

# 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*)