P. Taylor (ed.), *Lloyd George: A Diary by Frances Stevenson* (Hutchinson, 1971), p. 79. Her autobiography includes memories of others, such as Richard Lloyd George, that she had read, as well as her own memories.

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16 Sir Alfred T. Davies, *The Lloyd George I Knew* (Henry Walter, 1948), pp. 21–2. Lloyd George admired Harrison's addresses to the Positivist Society but believed such truths were taught better by Christianity. Lloyd George's diary, 2 Jan. 1884 in William George, *My Brother and I* (Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1958), p. 78. Mary Ellen to her mother, 20 Apr. 1891, printed in W. R. P. George, *Lloyd George: Backbencher* (Gomer, 1983), p. 50.

17 On 13 August 1890. Kenneth O. Morgan (ed.), *Lloyd George Family Letters, 1885–1936* (Clarendon Press and Wales University Press, 1973), p. 35.

18 Diary entry, 22 Mar. 1913, Lord Riddell, *More Pages from My Diary, 1908–1914* (Country Life, 1934), p. 133.

19 Frances Lloyd George, *The Years That Are Past*, p. 251.

20 *Ibid.*, pp. 248–51.

21 W. Watkin Davies, *Lloyd George 1863–1914* (Constable, 1939), pp. 38–9.

22 Diary entry, 16 Mar. 1913, Riddell, *More Pages*, p. 129.

23 G. M. Trevelyan, *Grey of Fallodon* (Longmans Green, 1937), p. 255.

24 Meeting of 10 Sep. 1891, *Pontypridd Chronicle*, 18 Sep. 1891. Rosebery, disliked by Nonconformists for his horse racing, gained some approval when it came out that he had paid for the 1899 tercentenary statue of Cromwell at Westminster.

25 David Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience: Chapel and Politics 1870–1914* (Allen and Unwin, 1982), pp. 137–8.

26 *Daily News*, 25 May 1898.

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28 *Cambria Daily Leader*, 26 Apr. 1902.

29 *Daily News*, 13 Jul. 1903.

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31 Speech of 17 Sep. 1902, *Carnarvon Herald*, 19 Sep. 1902.

32 Adams to Tom Jones, 31 Jan. 1948, National Library of Wales, Thomas Jones Papers, A2/24.

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34 Diary entry, 25 Jul. 1920, Lord Riddell, *Lord Riddell's Intimate Diary of the Peace Conference and After, 1918–1923* (Gollancz, 1933), p. 226.

35 Diary entry, 11 Oct. 1914, Lord Riddell, *Lord Riddell's War Diary, 1914–1918* (Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1933), p. 35.

36 Riddell's diary entry, 31 Oct. 1908, Riddell Papers, British Library, Add. Ms. 62969, f. 22.

37 Diary entry, 5 Dec. 1912, Riddell, *More Pages*, p. 107.

38 Peter Rowland, *Lloyd George* (Barrie and Jenkins, 1975), p. 22; Edwards, *Lloyd George*, vol. 2, p. 115.

39 Colin Cross (ed.), *Life with Lloyd George: The Diary of A. J. Sylvester* (Macmillan, 1975), p. 251; Davies, *The Lloyd George I Knew*, p. 34.

40 Diary, 7 Jul. 1939, Cross (ed.), *Life with Lloyd George*, p. 231; diary entry, 21 Jul. 1918, Riddell, *War Diary*, p. 342.

41 Diary, 30 Jul. 1936. Cross (ed.), *Life with Lloyd George*, pp. 143–4. Cross points out that Asquith's father was a Congregationalist layman.

42 Davies, *Lloyd George*, p. 217.

43 See, for example, K. D. Wald, *Crosses on the Ballot Paper: Patterns of British Voter Alignment since 1885* (Princeton University Press, 1983).

44 Interview, 19 Jul. 1935, A. J. P. Taylor (ed.), *Off the Record: Political Interviews, 1933–1943* (Hutchinson, 1973), p. 49. Crozier had also heard Lloyd George speaking similarly. Stephen Koss, *Nonconformity in Modern British Politics* (Batsford, 1975), pp. 187–215.



# Letters to the Editor

## 1915 general election (1)

Ian Garrett's article on the 1915 general election (*Journal of Liberal History* 95, summer 2017) was thorough in its assessment and evaluates the various factors involved in such a way that it would be difficult to disagree. He concludes that the result would have been similar to the results of the 1910 elections. I think that the result would probably have been better for the Liberals than the 1910 elections had the Liberal government passed its Plural Voting Bill.

Firstly, it should not be overlooked that the general election would not have taken place until 1915, to allow for the passage of the Plural Voting Bill. The article did not go into much detail about the expected effects of abolishing plural voting, but both the Liberal and Unionist HQs' assessments of the December 1910 election concluded that plural voting had helped the Unionists win 29 seats that would have otherwise been lost. This means that instead of the starting point for the election (ignoring by-election changes) being 274 to 272 in favour of the Liberals, it would have been 300 to 243 in favour of the Liberals. Had the Bill decided to abolish university constituencies, the Liberals would have started ahead of the Unionists by 300 to 234. Also, had the number of Irish seats been reduced in accordance with the Irish Home Rule Bill, the balance between Liberal and Unionists would have widened to about 300 to 224.

The article also talked about local government election indicators, overlooking one easier to interpret indicator: London. The London County Council elections were fought on the same constituency boundaries as those for parliament. The 1913 LCC elections showed an improvement for the Progressives over 1910 in the key parliamentary battleground constituencies. Even though 1913 was not a good year electorally for the Liberal government, these LCC elections indicated that the Liberals in London might actually have made a net gain in seats.

These additional factors lead me to conclude that in 1915 the Liberals would

probably have been the largest party and may conceivably have won an outright majority.

Graem Peters

## 1915 general election (2)

I am pleased to find that Ian Garrett, writing in your summer 2017 issue ('The Liberal Party and the general election of 1915') has, in effect, endorsed conclusions which I reached almost half a century ago.

In *The Last Liberal Governments, 1911–1914* (London, 1971), I called into doubt (p. 348) the views which had been expressed by George Dangerfield (and re-echoed by Dr Stephen Koss in 1969), arguing that:

The 'faults' of Liberalism between 1900 and 1914 cannot seriously be hailed as a factors which would prevent the Liberal Party from ever regaining power after 1915. Politicians are always doing their best to adapt to the particular demands of their particular age, and always manage – in the contemptuous opinion of historians – to be at least ten years out of date in their approach. Asquith and his colleagues did not, after all, do so badly [in coping with the problems which confronted them].

And I concluded (p. 354):

The probability is that shortage of funds, if nothing else, would have prevented the Labour Party from mounting an anti-Liberal campaign on too large a scale in 1915. What is far more likely, however, is that another electoral pact, similar to the one concluded some ten years before, would have been reached between the two parties. Lloyd George's speech of 2 June 1914 was certainly a tacit recognition of the fact that one was needed if the Liberals were to stand any chance at all of winning the next election. The general election of 1915 would presumably have resulted, therefore, in a small

majority for either the Unionists or the Labour-supported Liberals, with the thirty [Irish] Nationalist members (whom many observers in recent years had described as 'natural Conservatives') ready to throw in their lot with whichever group had the most to offer.

However belated it might be, it is pleasing to find some support for my views at long last! I won't feel quite so isolated in future.

Peter Rowland

## Chris Rennard interview

I enjoyed reading your interview with Chris Rennard in the summer 2017 issue of the *Journal of Liberal History*, and I can relate to many of his experiences, especially in the early 1970s.

In 1970 the Liberal Party passed its famous community politics motion, and the following year Gordon Lishman and I were employed as travelling organisers to carry the message about local government reorganisation and the need for community campaigning.

We were equipped with bright orange mini-vans for our travels. These became known as war wagons because their registrations began 'WAR ...'. One of the areas we visited in the 1971–73 period was Merseyside, and I used to carry samples of the Liverpool 'Focuses' all over the country to inspire local parties.

I very much hope the *Journal* will carry further such interviews in the future.

Barry Standen

## The Liberal Party

Chris Rennard has the right to call the party which fought the by-election at Bootle as breakaway (interview with Chris Rennard, *Journal of Liberal History* 95, summer 2017). Others would disagree. But to put the name Liberal Party in quotation marks is insulting and factually inaccurate.

Roger Jenking (*Liberal Party member*)

## Liberalism in France

The political background to Emmanuel Macron's election as French President explored;  
by Michael Steed

# En Marche! A New Dawn for



EMMANUEL MACRON'S STUNNING victory in the French presidential election has potentially profound implications. The vote in France in 2017 is already being hailed as a critical juncture in contemporary history – the turning of the tide of authoritarian populist nationalism that surged with the 2016 Brexit and Trump victories and the near victory in Austria of a neo-Nazi presidential candidate. Macron's platform was undoubtedly a reassertion of humanitarian, internationalist, liberal and rationalist values. But did he owe his victory to that platform?

It is too soon, in a journal devoted to history, to attempt a full assessment of the implications of the election. But it is worth examining Macron's success with them in mind. Specifically, for this British journal, the centrism that Macron led to victory in France appears to have enough in common with the successive surges in electoral support for the Liberals, Alliance and Liberal Democrats to merit closer examination. Macron

himself tried to avoid a 'centrist' tag, saying in 2016–7 that he was neither of the left nor of the right, though he had earlier (see below) claimed to be of the left.

He preferred, along with many supporters of *En Marche!*, to claim to be rallying progressive forces from both right and left against the conservatism of older ideologies and parties – a positioning remarkably similar to Jo Grimond's in the 1950s. A part of that approach was to present his political career, the movement he launched in April 2016 and the presidential campaign he launched in November 2016 more as demonstrations of energy and action than essays in political language. Not for nothing had he fallen in love at school with his drama teacher, whose guidance lit up his successful bid for the French presidency.

In this manner, *En Marche!* was presented as a twenty-first-century answer to the problems of a country beset by irrelevant, historic party lines. Yet it has many less successful precursors. We will

# For European Liberalism?



therefore examine the relevant French historic and institutional context, the precise character of this dramatic revival of leftist centrism in France and the particular reasons why it has succeeded where previous, similar efforts failed. This article will take the story to the end of January 2017, when the field of competitors for the presidency became established, and Macron's victory was therefore a likelihood.

## **Left, right and centre in the Third (1871–1940) and Fourth (1944–58) Republics**

The French Fifth Republic had previously been unkind to attempts to win power for the political centre. It inherited from its predecessors a strong sense of a left–right divide, dating back to the French Revolution, which had dominated electoral politics in the Third and Fourth Republics. However, during the nearly ninety years of those two republics, although votes were cast along well-trodden left–right lines,

France was often governed from the centre. There was never a two-party system along the lines established in Britain from 1868, rather two loose blocs of left and right. Many of the hallmarks of modern democracy – mass male suffrage, vigorous free debate, rival political ideologies and the overturning of governments by parliament or the electorate – arrived early in France; however one hallmark – the modern, structured, mass-membership political party – did not. Until its collapse in 1940, political formations in the Third Republic were more like the loose overlapping assemblages of Whigs, Tories, Radicals and Peelites that dominated British politics in the mid-nineteenth century.

French electoral systems (see Box 1) make for complex political choices, and have encouraged an unusual sophistication in the French electorate. Tactical voting was always widespread and became instinctive. Individual, often locally entrenched, personalities found they could face both ways, and both left and right blocs included

## En Marche! A New Dawn for European Liberalism?

groups prepared to deal with moderate elements in the opposite camp.

So, as the Radicals (see Box 2), dominant from the left for much of the Third Republic, were pushed towards the centre ground by the rise of first the Socialist Party (SFIO) and then the soon-to-be powerful Communist Party, their descendents in the 1920s and 1930s were able to maintain a key role in government formation even though – or perhaps by – dividing, reuniting and redividing as they formed appropriate alliances. Their success was in stark contrast to the fate of the British Liberal Party, whose divisions in 1918–23 and from 1931 on profoundly weakened it, pushing it to the sidelines of government. This contrast led many political scientists to conclude that the key difference lay in the voting system. If the UK had adopted the two-ballot system (favoured by many British radicals in the late nineteenth century) or the alternative vote (which later became the preferred minor reform of British Liberals), might the British equivalent of the French Radicals have been able to remain as key to government formation as their French counterparts did?

The similarity between the British Liberal and French Radical parties was more profound than both being pushed to the centre by the rise of class-based parties to their left. Both had been the parties of democratic reform in the nineteenth century, challenging conservative ideology and privileged classes and institutions. They had borrowed ideas and names; liberal as a political word had come into English from Spanish via French while radical had been used politically in Britain before it was in France. Their differences lay more in their opponents. British conservatism was relatively pragmatic and the British aristocracy ultimately prepared to hand over power peacefully (as the House of Lords did in 1910–11); the French monarchy and supporting Catholic Church, however, was more ready to dig itself in and more ideologically challenging. So French radicalism defined itself as republican, a word which in French is more about democratic legitimacy and respect for constitutional process than whether the head of state is hereditary. It also championed not just (as Liberals did) removal of all legal disqualifications on grounds of religion, but a positive view of the state as secular, or *laïcité*. The main battleground for this had been national education, which remained a deeply divisive issue during the Fourth Republic. However, by this stage the Radicals' effective opponents had become larger political parties.

Electoral politics were by then dominated by newer, well-organised mass parties – Communist, Socialist and Christian Democrat (MRP), soon joined by a strong Gaullist party. Both the old Radicals and the old Conservatives, however, survived and, because of their strategic positions in the party system, provided more prime ministers between 1945 and 1958 than any of the more

modern parties. Indeed, though becoming more dependent on electoral support in rural fringes of France, especially the southwest (which could be seen, like British Liberalism's dependence on the Celtic fringe, as the hallmark of a historic party in decline), the Radical Party's leadership was dramatically rejuvenated. Radical premiers included both the most memorably dynamic of the Fourth Republic, Pierre Mendès-France (1954–5), and France's youngest political leader since Napoleon, Félix Gaillard, who took office in 1957, a day after his thirty-eighth birthday.

The MRP, reflecting a social Catholic tradition that looked to the papal encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891) for inspiration, set out to provide a 'third way' between capitalism and Marxism. In many European countries, such as Germany, sectarian parties were pushed by electoral

### Box 1: Electoral systems

France employs a variety of voting and counting rules, periodically tweaked to achieve a political purpose. Most are conducted by two-round majoritarian systems, with effects similar but not identical to British single-round plurality systems. These include a push towards a stark two-way choice at the second round, an exaggeration of voting majorities and discrimination against minority political parties (or viewpoints), unless their support is geographically clustered. The main difference is that the French first round allows such smaller parties to stand, testing their strength, before aligning themselves with larger allies at the second round.

However, the French rules for who goes forward to the second round vary; the presence of a smaller rival in the first round sometimes blocks a larger party's entry to the second round. Hence, with this blackmail power, smaller parties can be persuaded not to contest some constituencies at the first round in return for a free run in other seats. That has long encouraged French parties to form alliances, a behaviour which extends to plurinominal (multi-member) elections by list. Thus in both municipal and regional elections, lists compete at the first round for enough votes to get through to the second one. At the second round the strongest list (or combination of lists which competed at the first but then fused) gets an overall majority of seats, with the rest allocated proportionally. When in December 2015, the Front National topped the first round in several regions, other parties' lists were fused or withdrawn to prevent the FN coming top in three-cornered contests and receiving the majority bonus.

The French national assembly is (and departmental councils were) elected in uninominal constituencies, as with the House of Commons. But as each candidate has a suppléant who will take their seats in certain circumstances, two-party combinations can stand. For the 2014 departmental council elections, binomial constituencies with exact gender parity were used; all candidates stood as male/female pairs, each with gender appropriate suppléants. This provides further opportunities for inter-party linked candidatures.

The presidential contest is purely uninominal, with the strict rule that only the top two proceed to the second round. The shock of Jean-Marie Le Pen getting through to the second round in 2002, with only 16.9 per cent, has meant that subsequent election campaigns have focused on whether to vote at the first round for candidates with an eye to who will make it to second, the much discussed vote utile (a form of the British tactical squeeze).

Most presidential candidates in 2017 favoured reform of parliamentary elections, to a partly or wholly proportional system.

**Box 2: Political parties**

The Radical Party, France's oldest political party (founded 1901), sometimes known simply as *Parti radical*, or occasionally as PRRRS from its original full title (*Parti républicain, radical et radical-socialiste*), or as *Parti radical valoisien* (whenever it split, possession of the party HQ in the Place de Valois was the key to legitimacy).

The Socialist Party was founded as the *Section française de l'internationale ouvrière* (SFIO) following a decision by the Socialist (Second) International in 1904 that two squabbling French Socialist groups should amalgamate. In 1969, the SFIO was relaunched as the *Parti Socialiste* (PS), which merged with a small party lead by Francois Mitterrand in 1971.

At the 1920 SFIO congress, most members broke away to form a party obedient to the Third (Communist) International, which became the French Communist Party, now a small fringe party but stronger than the SFIO from 1945 to 1981.

The Christian Democrat *Mouvement républicain populaire* (MRP) was formed out of previous groups in 1945, relaunched as the *Centre démocrate* in 1965 and continued under various labels until its successor was relaunched as *MoDem* in 2007. It is not to be confused with right-wing mini-parties using the Christian Democrat epithet.

Gaullist and Conservative parties change their names regularly, often shedding or adding members of smaller right-wing parties as they do so. Sometimes known in French as *Modérés* or *Indépendants*, they also often use words like *libéral* (whose meaning in French is closer to 'economic liberal' in English) *populaire* or *républicain* but never the word *conservateur*. The present party *Les Républicains* (LR) was the renaming chosen by Sarkozy in 2015 for what had been the UMP, formed in 2002 to bring Gaullists and Conservatives together in a single party.

*Mouvement Réformateur* (MR) was the 1973 umbrella label for the *Parti radical valoisien* and the *Centre démocrate*.

The *Mouvement des Radicaux de Gauche* (now *Parti Radical de Gauche*, PRG) broke away from the Radicals in 1973.

The *Union pour la Démocratie Française* (UDF) was originally an umbrella label for a wing of the Conservatives, the *Parti radical valoisien* and the *Centre démocrate*. It eventually became a party, having shed most of its member parties.

*Le Nouveau Centre* (now *Les Centristes*) is a right-of-centre splinter party.

*Mouvement Démocratique* (*MoDem*) was launched in 2007, replacing the UDF.

The *Union des Démocrates et Indépendants* (UDI) was an umbrella party formed in 2012, which includes the *Parti radical valoisien* and *Les Centristes*.

competition into a place on the right. In France the MRP, because it faced both Conservative and Nationalist (i.e. Gaullist) opponents to its right, succeeded in positioning itself as a more centrist party and provided the foreign minister in most Fourth Republic cabinets. The MRP was strongly in favour of European integration, along with most Radicals and socialists, and used its pivotal strength to bring France fully into this process, against Communist, Gaullist and some Conservative opposition. That fault line, between the pro-European centre and the *souverainistes* of the political right and left, which was established in the late 1940s, persists and was very evident in the 2017 campaign.

Thus in the mid-twentieth century, the Radicals and the MRP were playing key, and similar, roles both in France's embracing of the European idea and in the establishment of the particular French mixture of market economy, state management and social security. These issues defined the political centre in France. In contrast, at the European level their links were different. French Radicals had played a leading part in establishing an inter-war *entente internationale* of similar parties, including British Liberals, and were involved in its successor, the Liberal International, founded in 1947. However, the political connotations of the French word *libéral* were more conservative than its English homonym, and the LI became, over time, distinctly less francophone. The MRP more naturally found its place in the *Nouvelles Équipes Internationales*, the Christian Democrat equivalent of LI, and also founded in 1947. It followed that, as political groups were formed in what was later to become the European Parliament, the Radicals and the MRP were also separated. However, an added complication was that at first French Conservatives and (until they formed a group of their own in 1963) Gaullists chose to become allied to the Liberal group. Many years later, as the French right came together domestically, both Conservative and Gaullist traditions found a more natural home in what is now the European Peoples Party.

**The Fifth Republic**

Major constitutional changes in 1958 and 1962 moved the focus of French politics to a popularly elected president. This has trapped both centrist forces. Until 2017, the presidency was monopolised by two political forces: the dominant Gaullists, steadily broadening from 1974 into a conventional conservative party, and an increasingly strong Socialist party. But centrism, like the UK Liberal Party, refused to die. At the first (1965) presidential election, Jean Lecanuet, the MRP leader, launched his candidature supported by some Radical figures such as Maurice Faure, though the Radical Party itself backed Mitterrand (standing as the sole voice of the left; he had previously worked closely with the Radicals). Lecanuet, using modern marketing methods (with many similarities to Macron's style in 2017), was branded as the French Kennedy, polled 16 per cent and unexpectedly forced de Gaulle to a second ballot. But the demographics of his vote did not reflect that modernity; rather it peaked in those rural areas with a strong Catholic tradition, which happened also to be where French farmers feared de Gaulle would upset the Common Agricultural Policy. He only did well in one large city, Lyon. At the second round, Lecanuet's vote split fairly evenly between de Gaulle and Mitterrand, pointing to the inherent difficulty for centrism of a two-ballot system.

**Then, in 1970, the Radicals staged a brief dramatic revival when they co-opted a new leader, the high-profile journalist Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, who won a by-election at Nancy in Lorraine, hailed by some as a French Orpington.**

In 1969 Alain Poher, the centrist president of the senate (with an MRP background), stood against the inheritor of de Gaulle's mantle, Pompidou; centrism nearly made a comeback. The Radical Party backed him; he polled 23 per cent, spread more evenly across France than Lecanuet's vote; and went into the second round. But the Communists, who were then far stronger than the Socialists, successfully commanded their flock to abstain and consequently Poher lost. He never formed a party.

Then, in 1970, the Radicals staged a brief dramatic revival when they co-opted a new leader, the high-profile journalist Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, who won a by-election at Nancy in Lorraine, hailed by some as a French Orpington.<sup>1</sup> However, at the 1973 legislative elections, centrism went down fighting what many judged would prove to be its last independent battle. Lecanuet and Servan-Schreiber joined forces to form the *Mouvement Réformateur* (MR) but their campaign behaviour prefigured the 1987 'two Davids' fiasco. The MR polled just 12.6 per cent of the vote, less than its two components previously achieved separately; the bulk of its thirty-four deputies won their seats in more traditionally right-wing (i.e. usually strongly Catholic) areas, dependent on more conservative-minded voters at the second ballot.

Meanwhile, the majority of outgoing Radical deputies, who had mostly been elected in the 1960s as anti-Gaullists with the aid of third-placed Socialist or Communist voters (typically in the rural southwest) had seen the writing on the electoral wall and refused the MR ticket. They broke from the main party, forming the *Mouvement des Radicaux de Gauche*, having signed the Common Programme of the left in November 1972. The MRG was very much, in size, the junior partner in this alliance, led by Georges Marchais for the Communists, Francois Mitterand for the Socialists and the MRG leader Robert Fabre, who became known as its Third Man. He maintained a sturdy independence in positioning his party as of the left, but a left more broadly defined than by the two larger partners. Fabre was an archetypal local politician from a small town in the rural department of Aveyron, Villefranche de Rouergues. He was born there in 1915, served the town as a local pharmacist, was its mayor for thirty years and deputy for eighteen, yet rose to serving his country as a member of its Constitutional Council (1986–95). His career epitomises the deep roots of French Radicalism.

The MRG, after several name changes now called *Parti Radical de Gauche* (PRG), has occasionally put up a presidential candidate or run a separate list at European elections, but always done a deal with the Socialists for seats in the National Assembly. A somewhat quixotic tilt was made at the presidency in 1981 by the leader who succeeded Fabre, Michel Crépeau, the mayor of another south-western town, La Rochelle. It was

supported by a 283-page manifesto *L'avenir en face*,<sup>2</sup> which sought to show how radical philosophy was of the left but different from the socialist left. The party still retains a certain strength in south-west France<sup>3</sup> (also Corsica) – in local government and also in the local-councillor elected senate – but its results in nationwide elections suggests a remaining core support of only around 2 per cent.

The Radical split proved permanent. Servan-Schreiber and the MR swung behind a modernising Conservative, Giscard d'Estaing, at the 1974 presidential election. The official *valoisien* Radical Party (see Box 2) has never fought independently again, surviving mainly where it has strong local personalities, particularly in a few towns in eastern France, and has seen its meagre fortunes fluctuate with the ups and downs of presidential figures from the right. For nearly three decades it linked with ex-MRP groups and sometimes Conservatives in a *Union pour la Démocratie Française* (UDF). While Giscard d'Estaing was president (till 1981), the UDF prospered; but when he left the domestic political scene, it shed both member-parties and votes as most of the right increasingly came together in a single main party, renamed *Les Républicains* (LR) in 2015.

However, some of the centrist Christian Democrat tradition went down another political path. In 1969, the SFIO was relaunched as a renovated *Parti Socialiste* (PS), shedding some of its historic anti-clericalism; meanwhile the main body of Christian Democrat trades unionism dropped the Christian epithet and moved closer to the PS. The electoral change was most marked in Brittany, which had traditionally voted more on the right and where French Christian Democracy developed earlier, in the 1930s. The new PS slowly absorbed the social Catholic tendency here; its vote has steadily climbed in Brittany until by the election of the regional assemblies in December 2015, the vote for the PS, led by Yves Le Drian (Hollande's defence minister), made this the most Socialist region in France.

So over the next six presidential elections, from 1981, when Mitterand ousted Giscard d'Estaing, to 2012, when Hollande ousted Sarkozy, the various survivors of France's old centrist parties were loosely cemented into right and left blocs. There were a few attempts to break out, mostly from within the right-wing camp, which partly pre-figure the Macronite movement of 2016–7.

### **Francois Bayrou**

As pressure grew on the UDF to be absorbed into the main party of the right, the leadership of the resistance fell to Francois Bayrou. Coming from another part of France where a locally strong Christian Democrat tradition was mutually reinforced by local cultural distinctiveness, Bearn (Pyrénées Atlantiques), Bayrou is a practising

Catholic who has championed a progressive, human-rights-based form of his tradition – in 2009, for example, he denounced Pope Benedict's pronouncements on the role of condoms as a protection against AIDS as 'unacceptable'. But along with his tradition, he is passionately in favour of European integration and a supporter of private (i.e. Catholic) education. From this background, he naturally entered politics from the right, and at the 1990 St Malo convention of his party, which it set out its long-term thinking, he advocated for a distinctive, personalist contribution to the role of a market economy.<sup>4</sup>

In 1993, he became a young (at 41) minister of education under first Balladur and then Juppé as prime minister, and sought to reconcile France's historic educational battle, supporting state aid to private schools whilst also promoting the principle of *laïcité*. In 1998, he took over leadership of the UDF, seeking to change it from a federation of small parties into a more unified, membership-based party. At first, this had little impact, and in the 2002 presidential election he was an also-ran with under 7 per cent, less than half Lecanuet's vote a generation earlier.

But Bayrou battled on as a deputy, increasingly critical of Chirac's presidency and shedding UDF members who wanted to stay within the right bloc umbrella – a breakaway group seeking to keep closer to the right-formed *Le Nouveau Centre* (renamed *Les Centristes* at a special congress on 11 December 2016). In May 2006, he voted with a Socialist censure motion on a money-laundering scandal (the Clairstream affair), following which the TV networks, for time-keeping balance, tried to classify him as 'opposition'. Bayrou stood his ground, successfully insisting he was independent of both government and opposition, and had a second go at the presidency in 2007. The opinion polls picked up a rising trend, and for a period the campaign news story became whether he could overtake the Socialist candidate and get through to the second round. He peaked in January; an average of the polls in that month gave him 22 per cent, compared with 28 per cent for the UMP's Sarkozy and 24 per cent for the Socialist Royale.

Thereafter Sarkozy (with 31.2 per cent at the first round in April) and Royale (with 25.9 per cent) squeezed him down to 18.6 per cent, nonetheless a massive swing to Bayrou of 11.8 points compared with 2002. Flushed with that surge, he at once launched a fresh centrist party with modern panache – the *Mouvement Démocratique*, to be called MoDem rather than a set of initials – with an emphasis on political reform (clean government, proportional representation, etc.) rather similar to Nick Clegg's platform of 2010. But the tendency of the French to let the outcome of the presidential vote influence their parliamentary choice meant that in the June 2007 parliamentary elections the MoDem vote sank to 7.6 per cent and it won just four seats – including Bayrou and his locally

popular Bearnais neighbour, Jean Lassalle, who was later to stand in 2017.

MoDem polled 8.4 per cent at the 2009 European elections, reinforcing the Liberal (ALDE) group in the European Parliament with six MEPs. This marked the point at which, at the European level, the logic of a domestic, strongly pro-European, centrist position finally brought French centrism firmly into the EP Liberal camp; the twenty-nine-strong French UMP contingent (with 28 per cent of the vote), mixing Gaullist and Conservative traditions, with both pro-EU and Eurosceptic viewpoints, sat with the right. However, MoDem found it difficult to build secure roots in France – only winning a scattering of seats on local councils by forming local alliances. Bayrou became a leading critic of President Sarkozy's style, advocating a more responsible financial policy to tackle France's rising public deficit and increasingly sounding like an isolated prophet of doom rather than a political leader. On his third run for the presidency in 2012, he was eclipsed by the revival of the Le Pen vote and the first dramatic impact of Jean-Luc Mélenchon (an ex-PS minister, standing independently on an anti-austerity platform), dropping to fifth with just 9.1 per cent. He supported Hollande at the second round, then lost his seat in the National Assembly in a rare three-cornered second round fight, while MoDem sank to two deputies – Lassalle and a surprise victor from the Indian Ocean (who joined the PRG group in the Assembly). The electoral system and two-party dominance seemed to have quashed MoDem.

#### Jean-Louis Borloo

Other centrists stuck with the right bloc, so maintaining a parliamentary presence. Best known amongst them was Jean-Louis Borloo, who has led a remarkably varied career and is currently, having retired from politics, promoting electrification in Africa. A former chief scout, he came into politics via an unusual route – a high-earning commercial lawyer who was called in to save the local football team in Valenciennes (a rust-belt town near the Belgian border) in 1986, which he did. He then formed a non-party list to contest the mayoralty of Valenciennes in 1989, winning it with a remarkable 76 per cent. During his period governing the town, he received national attention for his success in attracting jobs and reducing the town's unemployment. Forming ad hoc alliances with ecologists and the UDF he progressed to become MEP in 1989, just failed to become a centrist/green president of his region in 1992, and became a deputy in 1993 and then an energetic and telegenic national minister (with a distinctive bouffant hair style, pre-figuring Boris Johnson's) in successive right bloc governments 2002–10.

In 2002 he was a leading supporter of Bayrou, then fell out with him and joined the Radical

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Jean Lecanuet  
(1920–93)  
Jean-Jacques Servan-  
Schreiber (1924–2006)  
Francois Bayrou  
(1951–)  
Jean-Louis Borloo  
(1951–)

Party, was co-opted to be its joint leader in 2003 and elected its sole leader in 2005. After MoDem's failure at the 2007 legislative elections, he was widely seen as the obvious centrist presidential candidate for 2012, regularly picked in the polls as one of the most popular and effective ministers, identified with important measures in urban renovation and in combating climate change. But in November 2011 he withdrew his name and gave support (against Bayrou) to Sarkozy in 2012.

Re-elected a deputy with a strong personal vote in Valenciennes in June 2012, Borloo set about bringing together deputies elected from the *Nouveau Centre*, the Radical Party and five mini-parties to form the *Union des Démocrates et Indépendants* (UDI). During the 2012–17 Assembly, the UDI was the third largest parliamentary group. The UMP had stood down for these deputies, but it was still evident that such centrists could draw a few critical votes that a UMP candidate could not.<sup>5</sup> In contrast to the legendary fissiparity of centrist politics (Bayrou once memorably likened leading a group of centrists to pushing a wheelbarrow full of frogs jumping in all directions), Borloo's UDI stuck together throughout Hollande's five years.

A rapprochement with Bayrou followed: on 5 November 2013 Borloo and Bayrou signed an accord under the title 'The Alternative'. This provided for a joint MoDem–UDI list in the 2014 European elections and envisaged the same in the 2015 regional elections, to be followed by an open centrist primary for the 2017 presidential contest. Borloo claimed this expressed his personal commitment 'in the social tradition of Christian Democracy, at the same time ecologist, radical and social democrat'.<sup>6</sup>

The Alternative met its first electoral test at the May 2014 Euro-elections; despite overtures from the UMP, it insisted on separate centrist lists, proclaiming that its conservative rivals were too divided over Europe and it alone was 'clear and coherent' in its pro-European stance. UDI–MoDem lists were labelled '*Les Européens*', with a federalist programme calling for the direct election of the EU president, social and fiscal convergence (including a common minimum wage), a carbon tax on those imports into the EU which failed to respect EU environmental standards, and a separate government and budget for the Eurozone.<sup>7</sup>

In May 2014, the *Front National's* dramatic success in coming top with nearly 25 per cent (up from 6.3 per cent in 2009) took the headlines, but with established parties in decline, the trend was actually both to the populist right and to the liberal centre, little noticed at the time. The UMP lists took 21 per cent (down by 7 points), PS–PRG 14 per cent (down 2.5) and the Greens 6 per cent (down 10). The MoDem–UDI lists took almost 10 per cent, 1.5 more than MoDem alone had in 2009.

However, this mild centrist success was overshadowed by the hospitalisation of



Jean-Louis Borloo, followed in April 2014 by his resignation aged 63 from all political offices. Jean-Christophe Lagarde was elected his successor as leader of the UDI, and Laurent Hénart, mayor of Nancy, as leader of the Radical Party. Neither has made a political impact remotely comparable with Borloo and they have tended to lead both the UDI and the Radicals back in the direction of maintaining electorally useful alliances to their right.

Out of parliament, Bayrou had recovered a local political base in the March 2014 municipal elections by winning the mayoralty of Pau. A year later, in the departmental elections, under a new system of binomial candidatures (see Box 1) which encouraged parties to pair up, generally the UDI linked with the UMP. In the December 2015 regional elections, joint LR (ex-UMP) and UDI tickets were joined by MoDem in most regions; MoDem harvested a small independent vote just in Burgundy-Franche Comté, with a significant pocket only in Belfort. Bayrou maintained both a steady following in the presidential polls of around 5 per cent, and thus the ear of the media as to whether he would stand in 2017 – he would if Sarkozy stood again, but not if Juppé were nominated. Whether or not to extend an arm to Bayrou became one of central issues in the LR-sponsored primary of November 2016. When Fillon unexpectedly won, Bayrou maintained an enigmatic silence about his own intentions.

### Radicaux de Gauche

Meanwhile the PRG reaped the reward of its alliance to the left. Enough left-Radicals were elected in the wake of Hollande's election in 2012 to allow, with a few other deputies, a parliamentary group to be formed.<sup>8</sup> Except in the new Grand Est region (where they allied with the Greens), PRG candidates in the 2015 regional elections stood on PS-led lists – winning enough seats to form their own group only in the new Occitanie region, centred on Toulouse. Hollande's PS-led governments have contained two or three Radical ministers along with, for part of the time, some Greens. Sylvia Pinel (Commerce and then Housing) was its senior minister until she stood down in February 2016 to become senior vice-president of the Occitanie regional assembly. At that point, Jean-Michel Baylet (see note 2) entered the cabinet, charged with territorial government questions, a subject on which the PRG, with its strength in local councils, has a special interest.

Under Valls, it also had two junior ministers. Annick Girardin (Development and Francophony, then Civil Service), a native of St Pierre-et-Miquelon (island remnants of French Canada), built up an impressive vote there (from 15 per cent in 2002 to 65 per cent in 2012), in France's least populous constituency. Thierry Braillard (Sport), won central Lyon in one of

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the local upsets of the 2012 election. Under its national agreement, the PS had handed the seat to the Greens. But the Socialist mayor of Lyon, Gérard Collomb, disagreed and backed his PRG city council colleague to beat the official PS-backed candidate.

However, it is difficult to point to much that is distinctive about the Radical contribution to this coalition government – although in August 2014 the PRG ministers (along with some Socialists) blocked a cost-saving proposal from centralist-inclined Socialist ministers to abolish elected departmental councils from 2021. Rather, in the complex balancing of both rival Socialist factions and smaller coalition partners, the PRG has been part of the market-friendly tilt away from the more Marxist wing of the PS. The PS won office with a policy of higher taxation rates on the wealthy and pledges to revive the ailing economy. As unemployment (especially among the youth) stayed obstinately high and the government's poll rating steadily sunk, Hollande, in January 2014, tried to reboot his economic strategy with a *pacte de responsabilité*. This concordat joined together the main French business organisation (MEDEF) with the government in a common effort at economic revival, by offering employers reduced fiscal and social security burdens. The backroom boy on Hollande's staff responsible for it was a special advisor, Emmanuel Macron, the president's *secrétaire général adjoint*.

### Emmanuel Macron

The more left-wing Socialist ministers were unhappy with this development – and with losses at the March municipal and May European elections heightening tension – the more they became restive in public. Chief among these was Arnaud Montebourg, minister for the economy, whose dissident protectionist view that ailing industries merited state subsidies, was reminiscent of the role that Tony Benn took in the 1974–9 Labour government. In late August 2014, he and Benoit Hamon, the recently appointed minister of education, burst into such open attack on their own government's austerity strategy (described as dictated by the German government) that they were both sacked. Macron took Montebourg's place in a friendly handover, as despite their policy differences they had established warm personal relations in their previous roles. The new, 36-year-old economy minister at once took over his predecessor's planned engagements, keenly followed by the media, who noted an initial uncertainty about playing the public political role followed by a very rapid learning process, as this charmer spotted how to perform. *Le Monde*, which had already paid significant attention to his senior advisory position with President Hollande in 2012, gave his ministerial advent a full-page spread as '*L'envol [takeoff] d'un libéral de gauche*'.<sup>9</sup>

## En Marche! A New Dawn for European Liberalism?

Macron had joined the PS aged 24, though only for three years, and later spent a few years earning well as an investment banker. This last role was at once seized on by the government's opponents; the *Front National* denounced him as '*un financier technocrate*' and the Socialist left labelled him an elite banker. Macron actually came from a comfortable, professional, middle-class background in the provincial town of Amiens (he had declined an invitation to stand on the Socialist list for the Amiens town council); he had acquired an elite higher education at the *École Nationale de l'Administration* (ENA) by brains and hard work. ENA graduates have dominated French governments of both left and right to a degree that echoes the role of Eton and Oxford in British Conservatives ones – but the meritocratic elite represented by '*énarques*' is very different to the background of family wealth on the part of its British near-equivalent.

Macron had also spotted and seized his chance. In late 2008, when Hollande was an outsider for the Socialist presidential nomination, he joined the Socialist politician's team, having already been appointed rapporteur for a right-bloc government commission, presided over by Jacques Attali, which considered the need to promote economic growth in France through deregulation. Attali, a prolific writer on economic and social affairs and another *énarque*, served ten years as President Mitterand's advisor before becoming the first president of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development in 1991. Attali, along with Michel Rocard, is widely cited as Macron's mentor. In a regional press interview given on his first ministerial visit, Macron himself said he was of the left, which – to him – meant 'to be effective, to recreate conditions favouring investment, production and innovation ... To be left is to be responsible, it is not to posture'.<sup>10</sup> That set the tone for a brief, galvanising ministerial career.

### The '*loi Macron*'

The new minister's name was soon well known. It fell to him to promote the government's next flagship bill, a lengthy and complex economic reform bill based on the Attali commission's report, which became known simply as the '*loi Macron*'. Its full name ('law for economic growth, activity and equality of opportunity') was a slogan which covered a comprehensive list of deregulation proposals, ranging from reducing restrictions on Sunday opening and night working, freeing up the legal professions, reducing the time and cost needed for a driving licence, some denationalisations (armament manufacture, plus Lyon and Nice airports), making it easier to move accounts between banks, enabling university hospitals to operate more commercially, liberalising of bus routes and easing of some building regulations (especially

in tourist zones), to promoting the issuing of free shares as a reward for success. This omnibus ragbag aroused a range of opposition – the unions were especially protective of the Sabbath, while France's notaries proclaimed that 'submitting [them] to the law of the market ... would degrade an essential public service'.

The French parliament was another problem. United, the PS only had a bare majority unless its Communist, Green and PRG allies voted with it, while the PS left wing, disturbed by the government sackings of August 2014, were ready, if not eager, to rebel. In February 2015, Prime Minister Manuel Valls decided on an autocratic but constitutional response, invoking clause 49-3 for the first time during the Hollande presidency.<sup>11</sup> Under this procedure, a French government, by making a measure a matter of confidence, ensures that only a vote of censure passed by a majority of all deputies can block it, abstentions thereby counting as supporters. Deputies of the right and centre united to vote to censure, but only six Communists and one Green joined them. Had the bill been put to the vote in its own right, centrist support might have balanced rebel Socialist opposition,<sup>12</sup> but Valls preferred confrontation to winning by dealing with part of the opposition. Macron let it be known that he would have preferred to win the debate and so to have won a victory in the battle of ideas. Having had its enforced first reading on 19 February 2015, the detail of the bill wound its way through various amendments in the Assembly and Senate, bringing to the fore Richard Ferrand, a Socialist deputy from Brittany, the bill's rapporteur. Arbitration between senate and assembly versions having failed, Valls used 49-3 again on 16 June to enforce the government's will.

This parliamentary battle was France's main domestic political story in the first half of 2015. It left scars both between the PS and its left-wing allies, which became evident in rival lists for the December 2015 regional elections, and within the PS, which became evident in the January 2017 primary when Valls was defeated. It made Macron's name, then left him free to continue his battle for economic reform 'Putting [the law] into action and continuing the movement, these are my two priorities'.<sup>13</sup>

It is too soon to assess the effects of the *loi Macron* on economic growth or job prospects, though France's high unemployment rate did begin to fall by 2017. Some social effects, though, were immediate. French families now find their supermarket open on a Sunday morning. Most dramatically, cheap intercity bus routes mushroomed. In March 2016, the state authority supervising the new routes (ARAFER) announced that 770,400 passengers had used such routes in the last five months of 2015 – a massive increase over the 110,000 who had used them in the whole of 2014 – and the problem now was inadequate bus

The new minister's name was soon well known. It fell to him to promote the government's next flagship bill, a lengthy and complex economic reform bill based on the Attali commission's report, which became known simply as the '*loi Macron*'.

stations. Naturally, the new coaches were called in French *les autocars Macron*. By 2017, most of the French young must have used, or know a friend who has used, a Macron *autocar*.

This achievement gave Macron a familiar, friendly identity. When he was discussed in the media in the context of Fillon, a racing car enthusiast, Macron was ironically '*le champion des autocars*'. It fed into his presidential campaign; in September 2016, quoting a rise in annual usage by then from 110,000 to four million, he claimed that this 'symbolic reform' broke one of the barriers between '*les insiders et les outsiders*', arguing that such mobility – for jobs, for leisure, for social life or for love – was essential to free whole areas of France from slavery, notably the *banlieu* of Paris.<sup>14</sup> Notions of access and the smashing of barriers became a leitmotiv of Macronism.

The political effects were already visible. In June 2015, a youth group '*Les Jeunes avec Macron*' formed to support his economic reform campaign;<sup>15</sup> sixteen months later one of its co-founders, Sacha Houlié, became one of *En Marche!*'s nine envoys as the Macron candidature was prepared.<sup>16</sup> In France, political summer schools form part of the annual rhythm of politics. In 2015, the day before the opening of the yearly Socialist gathering at La Rochelle (held under the slogan 'Act Together'), the two wings of the party organised rival gatherings. The right wing met nearby at Léognan (Gironde); Macron (not invited to La Rochelle as he was not a party member) was its star turn, as the senior Socialist Gérard Collomb (whose re-election as mayor of Lyon had been a notable PS success the preceding year) publicly commented on his despair at the conservatism of thought of the rival camp of left wingers. On the same day, 27 August 2015, Macron received a standing ovation at the MEDEF (employers) summer school.<sup>17</sup> The seeds were sown for the political realignment of April–June 2017.

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### The November 2016 primary

Before then, elections were due in December 2015 for the new twelve French mainland regional assemblies (Hollande's flagship reform of 2014); voting took place shortly after the Bataclan massacre in Paris. The *Front National* advanced to 28 per cent of the vote, well ahead of the centre-right joint lists. As the last major test before the 2017 elections, that made Marine Le Pen's presence in the second round of the presidential vote a near certainty. This prospect galvanised French politicians, as both right and left prepared to fight each other for the role of beating her; the FN had been easily beaten at the second round of the regionals in its two strongest regions, as the PS withdrew its lists to clear the way for the centre-right (see Box 1). It also seemed to mark the end of a centrist challenge; the Bayrou–Borloo idea of 'The Alternative' had disappeared, and almost

everywhere centrist forces had opted for lists of the left or the right, presaging a simple three-way presidential race.

Both France's two big parties chose the innovative method of citizen primaries, open to all electors who turned up on the day, declared their broad support and paid a small fee; this was used for the first time in 2011 by the PS, when Hollande had won the nomination. Both sides hoped this would prove, as it had for the PS, a unifying experience. This time it would not prove so for either.

The *Les Républicains* party planned the move carefully, following a brief chaotic civil war in late 2012 over an effectively tied election for a new leader. It boldly called its primary that 'Of the right and of the centre', though no centrist party accepted the bait. The UDI balloted individual members of its member-parties on whether to participate; they decided it should keep an official distance. So the seven candidates for nomination comprised six leading LR politicians and one face-saving non-LR participant from a tiny satellite religious party.

The contest boiled down to a final choice between two former prime ministers, Alain Juppé (a long-time favourite, explicitly bidding for centrist votes as the route to winning the presidential race) and Francois Fillon (who won the three TV debates in a remarkable late sprint, mobilising two distinct sources of right-wing ideas, religious and economic). Though the UDI was officially not engaged, Lagarde and Hénart had called for support for Juppé, emphasising his humanist values and pro-European views. In retrospect, Fillon's emphatic victory on 27 November 2016 is the point at which Macron became the man most likely to get the chance to face Le Pen in May 2017.

It left Bayrou (and MoDem) without a strategy, as he had made his next move dependent on the outcome of a primary choice between Juppé and Sarkozy. It left the UDI and centre-leaning LR voters unhappy, particularly as Fillon's proposed severe cuts in healthcare provision suddenly became the subject of scrutiny. Despite that, in December Fillon clearly led in the polls. But when his controversial employment of his wife and children on the public payroll was revealed in late January and, after first undertaking to stand down if subject to formal investigation, he then catastrophically refused to fulfil this pledge, Fillon's ratings dropped, never to recover. If he had been a candidate nominated simply by LR, the party could more easily have dumped him. Instead, he insisted on his right to stand as the overwhelming choice of a primary vote involving 4.3 million people.

### *En Marche!*

Macron, meanwhile, had carefully prepared his bid, in stages. In early April 2016 he brought

**Part think tank, part a series of mass rallies, EM! held meetings around France to ask what people felt was not working and to discuss their ideas for new solutions. It avoided starting with its own policies or defining an ideological position.**

his supporters together as *En Marche!*, with Richard Ferrand (rapporteur for the *loi Macron*) as secretary-general. Although seen from the start as a platform for Macron's presidential hopes, it was deliberately organised so as not to be a political party. Its officers and members could retain any existing party memberships – so Ferrand remained a Socialist deputy, and Macron remained a government minister (until the end of August). Part think tank, part a series of mass rallies, EM! held meetings around France to ask what people felt was not working and to discuss their ideas for new solutions. It avoided starting with its own policies or defining an ideological position. Macron, and EM!, picked up support early from a few Socialist figures, such as the mayor of Lyon (Collomb) and some centrist ones, especially MoDem–UDI MEPs (e.g. Jean Arthuis, J-M Calvada and Sylvie Goulard), but notably little from leading national political figures until the early months of 2017. EM!'s impressive achievement was organising its rallies, addressed at inspiring length by Macron, to which it attracted crowds of thousands all over the country. He finally declared his presidential ambition openly in mid November 2016, drawing attention away from the right's primary. He had built a momentum without a policy programme, with the declared aim of gathering progressives of all political traditions to combat conservatism.

Meanwhile, the PS was facing the dilemma of how to handle a deeply unpopular president, who (so his friends said) had hoped for a shoo-in as candidate for a second term. Early calls for an open primary for the whole left, from Macron to Mélenchon (who had done well in 2012 as a presidential candidate to the left of the PS), were spurned by PS leaders. Mélenchon openly, and Macron effectively, were left free to promote their own cases as runners without being chosen by a party. Then the PS announced, belatedly, it would organise a primary in January 2017, with nominations opening in December, so allowing Hollande to keep his options open until then. Leaving the announcement as late as he possibly could, he decided that withdrawal was preferable to likely humiliating defeat in his own party primary. Typically, Macron held a major rally in Paris on 10 December, grabbing headlines from the opening shots in the Socialist primary; the media debated whether only ten thousand people had gathered to hear him, or was it the fifteen his supporters claimed? Those on the moderate wing of the PS, who wanted to save their party from a lurch to the left and the repudiation of the Hollande presidency's record, had little time to organise.

In late January the primary of what was called *La belle alliance populaire* chose one of the ministers dismissed in August 2014, Benoit Hamon, over Valls, the prime minister who sacked him. The PRG had put their own proposed presidential candidate, Sylvia Pinel, into the primary; she

came sixth, scoring 1.5–2 per cent across most of France,<sup>18</sup> with higher pockets in the rural southwest, Corsica, some overseas bits of France and among French citizens living abroad. A former leading figure in MoDem, Jean-Luc Bennahmias, also chanced his arm, and came seventh. But the outcome hardly mattered by this stage. France's main party of the left since 1981 was being doubly overtaken by two insurgent movements, Mélenchon's and Macron's.

By January the polls were showing Macron as a strong third runner, with support similar to Bayrou's ten years earlier, with a chance (like Bayrou at that stage) of pulling ahead and getting into the final round, which otherwise would be pitching the more conservative wing of the right (Fillon) against the far right. The regular monthly survey of the leading academic poll conducted for Cevipol<sup>19</sup> had first tested Macron's support, in various hypotheses, in September. If Sarkozy were the Conservative champion and Macron not stood, it found that Bayrou, Hollande and Mélenchon would have been vying for third place. But Macron, taking votes across the spectrum, would already have comfortably made third place then with 14 per cent, even competing with Bayrou. Bayrou, on his own could get 12 per cent. By January, before the Fillon scandal broke, Macron, without Bayrou present, had advanced to 19–21 per cent, depending on who the PS candidate was. Bayrou by then was down to a core 5–6 per cent, if he stood. Then Fillon threw away his party's chance of winning and Macron moved into the commanding position in the polls which led to his victory.

There followed Bayrou's decision to ally with Macron, the official presidential election campaign, the formation of a new cross-party government under Macron's choice of Edouard Philippe as prime minister and the two-round parliamentary elections in June when the centrist forces swept the board. These further developments, along with their wider implications for European politics and liberalism in particular, will be covered in a following article, to be published in issue 98 (spring 2018) of the *Journal of Liberal History*.

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1 At the 2nd round on 28 June 1970, he took 55 per cent in a three-cornered fight against both a Gaullist and a Communist; Nancy has

- remained a pocket of *valoisien* Radical strength to this day.
- 2 Michel Crépeau, *L'avenir en face – le nouveau manifeste du mouvement des radicaux de gauche* (Saint-Armand, October 1980)
  - 3 This regional strength of the old Radical Party, the MRG and now the PRG, is strongly associated with the circulation area of the regional newspaper published in Toulouse, *La Depeche du Midi*, and with the Baylet family who have owned it since the 1920s. Jean Baylet, who died in 1959, played a major part in maintaining an anti-Gaullist centre-left vote in this region, still evident in Mitterrand's regional success there in 1965; his widow Evelyne-Jean Baylet, who died aged 101 in 2014, was the first female president of a departmental council (Tarn-et-Garonne in 1970). Their son, Jean-Michel Baylet, was leader of the PRG from 1996 to 2016, when he made way for Sylvia Pinel, also from Tarn-et-Garonne.
  - 4 J. Barrot and F. Bayrou, *Actualité de la pensée démocrate chrétienne*, Convention de St Malo 19–21 October 1990 (Centre des Démocrates Sociaux).
  - 5 Comparison of the second ballot straight-fight votes between the 2012 presidential and parliamentary elections shows that a UMP candidate polled 0.8 less in June than Sarkozy had done in May, whereas a *Nouveau Centre* candidate polled 1.0 more and a *valoisien* Radical 1.5 more (author's calculations). Thus a seat winnable by the left against the UMP by less than about 4 per cent would not fall to the left if the UMP backed a centrist; that critical difference changed the outcome in marginal seats.
  - 6 *Le Figaro*, 6 Nov. 2014.
  - 7 *Le Monde*, 7 May 2014.
  - 8 National Assembly rules make fifteen the minimum size for a group, which gave the PRG a more independent parliamentary platform. Previously, PRG deputies had normally been affiliates of the Socialist group.
  - 9 *Le Monde*, 28 Aug. 2014, p. 17.
  - 10 *Ouest-France*, 2 Sep. 2014.
  - 11 This draconian procedure had been invoked by some Fifth Republic governments (including Rocard's Socialist one). But it had not been used in the nine years before 2015, while neither previous Socialist premiers, Jospin 1997–2002 and Ayrault 2012–14, had used it. Valls was to use it six times, but his manifesto for the Socialist primary in 2017 then called for its abolition!
  - 12 *Le Monde*, 20 Feb. 2015, ('*Un vote de censure qui reliait la droite*') reported that of the UDI deputies, eight wanted to vote for introduction of the *loi Macron*, thirteen were against and nine abstained; faced with the confidence vote they united with the right. Similarly in June 2015, about half the centrists were reported to be ready to vote for the reform, until repulsed by the use of 49-3.
  - 13 *Le Monde*, 7 Aug. 2015.
  - 14 '*Il est urgent de reconcilier les Frances (1 Sept 2016)*', in *Macron par Macron* (Editions de l'aube, 2017), pp. 44–5.
  - 15 *Les Jeunes* were not that young. Several of their founders had been part of the network hoping for the candidature of Dominique Strauss-Kahn in 2012; by March 2016, when LJAM set up a think tank, *La Gauche libre*, the movement claimed 3,000 members, average age 33 (*Le Monde*, 12 Mar. 2016). A year later LJAM had grown to 18,000 members, average age 29, 70 per cent of whom were stated to have no previous political engagement (*Le Point*, 9 Mar. 2017).
  - 16 '*Emmanuel Macron nommé ses "ambassadeurs"*', *Le Monde*, 27 Oct. 2016.
  - 17 '*Macron, star au Mdef, épouvantail au PS*' and '*A la veille de son université d'été, le PS étale ses divisions*', *Le Monde*, 29 Aug. 2015.
  - 18 This was a considerable improvement on the 0.64 per cent vote for the veteran PRG leader J-M Baylet when he stood in the 2011 Socialist primary.
  - 19 Cevipol (*Centre d'études de la vie politique*) surveys are conducted by Ipsos – Sopra Seria, and are comparable with the British Election Study, being based on 15,000–20,000 names drawn from the electoral register, allowing detailed breakdowns and confidence levels far superior to most polls.

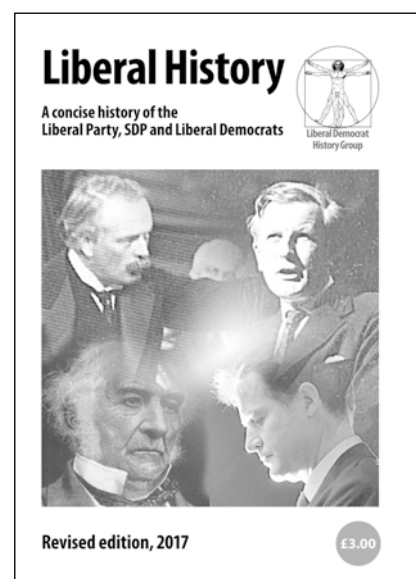
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## Party membership

Tim Bale, Monica Poletti and Paul Webb analyse the characteristics of Liberal Democrat members in 1997 and 2015

# The same but different: Lib De



**S**TEREOTYPES OF PARTY members abound. The Conservative Party conference conjures up images of blue-rinse dragons and oleaginous Tory boys. Think Labour, think sharp-suited Blairite-wannabees mixing with trade unionists and dressed-down radicals. And the Lib Dems? Beard and sandals, naturally. Ridiculous of course, but all the more persistent for that.

Which is why the academics Patrick Seyd, Paul Whiteley, and their various collaborators, did everyone a favour when, back in the 1990s they carried out survey research on the memberships of all three parties – research published in three books: *Labour's Grassroots*, *True Blues*, and then, a few years later, *Third Force Politics*, which dealt with the Lib Dems.<sup>1</sup>

# m members in 1999 and 2015

But that was then and this is now. Or rather, this is two years ago, since a lot may also have changed since the 2015 general election. When Liberal Democrat members were surveyed in 1999 by Seyd, Whiteley and Billingham, there were 83,000 of them, Paddy Ashdown was the leader, the party had no experience of government, the Tories were in turmoil and New Labour reigned supreme. It all seems like a long time ago. Since then we have had the Iraq War and the Global Financial Crisis. We have also seen the Lib Dems go into coalition with the Conservatives in 2010 only to be spat out into opposition five years later, leaving them with around 45,000 members, a figure that went up to 60,000 members after Nick Clegg's resignation speech.<sup>2</sup> It was at that point – May 2015 – that, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and as part of a project covering six British parties, we carried out the latest academic survey of Lib Dem members.<sup>3</sup> Our method was different: where the pioneers gained the cooperation of the party to use postal surveys, we used YouGov's internet panel to find the members we questioned.<sup>4</sup> But many of the questions we asked were, quite deliberately, either identical or very similar.<sup>5</sup> We are therefore in a position to see whether the party's members have changed much over a decade and a half, although we cannot, of course, completely discount the possibility that at least some of the differences (or indeed similarities) we detect are artefacts of different sampling methods

With that caveat in mind, we look first at demographics – who were and are the members? Next, we take a look at their political views on a few key indicators. Then we touch briefly on how they came to join the party before moving on to what they do for it and how active they are, both at general elections and between them. We finish by looking at what they think of the party they belong to and whether being a Lib Dem member has lived up to their expectations. Our focus in each section is to assess whether there appears

to be change over time and to propose a few explanations as to why things have (or have not) changed.

## Demographics

Some two-thirds of the more than five and a half thousand members of six parties that we surveyed just after the 2015 general election were men. As we can see from Table 1, the 2015 Lib Dem membership, therefore, was about average in this respect – the party contained a higher proportion of men than women than did Labour, the Greens and the SNP, but a lower proportion than did the Tories and UKIP. This represents quite a change, however, from the situation prevailing in 1999, when the gender imbalance was rather less obvious. Even then, however, it was the case that there were more male than female members, in spite of the fact that out there in the electorate, the Lib Dems picked up more votes from women than they did from men – something that was also the case (indeed more so) in 2015. It is worth noting, however, that we may well be underestimating the gender balance in the party: certainly, well-informed sources suggest that the proportion of women is closer to a half than a third.<sup>6</sup>

When it comes to age, however, Table 1 tells a different tale. The average age of a Lib Dem member in 2015 is, at 51 years old, eight years younger than it was in 1999. Looking in more detail, the picture looks quite encouraging for the party in that it seems to have more younger members in the younger age brackets and fewer older members in the older age brackets in 2015 than was the case sixteen years previously.<sup>8</sup> This is counterbalanced, however, by a more depressing story when it comes to voters. Perhaps as a result of its leadership agreeing to the coalition's tripling of tuition fees, the party found it impossible to recruit the same proportion of young voters as it did young members – in marked contrast to 1999.

Left: Liberal Democrats on the march for Europe, London, March 2017

## The same but different: Lib Dem members in 1999 and 2015

<b>Table 1: Lib Dem members and voters compared (%)</b>				
	<i>Members 1999</i>	<i>Members 2015</i>	<i>LD voters 1997</i>	<i>LD voters 2015<sup>7</sup></i>
<i>Gender</i>				
Male	54	68	47	43
Female	46	32	53	57
<i>Age</i>				
18–25	2	10	12	5
26–35	5	16	19	12
36–45	11	13	21	16
46–55	23	13	19	19
56–65	22	17	12	22
65+	36	31	17	26
Mean age	59	51	47	53
<i>Education</i>				
Graduate	42	56	16	44
<i>Employment</i>				
In full-time education	2	8	4	1
Employed	50	51	59	62
Unemployed	2	2	2	2
Retired	32	35	19	30
Looking after the home/Not working	6	3	10	4
<i>Sector worked in</i>				
Public	46	32	29	n/a
Private firm	38	36	54	n/a
Self-employed	n/a	19	n/a	n/a
Charity/voluntary work/other	n/a	11	n/a	n/a
<i>Religious</i>				
Yes	65	22	64	52
No	15	29	36	48
No response	20	49	<1	0
<i>Ethnicity</i>				
White	99	94	98	93

*\* 28% of the sample (half of whom were pensioners who were asked to tell us what their last job was) did not answer this question and were excluded; but there is no reason to suppose that non-respondents' and respondents' answers would be markedly dissimilar).*

Perhaps the most striking continuity between the Lib Dem membership of 1999 and 2015 is in their employment status. Clearly, given what we see in Table 1 (and with a caveat about the comparability of the figures addressed in the note beneath it) there seems to have been a change in that fewer members appear to be employed in the public sector in 2015 than in 1999, no doubt due to its shrinking importance in the economy. It is also noticeable that many more of the 2015 members are graduates – a difference that may well be accounted for, at least in part, by the expansion of higher education that accelerated under the New Labour government and has carried on since then. This is even more noticeable when we look at voters. Apart from that, however, the two groups of members look very similar, with around half

working and a third of them retired. Lib Dem voters, on the other hand, are more markedly retired than in 1999.

The most striking contrast between the two groups occurs when we look at faith. As we see from Table 1, in 1999, almost two-thirds of Lib Dem members declared they were religious. Sixteen years later that was the case for only just over a fifth, with the number saying they were not religious doubling and the proportion declining to answer increasing even more. Whether this has to do with the ongoing secularisation of British society or British liberalism coming more into line with a longstanding continental tradition of laicity, or both, is difficult to tell. It may even reflect the fact that respondents no longer feel that declaring a religion is a more socially



acceptable answer to give to a researcher than declaring none. Or it could just be an artefact of different response rates to this question: much higher in 1999 than in 2015. Whatever, if it does reflect a real change, it means that Lib Dem members are now rather more representative of voters as a whole. That is not the case, however, when it comes to ethnicity. Although, there has been progress in this respect – in 1999 all but 1 per cent of Lib Dem members were white whereas in 2015 some 6 per cent were from a minority background, with voters following a similar pattern – the party (in common, it has to be said, with other parties) has some way to go before it represents society as a whole since, according to the 2011 census, some 13 per cent of people in the UK were from ethnic minorities.

**Ideology**

Membership surveys tend to ask a battery of issue-related questions, often identical to those asked in election surveys. These can then be aggregated in order to produce an overall picture of whether members are left or right wing, libertarian or authoritarian. In this case, for the sake of simplicity as well as comparability, Table 2 shows the results for a couple of signature issues, one which captures members’ views on the left–right (or state–market) dimension, the other which captures their views on the libertarian–authoritarian dimension (which includes views on matters of law and order, censorship, immigration, the discipline and education of children). What it suggests is that Lib Dem members in 2015 were some way to the left of their counterparts a decade and a half previously, which is interesting in view of the conventional wisdom that many of the party’s more left-wing members were burned off following the decision to go into coalition with the Conservatives in 2010 and the austerity policies that flowed from it: either this was not the case or, if it was, then, had they stayed, the membership in 2015 would have been even more to the left of the membership in 1999 than they already appear

to be. Another possibility is that the results are somewhat influenced by more left-leaning members who (re)joined immediately after the demise of the coalition. Whatever, this change is all the more noticeable because support for redistribution in the wider electorate is not as widespread as it once was.

Just as interestingly, 2015 Lib Dem members appear to be considerably more ‘progressive’ (i.e. less authoritarian) than their 1999 counterparts, judging at least from their views on sentencing policy. Given this shift is unlikely to have occurred as a result of the exodus from the party during the coalition – after all, with the exception of immigration, it was not seen as a particularly ‘reactionary’ government when it came to such matters – then it would seem to reflect a more long-term change. Lib Dems, in other words, have become, rather appositely, more liberal since the turn of the century. This is likely to be associated with the fact that a significant proportion of the 2015 members are younger and more likely to be educated to degree level than their 1999 counterparts: youth and education are, we know, correlated with more progressive social views.

Surveys also routinely ask members (and voters) where they would place themselves on a scale running from very left wing to very right wing. Table 3 shows what happens when we do this. It suggests that, in spite of the fact that, on the issues, 2015 Lib Dem members appear to have moved to the liberal-left of their 1999 counterparts, they still like to think of themselves in pretty much the same way, namely as on the centre-left, with the emphasis as much, if not more so, on the centre than on the left. This suggests that locating themselves in that space has become very much a fixed part of Lib Dem identity – at least for party members (and probably for habitual Lib Dem voters too).

We also asked (prior to the Brexit referendum, of course) whether any Lib Dem members were in favour of the UK leaving the EU. When the same question was asked in 1999, researchers found 6 per cent of the membership would like to have

**Table 2: Lib Dem members on the left–right/authoritarian–libertarian dimensions (%)**

	<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>
<i>Redistribute wealth to less well-off/ ordinary working people</i>					
1999	7	39	32	19	2
2015	18	57	16	8	1
<i>Stiffer sentences for criminals</i>					
1999	14	31	30	21	3
2015	4	17	35	36	9

**Table 3: Left–right self-placement of Lib Dem members, 2015 and 1999 (%)**

<i>Left–right scale</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1999	3	8	25	28	23	8	4	1	1	0
2015	3	7	24	30	23	10	3	<1	<1	0

## The same but different: Lib Dem members in 1999 and 2015

Table 4: Political efficacy, Lib Dem members in 1999 and 2015 (%)						
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<i>A person like me could make a good job of being a councillor/MP</i>						
	1999	12	30	18	28	12
	2015	30	42	14	10	4
<i>People like me can have a real influence in politics if they are prepared to get involved</i>						
	1999	9	60	16	14	1
	2015	30	60	7	2	<1
<i>When the party members work together they can really change the local community/the country</i>						
	1999	16	73	9	2	0
	2015	36	57	6	1	0

seen the UK quit. By 2015 the figure was just 2 per cent – proof, if proof were needed, of how much of an article of faith the UK’s membership had become among Lib Dem members by then, and one reason, of course, why, aside from principle and potential electoral gains, Tim Farron had no choice but to put the party on the side of the 48 per cent of the country which voted ‘Remain’ in June 2016.

### Joining the party

One of the preoccupations of those who study members is why some people join political parties when so many others – including people who have a strong affinity with those parties and therefore might be expected to be interested in joining – do not. The answer – proven again and again and not just in the UK – lies in a variety of incentives, the most important of which political scientists label as *collective* (the desire to see a party’s policies enacted for the good of society) and *expressive* (an affinity with the party and its principles), and a strong sense of what they label *political efficacy* (the belief that one can make a difference).<sup>9</sup> This is exactly what the study of the Lib Dems’ 1999 members found and is what we fully expect to find when we finally complete our project. Indeed, when it comes to a sense of political efficacy we can see from Table 4 that, if anything, it was higher among the 2015 membership than it was among their 1999 counterparts. This may have been positively affected by the experience of belonging to a party of government, but it could also have something to do with who did and did not stick with the party after 2010, with the fact that 2015 members are more highly educated (something which correlates with a stronger sense of efficacy), and with the fact that the 2015 survey attracted more responses from active rather than inactive members

That said, there are some differences – most obviously when it comes to the strength of members’ attachment to the party. As Table 5 shows, the 2015 membership seem to feel more strongly attached to the Lib Dems than their 1999 counterparts. The most obvious short-term explanation

of this may be that the trials and tribulations of the coalition between 2010 and 2015 resulted in more weakly attached members leaving the party, leaving mainly the most strongly attached. In the longer term, it may simply be the case that by 2015, the party had been going for getting on for thirty years, whereas in 1999 it had not long since celebrated its tenth birthday, emerging from a sometimes tricky merger between the Liberals and the SDP. True, many 1999 members would have come from those two parties meaning that for them, the party had in effect been around rather longer than ten years. Nevertheless, the affinity members felt in 2015 may well have been stronger because it related to a more established institution and brand.

Those of us who are interested in *why* people join political parties are also interested in *how* they join, and here (in Table 6) we can see some change. First of all, of course, there are routes into the party (indeed, all parties) that are now taken for granted but which back in 1999 involved technology/media that was nowhere near so ubiquitous, assuming it existed at all. The 5 per cent of 2015 members who were prompted by a tweet or by something on Facebook were doing something none of their counterparts in 1999 would even have recognised. And although emails and websites were around then,

Table 5: Party identification of Lib Dem members, 1999 and 2015 (%)		
Attachment to the party	1999	2015
Very strong	26	61
Fairly strong	49	35
Not very/not at all strong	25	4

Table 6: How Lib Dem members join, 1999 and 2015 (%)		
Means of contact	1999	2015
Via telephone/door to door canvassing	13	8
In response to PPB	4	13
Family member	7	11
Friends	13	19
Colleague	1	5

<b>Table 7: Lib Dem party members' activity, 1999 and 2015</b>		
	<i>Members, 1999</i>	<i>Members, 2015</i>
<i>Time devoted to party activity in the last/average month</i>		
None	54	37
Up to 5 hours	29	33
5-10 hours	7	13
10-20 hours	4	9
20-30 hours	2	3
30-40 hours	1	1
More than 40 hours	3	4
<i>Attendance at meetings per year</i>		
Not at all	53	27
Rarely (1-2 times)	17	15
Occasionally (3-5 times)	11	23
Frequently (5 or more times)	20	35
<i>In the last five years, have you occasionally or frequently</i>		
Displayed an election poster	44	58
Signed a Lib Dem petition	15	77
Donated money to the Lib Dems	26	68
Delivered election leaflets	46	65
Helped at a party function	16	40
Canvassed voters	18	43
Stood for office within the party	8	30
Stood in local or national elections	9	33
<i>During the general election*</i>		
Displayed an election poster	70	38
Attend a public meeting/party rally	22	28
Delivered election leaflets	54	46
Canvassed voters	30	33
Helped run a committee room	19	13
Liked something by the party or candidate on Facebook	n/a	47
Tweeted or re-tweeted party or candidate messages on Twitter	n/a	31
<i>Compared to five years ago, are you</i>		
More active	15	24
Less active	41	28
About the same	45	31
<i>* 1999 members answers refer to the 1997 general election, whereas 2015 answers refer to the 2015 general election</i>		

as well as (believe it or not!) party political broadcasts, generates more.

**Activists**

The idea that five years of coalition with the Conservatives reduced the Lib Dem membership to a dedicated few is hard to resist when we look at what members did for the party in 1999 and 2015 respectively. As Table 7 shows, back in 1999, just over half of Lib Dem members admitted to doing absolutely nothing for the party beyond paying their subscriptions. By 2015 that was true of only just over a third of them. That said, the proportion of hard-core activists – those committing over twenty hours a month to the party on an ongoing basis – does not appear to be that different, in both cases coming in under 10 per cent. What the party seems to have been able to do by 2015 was to mobilise more of its members into doing just a bit of work for it. It also seems to have persuaded more of them – or they seem to have persuaded themselves – that it was more worthwhile attending party meetings, possibly because the content and/or the form of those meetings has changed over the years to make them more accessible and even enjoyable.

What is most striking, however, is that members in 2015 were – or were at least claiming to be – doing much more in the previous five years than their 1999 counterparts when it came to individual activities. It could be, of course, that our 2015 sample was more prone to exaggeration, and we suspect that many hard-core activists would find it very hard to believe that so many of their less active colleagues claim to have undertaken what political scientists would label ‘high-intensity’ activities like canvassing, let alone standing for party or public office. On the other hand, as the number of members reduced during the coalition years, it is inevitable, given the fact that the number of posts and candidacies stayed the same, that more people would have been called on to stand – many of them of course in circumstances where winning was highly unlikely, meaning they were in effect ‘paper candidates’ engaging in what in reality was a fairly low-intensity activity. We also have to remind ourselves, once again, that changes in technology have made it much, much easier these days not just to sign petitions and make donations but even to canvass voters without leaving the comfort of one’s own home. Those same changes may also help to explain why the 2015 membership seems to have delivered even more leaflets than its 1999 counterpart: those leaflets are now easier to produce meaning there are more of them that need distributing. Another reason might also be related to the fact that the national party is probably better able to directly stimulate local activity now, through the use of emails or social media for instance, than it was before those technologies were so widely used.

recruitment via those means (which prompted 23 per cent of 2015 members to join) was not even presented as an option in the (postal) surveys that went out to members in 1999. Still, when we look at means that were available in both years, we see some differences. Canvassing appears to generate fewer members nowadays. But, notwithstanding fears that we spend more time with our devices than with people these days, face-to-face contact with family, friends and colleagues,

## The same but different: Lib Dem members in 1999 and 2015

**Table 8: Lib Dem members' views of the party, 1999 (2015 figures in parentheses) (%)**

<i>'The Lib Dems are ...'</i>	Very	Fairly	Neither	Fairly	Very	<i>'The Lib Dems are ...'</i>
Extreme	<1 (<1)	5 (1)	42 (21)	41 (41)	12 (37)	Moderate
United	15 (19)	60 (41)	12 (25)	11 (13)	1 (2)	Divided
Good for one class	1 (<1)	4 (<1)	21 (5)	38 (32)	36 (62)	Good for all classes
Middle class	4 (5)	36 (32)	52 (59)	6 (3)	1 (1)	Working class
Left wing	1 (1)	36 (36)	58 (59)	5 (3)	<1 (<1)	Right wing
Efficiently run	15 (10)	59 (34)	13 (38)	11 (15)	1 (3)	Badly run

Fascinatingly, however, the 2015 general election actually saw a decline in the proportion of Lib Dem members undertaking individual activities compared to the proportion of members who undertook them at the 1997 election. The difference surely can be accounted for by the fact that in 1997 the party appeared to be on the up electorally whereas in 2015 it was indubitably on the way down (and, in many constituencies it had won in 2010, out). Not only was activity down almost across the board (the exception – just – being canvassing, apparently) it was down most in the activity that most clearly involved members (even relatively passive members) ‘nailing their colours to the mast’, namely displaying an election poster.<sup>10</sup> Forget shy Tory voters, there were clearly quite a few shy Lib Dem members in 2015!

For all that, of course, we should note that some of the differences in activity between the two groups of members can probably be accounted for by the timing of the surveys. In 1999, members were a couple of years into what was still effectively New Labour’s honeymoon period – a period in which the Blair administration had not really done much to prompt protest and outrage against its policies. 1999, then, probably constituted something of a fallow period for the Lib Dems and Lib Dem members. It might also be that two years after the electoral campaign, some of the members might have been more likely to remember doing more than they actually did. The 2015 survey, on the other hand, was taken a few weeks after an election which left many of the members surveyed dismayed but also inclined, perhaps, to want to attest that they had done all they possibly could for the party in the last few years if not perhaps at the election itself. This – and the fact that the coalition years had left the party with a smaller but relatively dedicated membership – helps account for the fact that members in 2015 were significantly more likely than members in 1999 to think they were more active (and considerably less likely to think they were less active) than they had been previously.

**Table 9: Lib Dem members' experience of membership, 1999 and 2015**

<i>'Being a member has ...'</i>	1999	2015
Fully lived up to expectations	43	45
Partly lived up to expectations	49	48
Not really lived up to expectations	7	7
Not at all lived up to expectations	1	0

And talking of timing, one of the biggest differences, of course, is in social media use: it is sometimes easy to forget that Facebook and Twitter have not been around forever; no doubt if they had been, Lib Dem members in 1999 would have been using them!

### Members' views of the party

In both 1999 and 2015 Lib Dem members were asked about how they saw their party by getting them to place the party on a series of continuums. Table 8 shows the answers given by the 1999 membership together with those given by the 2015 membership in parentheses beside them.

In both 1999 and 2015 the party was predominantly seen by its members in similar ways: moderate, united, good for all classes, neither left nor right and efficiently run. Comparing members' views in 2015 with those in 1999, however, we find that in 2015 the party was seen by its members as more moderate, slightly less united, and slightly less middle class (but also less working class) than was the case in 1999. But, interestingly in view of the fact that the Liberal Democrats spent five years in an austerity coalition with the Conservatives, the two groups placed the party in almost exactly the same space ideologically: there is no sense that, in the eyes of the 2015 membership anyway, the so-called ‘Orange Bookers’ had grabbed hold of the party and driven it to the right; indeed, if anything, those members seem convinced that it had held on to its centre-left or radical-centrist identity. Quite why fewer of them than was the case in 1999 thought the party was well-run is unclear

– and may be something that members reading this have a view on.<sup>11</sup>

Any difference on this score, however, does not seem to have translated into a difference in the way members in 1999 and 2015 rated their overall experience of belonging to the Lib Dems. As Table 9, shows, satisfaction levels in the two groups were not only impressively high but almost identical. No doubt staff at headquarters would love to know why just over half of all members still say that their experience has only *partly* rather than *fully* lived up to expectations, but they should be reasonably pleased with the response. On the other hand, that response is perhaps what we should have expected given that many of those with more negative experiences will presumably have been more likely to have left the party, ensuring that their views will have gone unrecorded in our 2015 survey (although not, we hope, in a survey of those who left all six parties covered in our study, carried out in 2017).

### Conclusion

Ultimately, then, as much has stayed the same as has changed. Demographically, the Lib Dems' 2015 membership may be more likely to be male, more likely to be a little younger, more likely to be graduates, more likely to work in the public sector and a little less likely to be religious and a little less likely to be white. But they do not look that different from their equivalents in 1999. Ideologically, they may be a little more socially liberal and a little more inclined to support redistribution. But they still see themselves as very much in the same centre-left/radical-centre, Europhile space as their counterparts did sixteen years previously. They also locate their party in almost exactly the same place, even if they are inclined to see it as slightly more moderate, and slightly less middle class and united. Both sets of members display a strong sense of political efficacy and attachment to the party, although, if anything, that sense of efficacy and attachment is stronger now than it was back then. There are some differences in how each group came to be recruited. But they are not great – and face-to-face contact still matters in this respect. When it comes to activism, the differences are more striking: the 2015 members seem to be more active between general elections than their counterparts in 1999, although they may actually have done less for the party in the election of that year than was done for it by activists in the contest held in 1997. None of this, however, seems to have impacted much on their levels of satisfaction: for the vast majority both in 1999 and 2015 being a Lib Dem member has – at least in part if not always fully – lived up to their expectations.

Surveys, of course, are more akin to snapshots than videos. We have made a few (hopefully) educated guesses to try to explain why things have

(and have not) changed in the decade and a half between the fielding of one questionnaire and the other. And we will certainly be able to delve deeper into what 'our' (2015) respondents look like, how they think, and what they do – and draw some interesting comparisons between Lib Dem members and the members of the other five parties we are researching. We also look forward to comparing 2015 members with members we have been able to survey after the 2017 election. For now, we must leave it to others (including, of course, regular readers of this journal) to analyse how the party has changed between the end of the twentieth century and the second decade of the twenty-first.

*Tim Bale and Monica Poletti (School of Politics and International Relations, Queen Mary University of London) and Paul Webb (Department of Politics, University of Sussex) run the ESRC-funded Party Members Project. This article was therefore supported by the Economic and Social Research Council (grant number ES/M007537/1).*

- 1 Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley, *Labour's Grassroots: The Politics of Party Membership* (Clarendon, 1992); Paul Whiteley, Patrick Seyd and Jeremy Richardson, *True Blues: The Politics of Conservative Party Membership* (Clarendon, 1994); and Paul Whiteley, Patrick Seyd, and Antony Billingham, *Third Force Politics: Liberal Democrats at the Grassroots* (OUP, 2006).
- 2 For Lib Dem membership figures since 1989 see the webpage maintained by the indefatigable Mark Pack: <http://www.markpack.org.uk/143767/liberal-democrat-membership-figures/>
- 3 For details of the project, see [www.esrcpartymembersproject.org](http://www.esrcpartymembersproject.org). While there are plenty of blogposts and media pieces referred to on the website, the project is just beginning to publish its findings in academic journals. The project will eventually – we hope in 2018 or 2019 – produce a book covering all its main findings.
- 4 The members' survey was conducted in May 2015. YouGov recruited the survey respondents from a panel of around 300,000 volunteers who are paid in redeemable points for completing a survey. Upon joining the YouGov panel, volunteers complete a survey asking a broad range of demographic questions which are subsequently used to recruit respondents matching desired demographic quotas for surveys. Potential respondents for the party member survey were identified from questions asking individuals if they were members of any of a list of large membership organisations, including the political parties. Results reported in this article are not weighted in any way since there are no known official population parameters for the Liberal Democrats memberships. However, YouGov party membership surveys using unweighted data have previously generated predictions for (Labour) party leadership contests that come very close (that is within 1 per cent) to the final official outcome, which gives us some confidence in the quality of the data, as does a comparison between our data on, for example, UKIP, and a survey of its membership carried out by Matthew Goodwin and Paul Whiteley for

**Ultimately, then,  
as much has  
stayed the same  
as has changed.**

## The same but different: Lib Dem members in 1999 and 2015

their book on Brexit. All in all we surveyed 5,696 members from six parties. The number of responses varied, mainly according to the size of the parties. We had responses from 730 Lib Dem members. Note that, because this is not a random probability sample one cannot, strictly speaking, compute a margin of error for our data but given the size of our sample and the estimated membership of the Lib Dems, a standard calculator would put it at a little under 4 per cent (with a 95 per cent confidence level). If anyone would like to help us weight our sample by supplying official party data, please get in touch.

- 5 Note that we have, where possible, simplified matters for the reader in the tables by using just one form of words that encompasses both surveys' questions where there were slight (but, importantly, inconsequential) differences in wording. Where the wording of questions on the same topic diverged too much to facilitate a fair comparison, we have excluded those topics and/or those questions in this article.
- 6 See <https://www.markpack.org.uk/122620/lib-dem-membership-gender-balance/>
- 7 Frequencies for Lib Dem voters taken from

BES 1997 (N=459) and have been weighted with the Britain whole sample weight (wtallgb), whereas those taken from BES 2015 (N=158) have been weighted with the combined main study weight (capped selection plus capped demographic weights) (wt\_combined\_main\_capped)

- 8 This may possibly result from an increased willingness among younger members to complete an internet survey, although – contrary to what many assume – YouGov and other internet pollsters do not routinely find it difficult to get older generations to assist with their work: younger people may be more tech-savvy but there are plenty of silver-surfers out there, many of whom, if they are retired, are rather less time-poor than their younger counterparts.
- 9 For a valuable insight into party membership in a number of European countries, see Emilie van Haute and Anika Gauja, *Party Members and Activists* (Routledge, 2017).
- 10 Sharp-eyed readers will have noticed that 2015 sample say they displayed an election poster over the last five years a lot more frequently than the 1999 sample, but at a lesser rate when asked about the most recent

election. Note, however, that the question asking about the last five years does not necessarily refer to the national campaign, meaning that somebody who has displayed election posters for local campaigns but not for national campaigns will be included in this figure. Also, the figure includes those who have displayed election poster either 'frequently' or 'occasionally'. The percentage of 2015 members referring to 'frequently' is 30 per cent, whereas the percentage referring to those displaying posters 'occasionally' is 28 per cent. The difference between the figure reported in 2015 for the last five years and at the last general election, compared to 1999 figures, might be due to a different balance between those who replied 'frequently' and 'occasionally' to the 'five years' question, and to the type of the election referred to. Moreover, members might have been willing to publicly express their vote for the Lib Dems in the 2010 general election (which presumably is taken into account in their answers) than in the post-coalition 2015 general election (when the party was less popular).

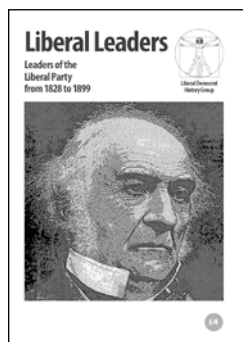
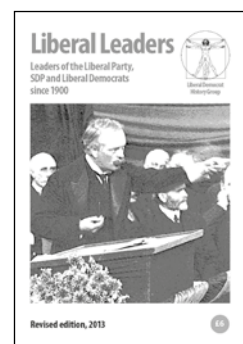
- 11 We can be contacted via [partymembersproject@gmail.com](mailto:partymembersproject@gmail.com)

# Liberal leaders booklets clearance sale

For a limited period, we are cutting the price of the two booklets below by 50 per cent – with a further 20 per cent reduction for subscribers to the *Journal of Liberal History*. You can order either via our online shop ([www.liberalhistory.org.uk/shop/](http://www.liberalhistory.org.uk/shop/)) or by sending a cheque (to 'Liberal Democrat History Group') to LDHG, 54 Midmoor Road, London SW12 0EN.

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The sixty-page booklet contains concise biographies of every Liberal, Social Democrat and Liberal Democrat leader from 1900 to 2013 (publication date). The total of sixteen biographies stretches from Henry Campbell-Bannerman to Nick Clegg, including such figures as H. H. Asquith, David Lloyd George, Jo Grimond, David Steel, David Owen and Paddy Ashdown. **Sale price £3** (normal price £6); available to *Journal of Liberal History* subscribers at the special price of **£2.40**. Add **£1.25** P&P.



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The forty-page booklet contains concise biographies of every Liberal leader from the Great Reform Act to the end of the nineteenth century – the heyday of the Victorian Liberal Party. The total of eleven biographies range from Lord Grey to Sir William Harcourt, including such towering figures as Viscount Melbourne, Lord John Russell, Lord Palmerston and William Ewart Gladstone. **Sale price £2** (normal price £4); available to *Journal of Liberal History* subscribers at the special price of **£1.60**. Add **£0.60** P&P.



# Report

## The leadership of Charles Kennedy

Evening meeting of the Liberal Democrat History Group, 3 July 2017  
with Greg Hurst and Lord Newby; chair: Baroness Lindsay Northover  
Report by Neil Stockley

CHARLES KENNEDY, ONE of the best-loved politicians of modern times, led the Liberal Democrats to their greatest electoral triumphs. But his leadership ended ignominiously in January 2006, when he was forced to resign by the party's MPs. After his death, in June 2015, he was mourned deeply by the party he once led. At the History Group's summer meeting, Greg Hurst, a senior journalist for *The Times* and author of *Charles Kennedy: A Tragic Flaw*, and Lord (Dick) Newby, who served as Charles's chief of staff, assessed his achievements as leader, and his weaknesses.

Both speakers agreed that Charles accomplished a great deal. The most significant achievement was that in 2005, under his stewardship, the Liberal Democrats won sixty-two seats and 22 per cent of the vote. It was the best performance by any third party since the 1920s. Both recalled that many commentators – not least within the party – claimed that the Liberal Democrats should have done even better, given the unpopularity of both Tony Blair's Labour government and Michael Howard's Conservative Party. Dick Newby acknowledged this point of view, but also drew some knowing chuckles when he reflected dryly that 'in retrospect, it doesn't seem such a disastrous performance'. We must now compare the party's results under Charles with its dismal showings in 2015 and 2017.

In 2003, he led the party to oppose Britain's participation in the war with Iraq. Hurst recounted that Charles was able to bridge the differences within the Liberal Democrats between its 'pacifists' and those who, for various reasons, were uneasy with opposing a British military action. Newby believed that the way Charles articulated the party's stance made many people feel comfortable about expressing their own opposition to the war, including by joining the march in London of February 2003. And, of course,

his criticisms of the war were subsequently vindicated.

Hurst contended that Charles was the UK's first modern 'anti-politician'. He recalled that many people felt they knew Charles personally, and when he died, they felt a genuine sense of loss. Hurst observed that, in conveying a sense of 'authenticity', Charles was the forerunner for successful 'anti-politicians' from other parties, such as Boris Johnson, Nigel Farage and Jeremy Corbyn. (This legacy was also ironic, Hurst reminded us, because Charles had been a politician for almost all his adult life. His only job before becoming an MP, at the age of 23, was a brief internship at Radio Highland.) As Dick Newby put it, 'people liked Charles, journalists liked him ... by and large, audiences liked him'. He recounted how, during the 2005 general election campaign, a *Question Time* audience applauded Charles as soon as he entered the studio. Newby argued, correctly in my view, that these three achievements were all connected and that the party's strong showing in 2005 was based on Charles's likeable, down-to-earth persona and the position he took on the Iraq War.

Without detracting from these achievements, the meeting considered in more detail Charles's failings and shortcomings as leader. Greg Hurst stressed that he was well-disposed towards Charles but pulled no punches as he shone new light on a familiar criticism of the Kennedy leadership: that he failed to provide a clear direction for Liberal Democrat strategy and policy. For a programmatic party, that aims to break through the two-party duopoly, this is a serious charge. And, in the latter period of his leadership, a feeling pervaded the party that it should have been performing more strongly.

Hurst described Charles as uninterested in policy, much to his colleagues' frustration, and – importantly for a liberal leader – a 'cautious man, not a radical'. He believed that Charles was always

fearful that the party might split over a major policy or strategic issue and that this sense of risk held him back from trying to seize some of the political opportunities that presented themselves to the Liberal Democrats during his time as leader. Once the party's response to the Iraq War started to consume his leadership, Charles had, Hurst said, ruled through a clique of people whom he 'felt comfortable with'.

Hurst charged that although Charles got the big calls right, as on Iraq, he was bad at party management and reluctant to take decisions. Hurst instanced Charles's reshuffles of his party spokespeople ('always a mess') and the way he handled the appointments of new Liberal Democrat peers. Hurst described Charles as an intuitive politician who watched and waited and 'sat on the fence as long as he could' before taking stances. He claimed that the only time Charles led his team from the front was during the Iraq debates.

On each of these points, Dick Newby provided valuable context and insights, without falling into the trap of acting as defence counsel for Charles. He contended, for example, that a 'lack of total application to policy' might explain Charles's reliance on a small clique. Newby recalled that early in his leadership, Charles had tried to consult and involve larger numbers of people over strategic and tactical matters. Over time, however, these arrangements had proved unworkable. Newby argued that, in any case, Charles's eventual move to narrow down his range of confidants and advisers was characteristic of nearly all political leaders.

Newby agreed that Charles was always more interested in process – the retail side of politics – than in the details of policy. He did not arrive at the leadership armed with a personal manifesto for the Liberal Democrats. Even so, as Newby reminded the audience, one of Charles's main political strengths was his ability to 'sniff the wind', to see the political consequences of any event and anticipate how the story would play out. This strength was to prove invaluable, not least during the debates over Iraq. Responding to questions, Newby acknowledged Lord Rennard's suggestion that a complementary strength was the ease with which Charles handled his television appearances and that he had a special gift for articulating 'values' rather than policies. Newby described these values in broad if not



vague terms: 'Europe' and 'social justice', along with an 'ancillary' concern for the environment. People liked Charles, Newby stressed, because he articulated these themes with such sincerity and conviction.

Newby also offered some interesting personal recollections. Yes, Charles was somewhat cautious and may not have appeared especially radical, but he was also very anti-establishment in his outlook. He was never taken in by the cosy meetings with Tony Blair at Number Ten. And, in contrast to most politicians, he was not at all fazed by royalty and 'just hated absolutely anything that involved dressing up'. But Newby also made a telling quip that Charles's caution may have stemmed from a concern that if he tried to boldly lead the party in a clear direction, 'he might lose, and it wouldn't be worth it'.

It was over Charles's effectiveness as a decision-maker that the two speakers differed most clearly. Picking up on Hurst's claim that Charles tended to sit on the fence as long as possible, Dick Newby pointed to important situations in which he took tough, fateful decisions, within tight timeframes. Two of these concerned the Iraq War. Charles came under considerable pressure from within the Liberal Democrats to take an official, leading role in the February 2003 march against the war. The party hierarchy was, however, scathing about any such suggestion. Charles 'thought it through', Newby said, and led thousands of Liberal Democrats to take part in the march, and then addressed the half-million strong crowd in Hyde Park. Newby, correctly, reminded us more than once how much political courage Charles showed – Labour and Conservative MPs savagely heckled his speeches in the Commons debates on Iraq and he was called 'Charlie Chamberlain' – and how he anticipated successfully the difficult questions and challenges that his colleagues would face during the debates.

In February 2004, the prime minister, Tony Blair, phoned Charles to inform him that he would, within a matter of hours, be formally announcing that he was setting up the Review into Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction – the Butler Review, as it came to be known. Blair intended to say that Alan Beith, a senior Liberal Democrat MP, would be a member of the enquiry. Charles objected immediately that the terms of reference were too narrow and 'would not do'. The prime minister went



ahead with his announcement – but without having Beith on the enquiry.

Newby also recalled how Charles 'thrived' during thirty-six hours of parliamentary ping-pong over control orders and that he was 'in his element' as he negotiated with Blair and Howard.

When responding to questions from members of the audience, Hurst cast some doubt on Newby's suggestions. He believed, for instance, that Charles had decided to join the anti-war march because he came under considerable pressure to do during a lunch with *Guardian* leader writers. Similarly, Charles had refused to countenance any Liberal Democrat participation in the Butler Review only because he was backed into a corner by Blair's timing of the announcement.

The speakers were at their most insightful when they assessed the weaknesses in Charles's character that made him a less effective leader than he might have been. In his opening remarks, Greg Hurst charged that Charles was lazy. He suggested that having entered the Commons at such a young age, Charles had never really had to do the 'hard yards' of politics. Later, responding to questions from the audience, Hurst argued that the party leadership had 'fallen into Charles's lap' in 1999 and that, in seeking the position, he was largely responding to the long-standing expectations of many people around him that he would succeed Paddy Ashdown. He did not have to fight especially hard for the job and nor did he demonstrate 'a burning passion' for it.

Dick Newby agreed that Charles was intellectually lazy but went on to suggest that it may in fact have been part of his political strength. Here, he drew a cricketering analogy with David Gower, a left-handed batsman who played with

style and effortless ease and never practiced, with the result that his batting average was not as high as it might have been. 'Swots' like Theresa May, by contrast, lacked imagination and charisma. This argument had its attractions, but became less convincing as the meeting progressed. Later, Newby explained how Charles's brilliance as a debater went back to his student days, when he developed a capacity to perform well with little or no advance preparation. He told some wonderful stories of how he 'busked it' as a party spokesperson for various portfolios in the 1980s and 1990s. But Dick also remembered how Charles was finally 'found out' at the launch of the 2005 Liberal Democrat manifesto when, underprepared (as well as recovering from the birth of his son and a hangover), he was unable to explain how the party's local income tax proposals would work. 'He let the party down really seriously,' Dick acknowledged.

The two speakers came closer still to a compelling explanation of what held Charles back when they agreed that he lacked self-confidence and belief in himself. Here, they offered some poignant anecdotes. Greg Hurst recalled accompanying Charles to a school in his constituency, with the chair of the local party. Charles made a speech to the students, and was brilliant, Hurst said. But afterwards he turned to his party colleague and asked, nervously, 'Did I do OK?' Dick Newby recalled visiting the leader at his constituency home in the Highlands. Charles pointed out the cemetery near his family home, to show where he would be buried one day and then asked, 'Will they forget about me?'

Dick Newby finally pointed out the proverbial elephant in the room when he reminded the audience of one further weakness: Charles was an alcoholic.

## Report: The Leadership of Charles Kennedy

Newby believed that this addiction was the root of his other shortcomings. 'At times, he was incapable of cogent thought, meaning that a certain amount of laziness was inevitable.' It was a serious problem, which Dick and his colleagues spent a great deal of time mitigating. Newby revealed how he and his colleagues became fast experts in explaining to colleagues and the media illnesses that had no visible symptoms and from which it was possible to recover quickly. The effort spent on such activity diverted their time and energy away from more important work. Given the nature of the malady, Dick reflected, it was 'amazing that he could perform so well, so often.' But, over time, 'his drinking caught up with him' and exacerbated Charles's lack of confidence. He recounted how a number of poor public performances by Charles led some Liberal Democrat MPs to complain to Newby and his colleague, Anna Werrin. Many times, they promised to take action, but the situation was not resolved and by the end of 2005, their assurances that a solution was imminent had lost any credibility with the party's parliamentarians. The game was up.

The answers to two intriguing 'what ifs?' underlined both Charles's strengths, and the inherent weaknesses

of his leadership. Duncan Brack asked whether Charles would have lasted as leader had the Iraq War not come along in 2003, given his lack of a 'burning agenda' and reluctance to take decisions. Newby thought that, despite his worsening symptoms of alcoholism, it was 'not inevitable' that he would have departed the leadership before 2005, given his strong performance in the 2001 general election campaign. Dick was sure that he was still 'head and shoulders above everyone else'. Hurst also believed that the party would have given Charles the benefit of the doubt. The Liberal Democrats' net gain of six seats in 2001 had been better than expected, he agreed, and Charles had succeeded in dislocating the Liberal Democrats from Blairism, with remarkably little fuss, thereby ensuring the party regained a more independent identity. This meant he would have been given 'time and space' to develop his leadership. But Hurst acknowledged freely that he did not know how Charles would have used such an opportunity.

Another audience member asked what might have happened had Charles not been deposed in 2006. Greg Hurst replied that he would have gone on to prepare the Liberal Democrats for opposition, rather than for government. With his remarkable ability to see around corners, Hurst argued, he

would have foreseen that Labour would lose its majority in 2010, leaving the Liberal Democrats holding the balance of power. Then, he would not have gone into coalition with the Conservatives, instead opting for a 'confidence and supply' agreement of some sort. Charles would also have been thinking about ensuring the party's position in the following general election, which Nick Clegg did not seem to have considered to any great degree, Hurst argued. This was all plausible, but such a scenario opens up some important and difficult questions. Would Charles have tried to deal with the Conservatives or with Labour, and how would he have justified his choice? What would have been his policy 'red lines' when reaching any agreement? And how would Charles, whose leadership had blossomed in relatively benign economic times have handled the grim politics of austerity?

We will never know the answers to those questions. But it was hard to escape the conclusion that Charles Kennedy was a good, if flawed, man whose legacy was a positive one; and that for all the trauma it caused the party, the ending of his leadership came at just the right time.

*Neil Stockley is a member of the Liberal Democrat History Group executive committee.*

A Lloyd George Society evening meeting, supported by LD Friends of Israel

# The Balfour Declaration of November 1917

In a letter dated 2 November 1917, Arthur Balfour, the Foreign Secretary in the Coalition Government of David Lloyd George, announced British government support for a 'national home' for the Jewish people, to be established in Palestine, then still part of the Ottoman Empire. The letter was sent to Lord Walter Rothschild, a leader of the British Jewish community, to be forwarded to the Zionist Federation of Great Britain and Ireland. The text of the declaration was published in the press on 9 November 1917.

To mark that centenary, the Lloyd George Society and the Liberal Democrat Friends of Israel are to hold a meeting to look at why the British government agreed to make this announcement at the time and in the way it did; and to examine the international consequences of the Declaration.

Speakers: Professor T. G. Otte from the University of East Anglia and Professor Colin Shindler of SOAS, London; Chair: Baroness Sarah Ludford (Vice President, LDFI)

Admission is free, all are very welcome.

**7.00 – 8.15pm, Monday 6 November 2017**

David Lloyd George Room, National Liberal Club, 1 Whitehall Place, London, SW1A 2HE

# Reviews

## Margot in wartime

Anne de Courcy, *Margot at War: Love and Betrayal in Downing Street, 1912–1916* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2015)

Review by **David Dutton**

MARGOT ASQUITH (NÉE Tennant), second wife of the leader of Britain's last purely Liberal government, is probably the best documented and most intensively researched prime ministerial spouse of the twentieth century, the very different Clementine Churchill her only possible competitor. Margot's autobiography was published in two volumes as early as 1920 and 1922. She followed this up with works such as *More Memories* (1933) and *Off the Record* (1943). Daphne Bennett's biography appeared in 1984 and, more recently, Michael and Eleanor Brock produced a polished edition of Margot's *Great War Diary* in 2014. In addition, Mrs Asquith inevitably figures prominently in books such as Colin Clifford's family history, *The Asquiths* (2002) and the published edition of the diary of Cynthia Asquith, wife of the prime minister's second son, Herbert (1968). So there is a familiarity in much of the story now narrated by Anne de Courcy, but the tale is so fascinating and told with such verve that any lack of historiographical novelty is readily forgiven.

Margot certainly exercised genuine political influence. Not only did she strive unceasingly to defend her husband's position and authority; she saw no constitutional impropriety in writing to, and sometimes summoning, Asquith's ministers in order to give them the benefit of her advice. Indeed, she had considerable confidence in her own political judgement, telling her stepson Arthur in July 1915 that she was a 'sort of political clairvoyant'.<sup>1</sup> Yet few would accept this self-assessment without considerable qualification. Margot was incapable of recognising her husband's shortcomings, particularly as a war leader, and was often a poor counsellor at times when good advice was desperately needed. Her partiality made her an unreliable historical witness. The second volume of Margot's autobiography prompted this complaint from the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres, who

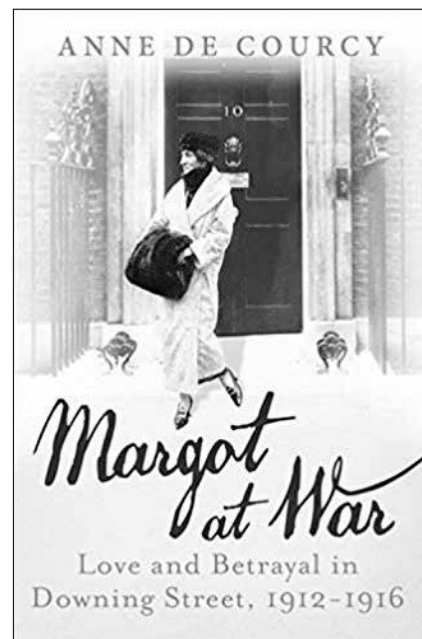
had served in Asquith's coalition government: 'To those who remember the tedious indolence of Squiff in 1916 – his dilatory slackness and indecisions – the book is utterly misleading, in fact a real travesty. Asquith ... never seems to have shaken off his desire for ease and self-indulgence.' Crawford rejoiced 'to think that I have not spoken to Mrs Asquith for twelve or perhaps fifteen years'.<sup>2</sup> Many had never regarded Margot as an appropriate wife for a British cabinet minister, let alone premier. When Asquith, ignorant of court etiquette, had written to Queen Victoria's private secretary to find out whether his proposed marriage to Margot required royal consent, Her Majesty noted that 'if this *was* required the Queen wd. not give it as she thinks *she* is most unfit for a C[abinet] Minister's wife' (p. 80). Margot's on-going fascination thus lies primarily, not in her political insights, but in the outrageous and sometimes bizarre behavior of one who kept a human skull in her bedroom – 'a faithful and silent companion ... just to remind me to *live* not to exist' (p. 23). 'In an era of frozen gentility', writes Anne de Courcy, 'her speciality was going too far' (p. 14).

Crucial to an understanding of Margot's position is the fact that she was Asquith's *second* wife. His first wife, Helen, had died of typhoid on 11 September 1891. Asquith lost little time in seeking a replacement and in April 1894 his engagement to Margot Tennant was announced. But Margot's transition into the household of a man who was already a cabinet minister was by no means easy, not least because her new husband already had a sizeable family. It would have been no surprise if she, rather than the late Princess Diana, had coined the phrase that, from the beginning, there had been three people in her marriage. At this stage, however, the interloper was not a prime ministerial mistress but his brilliant and forceful daughter Violet, then just seven years of age. In her own way, Violet became as protective of

her father as Margot was of her husband. De Courcy writes of Violet's 'almost incestuous adoration of her father and insistent, constant presence' (p. 3). But the two women were also 'incompatible characters – each was irritated by and jealous of the other' (p. 73). Margot's breathless, partly unpunctuated diary entry is revealing:

I never saw a more conspicuous instance of how little beauty matters than in Violet. She is not even soignée or prettily arranged. She has very dirty ribbons and waistbelts half below her sash, her shirts crooked, her cuffs and collars never really nice very little natural taste but somehow her vitality, her wonderful manners keenness and sweetness of nature all triumph over her torn and dirty clothes, not a very good complexion and not pretty teeth just as if they were unnoticeable trifles (p. 71).

This book's title is purposefully ambiguous. *Margot at War* might suggest a study of the experiences of the prime minister's wife in the context of the struggle against Germany. And there is much here that deals with just that. De Courcy's eye for the telling detail throws light on the efforts (or lack of them) of Margot and members of her class to adjust to the demands of the first total war in Britain's history. The continuous and ever growing need for manpower at the front had inevitable implications for those hitherto reliant on domestic servants. Pleading for exemption, Lady Elcho hoped that the war minister, Lord Kitchener,



would share her conviction that having parlour maids in the dining room was altogether too middle-class. 'I must say that I never thought that I would see parlour maids at Knole ... instead of liveries and even powdered hair' (p. 201). The writer, Naomi Mitchison, faced a similar struggle to adjust when she volunteered as a VAD nurse: 'I had never done real manual household work; I had never used mops and polishes and disinfectants. I was told to make tea but hadn't realised that tea must be made with boiling water. All that had been left to the servants' (p. 233).

But the book's subtitle and dates indicate the waging of a very different war, for it was in 1912 that the sixty-year-old prime minister became infatuated with a young woman of 25, who happened to be a good friend of Violet and the object too of the affections of Asquith's ministerial subordinate, Edwin Montagu. Coming on top of the rivalry deriving from her step-daughter, it is small wonder that Margot should later complain that 'I have only been alone with Henry and my children three weeks in nineteen years' (p. 3). The new plot would have been almost too extraordinary for a work of fiction:

Here were two men in love with the same woman – a woman who was the best friend of the daughter of one of them. A young woman who must have realised her friend's father was in love with her but who nevertheless played along with the relationship while keeping a hold on the other suitor – a suitor who could not conceive of the older man as any way a serious rival. A daughter who loved her father so all-consumingly that she was not only jealous of her step-mother but would never find another man to live up to him. A wife who loved her husband deeply, conscious of her fading attractions and miserably aware of his feelings for the younger woman (p. 210).

The Asquiths' marriage had run into trouble after a series of difficult pregnancies. Only two children had survived from five births and in 1907 Margot was advised by her doctors that further pregnancies should be avoided. In the absence of reliable contraception, this meant in practice the end of sexual relations between husband and wife. In the circumstances it was perhaps unsurprising that Asquith, described by

Courcy as a 'groper' with 'a penchant for peering down "Pennsylvania Avenue", as a woman's cleavage was then known', should have turned his attentions elsewhere (p. 82). The ultimately unanswerable question of whether his relationship with Venetia Stanley was ever consummated has been endlessly debated. De Courcy offers the most plausible interpretation:

It was a relationship charged with intense erotic obsession on Asquith's side and the willing acceptance of greater or lesser physical intimacies on Venetia's as the price to be paid for close friendship with someone of such intellectual calibre ... it is impossible to imagine that there was no physical approach at all (p. 224).

The wider significance of the relationship has already been explored following the publication in 1982 of Asquith's side of the enormous correspondence between the prime minister and his young confidante. De Courcy confirms that, whatever else is said about the liaison, it was entirely inappropriate: 'He described Cabinet meetings and the foibles of his colleagues; military secrets were betrayed; he told her of high-level disagreements' (p. 222). When in 1915 Venetia finally decided to marry Montagu, Margot was understandably

delighted. Bumping into Jackie Fisher, who was waiting to see her husband in Downing Street, she suggested to a surprised First Sea Lord that they should there and then dance in celebration. Asquith, by contrast, was left a broken man. 'No hell can be so bad' (p. 273). His premiership had more than a year and a half to run. Arguably, however, he was never the same again. His ejection from office in December 1916, in what amounted to a palace coup, again brought Margot, seemingly unaware of her husband's failing powers, to despair. The economist, Maynard Keynes, dined with the Asquiths two days after the deposition. Margot 'started to cry with the soup, sent for cigarettes, and dropped tears and ashes together into her plate – utterly overcome' (p. 339).

Asquith's premiership can be and has been chronicled without the inclusion of this personal history. Anne de Courcy's compelling narrative shows how much is lost in such bowdlerised accounts.

*David Dutton is Professor Emeritus of Modern History at the University of Liverpool.*

- 1 M. Brock and E. Brock (eds.), *Margot Asquith's Great War Diary 1914–1916* (London, 2014), p. xlvii.
- 2 J. Vincent (ed.), *The Crawford Papers* (Manchester, 1984), p. 471.

## Fascinating diary entries of a Liberal junior minister in the thick of events

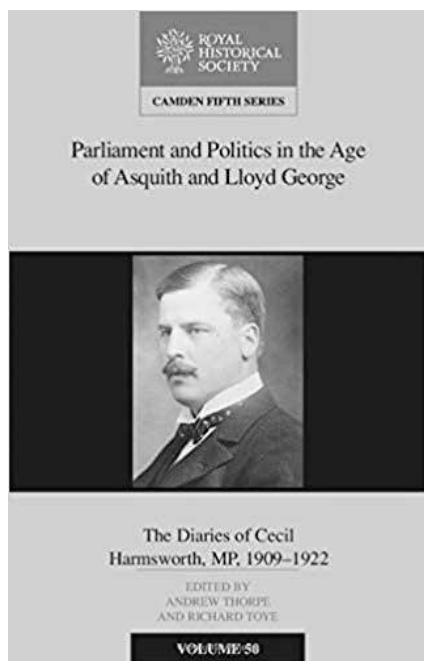
Andrew Thorpe and Richard Toye (eds.), *Parliament and Politics in the Age of Asquith and Lloyd George: the Diaries of Cecil Harmsworth, MP, 1909–1922*, Camden Fifth Series, Volume 50 (Cambridge University Press, 2016)

Review by **Dr J. Graham Jones**

**T**HE ROYAL HISTORICAL Society (and its predecessor body, the Camden Society) has ever since 1838 published editions of key sources on British history. The publication is ongoing (two volumes per annum) and is now published in association with Cambridge University Press. The present offering, volume 50 in the Camden Fifth Series inaugurated in 1993, is one of the few publishing an important source from the twentieth century in a series where many

volumes are devoted to the mediaeval and Tudor periods.

Commendable, too, is the enlistment of two of our most eminent twentieth-century political historians to undertake the task. Most of the laborious, intricate task of transcribing and selecting the material was undertaken by Professor Toye, while both editors are jointly responsible for the detailed, genuinely helpful annotations and the drafting of the introduction to the work. In a sense,



this work is a kind of prequel to the two volumes of the Sir Cuthbert Headlam diaries, which cover the years 1923–51, meticulously edited by Stuart Ball of Leicester in 1992 and 1999.

Cecil Bisshopp Harmsworth, later 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Harmsworth (1869–1948) opted for a political career, spurning a career within the Harmsworth journalistic empire to which he contributed in his younger days. His two elder brothers were the far more famous press barons Lords Northcliffe and Rothermere. He was the Liberal MP for the Droitwich division from 1906 until his electoral defeat in January 1910, and he then returned to the House as the MP for Luton in a by-election in 1911 until, sensing the real likelihood of imminent electoral defeat, he chose to retire from parliament in 1922. The editors of this volume rightly assert that ‘a sense of promise unfulfilled hangs over his career’ in politics (p. 1). He later entered the Upper House, still a self-avowed Liberal, as Lord Harmsworth in 1939, but made conspicuously little impression in the House of Lords, although he did make a major contribution as a generous public benefactor.

His political career thus spans the most crucial period in the whole history of the Liberal Party. In 1917, following the holding of some minor governmental posts under Asquith, he became a member of Lloyd George’s celebrated War Cabinet secretariat based in the Garden Suburb behind 10 Downing Street, and he was under-secretary of state at the Foreign Office from 1919

until the collapse of the coalition government in the autumn of 1922. As he inevitably became embroiled in the constitutional crisis of that year, his diary, now held at the library of the University of Exeter, becomes more intensely political from 1909 onwards and contributes much to our understanding of one of the most exciting and momentous periods in British political and constitutional history. Entries concerning Harmsworth’s personal and family life have been generally eschewed from this printed edition.

Amongst other compelling themes, the diarist describes successive fraught sittings of the House of Commons, often until the small hours of the night, and the eminent political figures of the age are given vivid pen-portraits from Harmsworth’s astute and fast-flowing pen. The entries describe political life during the reigns of the two giants H. H. Asquith and David Lloyd George, the key political issues and campaigns of the age are delineated, and lesser figures flit in and out of this fascinating story as it unfolds. Richard Toye has selected wisely throughout, and events of major importance are intertwined with more minor episodes, some of these detailing the diarist’s own political fortunes and career. Humour is never far from the surface too. For example, in his entry for 14 July 1909 (p. 30), he notes, ‘One Member heard to observe that the worst of all-night sittings was he never knew when to leave off drinking whiskies and sodas and to begin drinking tea. To bed at 9.30 a.m.’! And such observations on the foibles of human nature surface regularly throughout the text. This, of course, was the year of the People’s Budget, and Harmsworth engaged in a little bet with Samuel T. Evans MP, the solicitor-general, ‘five pounds to one that the Lords would reject the Budget. . . . Sam didn’t pay me’ (p. 37).

For Harmsworth personally came soon afterwards the sad spectre of unexpected electoral defeat at Droitwich by the agonisingly slim margin of just 105 votes – ‘Our friends’ disappointment is intense and members of them cry when I address them out of an upper window at the Committee Room’ (p. 59). But his period in the political wilderness was mercifully brief as re-election at fairly marginal Luton followed in July 1911 (see pp. 86–88). The diary entry for 27 July, by far the most substantial in the book, when he returned to the House for the first time to take his oath, describes in great detail the uproarious scenes in the

House of Commons caused by the rebellious opposition benches against Asquith – ‘One of the most discreditable episodes in the history of the House of Commons. . . . Mr Balfour, flushed and embarrassed, kept to his seat while the storm raged, uncontrolled around him’ (p. 93).

Many of the key political events of these years are referred to in the text of the diary. In the autumn of 1911 intense discussions were ongoing on the bill to disestablish and disendow the Welsh church, for the Liberal Party an intense preoccupation which the diarist finds puzzling: ‘It is indeed astonishing that a whole people – or a huge majority of them – should find in the Disestablishment and Disendowment of the Church the most ardent expression of [Welsh] nationality’ (p. 101, diary entry for 4 October 1911). There are also several references to the escalating disturbances perpetrated by the militant section of the Suffragette movement: ‘The Militant Suffragettes make a raid on the plate glass windows of Bond Street, Regent Street and Piccadilly. We drive around after dinner at the Granards to view the damage. Brown paper patches on windows everywhere and many shops barricaded. After dinner Asquith says across the table to Grey – “Well, Grey, your friends have been breaking my windows again” ’ (p. 113, entry for 1 March 1912).

The events of the First World War obviously occupy centre stage in the diary. On the day war was declared, Harmsworth writes, ‘Practically all parties in the House are united. The small group who pleaded for our neutrality yesterday is now silenced. The invasion by Germany of the rights of Belgium has brought everybody into line’ (p. 165, 4 August 1914). There are fascinating entries, too, on the political manoeuvres which led to the toppling of Asquith as prime minister in December 1916. On 4 December, just days earlier, ‘In the H. of C. confusion and bewilderment. Most people have been growing uneasy under the nerveless direction of the P.M. but most people also regard the possible premiership of Ll.-G. with dismay. It is not exactly a case of better the divvle you know than the divvle you don’t know – (for we know both divvles intimately). But Ll.-G.’s erratic record!’ (pp. 235–6). Within less than five months, his opinion of Lloyd George had much improved, ‘He has just come from a prolonged War Cabinet and is as fresh and keen on my political foibles . . . as if he had no other

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responsibilities in life' (p. 247, 1 May 1917).

The deftly drawn pen-portraits of eminent public figures are a joy to read too. Harmsworth is clearly a fan of the former Liberal Prime Minister Lord Rosebery, now a respected political elder statesman, whose speeches continue to enthral the Lords: 'He has all the gifts of great oratory – a fine presence, beautiful voice, action, passion, language' (p. 44, 24 November 1909). Just days later Asquith was described thus: 'With his fresh massive clean shaven face and fine white hair, Asquith suggests to me at times a Pilgrim Father. Then again I think of him as Oliver Cromwell whom he grows to resemble more and more every day – without the warts. The highest office and responsibility have "made" Asquith. Until recently he was undervalued even by his own side in politics' (p. 46, 2 December 1909).

There are also many revealing references to various members of the British royal family. King George V, opening parliament in February 1912 on his return from the triumphal tour of the Indian sub-continent: 'The King husky but audible, but sunburned after his Indian tour' (p. 111, 14 February 1912). Harmsworth was much impressed by Edward, Prince of Wales, 'He is surely the most attractive Prince we have had for centuries – small, very fair and quite boyish in spite of his twenty five years. I see him furtively peeping at his notes during the dinner and too much absorbed for conversation. When his time comes, he makes just the nervous little speech that goes down best with an English audience, without a trace of the guttural accent which is father has and was that much more strongly marked in the case of Edward VII' (p. 294, 30 May 1919).

Predictably, references and delightful cameo portraits of Lloyd George,

the central political figure of these frenzied years, abound throughout the text. There is a fascinating depiction of the launch of Lloyd George's revived Land Campaign at Bishop's Stortford in Hertfordshire in the heart of rural England in the autumn of 1913: 'A vast meeting – a sea of pink bald people – a delirious reception for Ll.-G. and an atmosphere that thickens momentarily. Ll.-G. Speaks for 2 hours and twenty minutes' (pp. 149–50, 11 October 1913). Harmsworth relished taking breakfast with the engaging Lloyd George family (including Dame Margaret and their elder daughter Olwen, the latter clad in her nurse's uniform) at 11 Downing Street in the middle of the war: 'It is a simple domestic party, each of us fetching his or her fish, or bacon and eggs from a side table. Ll.-G. is as brisk at this hour as most other people are when the world is well-aired and hums a cheerful stave as he moves to and from the side-table' (p. 226, 20 June 1916). One of the last such discussions follows the fateful Carlton Club meeting in the autumn of 1922 following which the prime minister tendered his resignation to King George V. At a meeting of coalition Liberal MPs which followed, 'Ll.-G. is quiet but remarkably cheerful and he breaks into merry laughter more than once during the long discussion that ensues. What is to be done now?' (p. 339, 19 October 1922).

This superb work is crowned by immensely full and helpful footnotes, clearly the result of intense, painstaking research (even detective) work, and a very full index. It is an important source enabling the rigorous scholarly reassessment of the social and political culture of the age of Asquith and Lloyd George.

*Dr J. Graham Jones was formerly senior archivist and head of the Welsh Political Archive at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.*



the world of professional agents engaged in voter registration, electioneering and the political, social and educational activities of local political parties. Those 'grimy engineers', as they were described in 1909, served below decks under charming gold-braided officers walking on the bridge and navigating the party's course. These 'hidden workers' became a vital link between the politics of Westminster and grassroots activism in the constituencies.

Rix's investigation of party agents' professional associations, party publications, extant regional organisational records, local newspapers and election manuals illuminates three main themes: firstly, the gradual, partial and uneven professionalisation and emergent status of full-time party agents; secondly, the nature of party activity at the grassroots; and thirdly, the complex and shifting interconnections between politics at the national level and in the local context. What emerges is a subtle, judiciously judged and nuanced sense of how party agents became crucial intermediaries between politicians and voters: an essential feature of the mass electoral culture that gradually moved towards full democracy in the early twentieth century.

Importantly, Rix shows that the professionalisation of party agents was not synonymous with the 'nationalisation' of politics – an interpretative link prominent in the existing historical literature. While professional bodies, such as the National Association of Liberal Secretaries and Agents (NALSA) and the National Society of Conservative

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## Agents at work

Kathryn Rix, *Parties, Agents and Electoral Culture in England 1880–1910* (Boydell Press, 2016)

Reviewed by **Angus Hawkins**

**K**ATHRYN RIX'S AUTHORITY, original and well-written study of full-time party agents between 1880 and 1910 is to be warmly

welcomed. A model of archival research, it demonstrates the value of thorough scholarship in correcting conventional easy generalisations. Rix brings to light

Agents (NSCA), were formed in the 1880s and 1890s, local issues continued to play a critical part in constituency contests. The choice of parliamentary candidates remained a matter for the local party chairman and local party notables. Candidates' campaign speeches, while referring to 'national' issues, were primarily shaped by constituency concerns and the need to affirm a direct association with the electors. Nor was the professionalisation of party agents necessarily a trigger for the far greater centralisation of party organisation. Agents used centrally produced election literature – yet this supplemented, rather than displaced, locally produced pamphlets, leaflets and posters. Central party organisation could advise and guide, but not dictate or coerce. For differing reasons both local associations, resisting what they saw as interference, and central party organisers, resenting unwelcome local

demands for financial support, often felt ambivalent about closer dependent relations.

By consulting journals and county biographical dictionaries Rix explores the background of nearly 200 party agents. To a great extent they came from working-class or lower-middle-class origins. Moreover, though being deeply immersed in the affairs of the local community, many full-time agents moved around the country during the course of their careers. So was effective practice spread throughout the regions, as well as through membership of professional associations. Agents fulfilled a crucial function in the registration of electors. In an important corrective, Rix shows that Conservative agents did not deliberately keep the number of registered voters low for partisan purposes, as has often been suggested. Nor did Conservative agents neglect political education in pursuing party allegiance as solely a

function of convivial sociability: 'beer, billiards and "baccy"'. Liberal agents, meanwhile, sought to counter perceptions of party affiliation as solely a matter of high-minded, prim, temperance-abiding moral earnestness. Conservatives could be serious and Liberals could have fun. Both Conservative and Liberal agents sought to foster party loyalty through political instruction and inclusive sociability.

For anyone seeking an understanding of how grassroots political activism operated and of the down-to-earth practicalities of winning political contests in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century England, Rix's study is essential reading.

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# Journal of Liberal History: special issues

## The Liberal Party and the First World War

*Journal 87 (summer 2015)*

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## The Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition of 2010–2015

*Journal 88 (autumn 2015)*

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A Liberal Democrat History Group fringe meeting

# Liberals in local government 1967 – 2017

The Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors (ALDC) was founded, as the Association of Liberal Councillors, fifty years ago. At this meeting, organised in conjunction with ALDC, we celebrate its 50th anniversary and discuss the role of Liberals and Liberal Democrats in local government. What has the party achieved in local government? To what extent has it taken a distinctively liberal approach?

Speakers: **Cllr Sara Bedford** (Leader, Three Rivers District Council), **Cllr Ruth Dombey** (Leader, Sutton Council), **Lord Tony Greaves** (long-serving councillor, Pendle Borough Council), **Cllr Richard Kemp** (Leader, Liberal Democrats on Liverpool City Council), **Baroness Kath Pinnock** (Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, former Leader of Kirklees Council) and **Matt Cole** (University of Birmingham). Chair: **Lord Andrew Stunell** (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Communities and Local Government, 2010–12).

7.45pm, Sunday 17 September

Bayview 2, Bournemouth International Centre (conference pass required)

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## Liberal Democrat History Group at Lib Dem conference

Visit the History Group's stand in the exhibition in the Solent Hall in the Bournemouth International Centre – stand 13. There you can:

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