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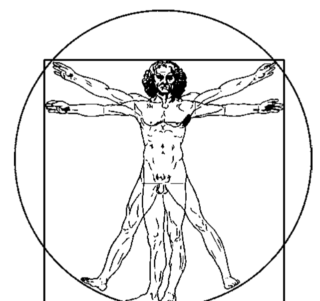

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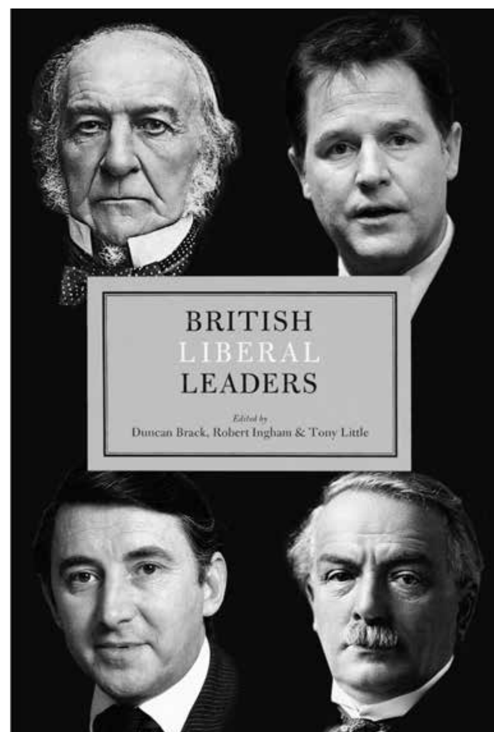

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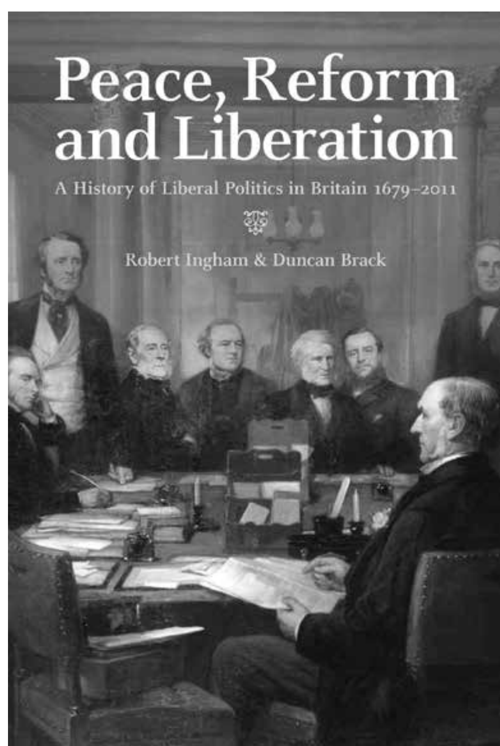

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Journal of Liberal History

The *Journal of Liberal History* is published quarterly by the Liberal Democrat History Group.

ISSN 1479-9642

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Cover design concept: **Lynne Featherstone**

Published by the Liberal Democrat History Group, c/o 54 Midmoor Road, London SW12 0EN

Printed by **Kall-Kwik**,
Unit 1, 37 Colville Road, London W3 8BL

May 2018

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Anthony Howe

Liberals, Free Tra from Cobden to th

This short article sets out to investigate the extent to which the origins of Liberal support for European cooperation lay in an attachment to free trade and the belief in its propensity to bind nations together, reducing the likelihood of international conflict. This intimate association between free trade, peace, and Liberalism went back to the campaign against the Corn Laws in the 1830s and 1840s but remained central to the Liberal Party's identity throughout the nineteenth century. It proved perhaps surprisingly resilient in the face of the First World War and the Bolshevik Revolution, and was only seriously challenged in the aftermath of a

ade, and Europe
e Common Market

Second World War, in the face of the 'Keynesian revolution' and the relative decline of the British economy.

Free trade and peace in nineteenth-century British Liberalism

The emergence of a distinctive Liberal identity in mid-nineteenth century Britain was virtually synonymous with the adoption of free trade and the range of cultural values associated with it. Whereas 'liberal' ideas of constitutional and religious freedom had long found advocates among Whig politicians, the transformation of economic thinking which followed from Smithian political economy became integral to the mindset of Liberal politicians and thinkers from the 1830s, and it is impossible to dissociate free trade from the Liberalism of Cobden, Mill, Gladstone, and Asquith.[1] Within the colonial mind, Liberalism, particularly in Australia, did at times become distinctly protectionist in character,[2] but before 1914 Liberals in Britain who wished to embrace protection did so only after moving to the Unionist party. In the emergency conditions of both the First World War and the Depression-hit 1930s, some Liberals departed temporarily from free trade loyalties but after the Second World War, most returned, not simply to a comforting hereditary faith but to a set of values linking peace, free trade, and interdependence which seemed newly pertinent in the post-war reconstructions of Europe and of the world economy.

This close association between free trade and peace became central to Liberal debate and understanding following the controversy over, and repeal of, the Corn Laws in 1846. For Richard Cobden, the leader of the Anti-Corn Law League, free trade and peace became virtually synonymous, and he proclaimed free trade as 'the only human means of effecting universal & permanent peace'. For this reason, he believed in 1842, 'it would be well to try to engraft our Free trade agitation upon the *peace* movement – they are one and the same cause.' This belief in turn was based on the idea of interdependence: 'Free-trade by perfecting the intercourse & securing the *dependence* of countries one upon another must inevitably snatch the power from the *governments* to plunge their people into wars'.[3] This linkage made explicit in political terms an argument which went back to the thinking of Enlightenment figures such as Montesquieu, who extolled the peaceful potential of trade (*la douceur du commerce*).[4] Late eighteenth-century statesmen influenced by Adam Smith and advocates of freer trade such as William Eden also included peace as among its benefits. The Anglo-French commercial treaty of 1786 was thus lauded for the hope that 'this new Connection between two great neighbouring nations may not only promote mutual Prosperity & Harmony but may tend to consolidate & preserve the general Peace of Mankind'.[5] Such optimism before the French Revolution was however soon overlain by twenty-five years of warfare against Revolutionary and Napoleonic France, when the only consortia of nations were the military alliances forged by Britain and the integration of Europe forged by Napoleonic military might.

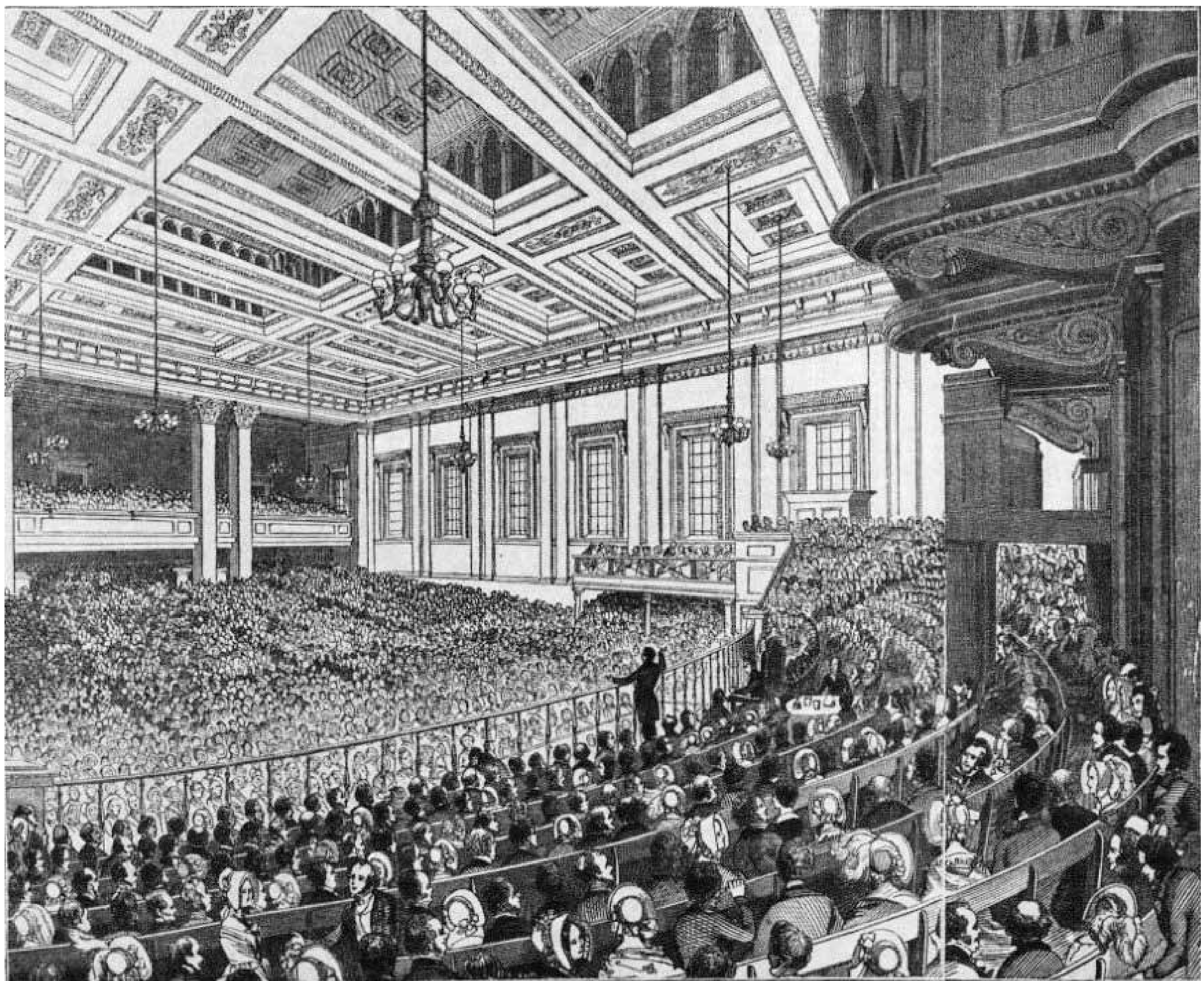
At the end of the French wars, peacemaking led to the 'Concert of Europe' but this remained a conservative device for imposing a territorial settlement favouring Europe's traditional rulers.

Liberal Party poster, c1905–1910. The Free Trade shop is full to the brim of customers due to its low prices while the shop based on Protectionism has suffered from high prices and a lack of custom.

In establishing the peace, military leaders such as Wellington deployed new tools of a quasi-collective European nature, but they remained geared to the immediate financial and military needs of peacemaking rather than the longer-term reconstruction of Europe.[6] But the wars also fuelled two radical engines of change. Firstly, among new groupings of the 'Friends of Peace', it encouraged popular support for the Enlightenment view that war was economically, socially, and politically harmful. Secondly, the wars' end had seen the formation of the Peace Society in 1816, opposed to all wars but also promoting the replacement of war by arbitration.[7] The belief that free trade would undermine war also found a major exponent in the utilitarian Jeremy Bentham, whose ideas were propagated by many leading free traders, including influential figures such as John Bowring.[8] But it was the fusing of these three traditions in the thinking of Richard Cobden that brought the belief that free trade led to peace lastingly to the forefront of Liberal politics.

For Cobden, the anti-Corn Law battle was therefore a 'peace crusade', and emphatically he upheld that it was free trade, rather than simply commercial ties, between nations that was paramount.[9] Not only would free trade encourage peaceful relationships between states but low tariffs would reduce the amount of money available to governments for military expenditure and an aggressive foreign policy, inspired by the chimera of the balance of power and by the vested interests of Britain's feudal-aristocratic establishment.[10] Cobden also believed that free trade would fatally undermine Britain's colonial system, which 'with all its dazzling appeal to the passions of the people can never be got rid of except by the indirect process of Free trade which will gradually & imperceptibly loose the bonds which unite our colonies to us by a mistaken notion of self-interest'.[11] Not all advocates of repeal shared Cobden's visionary approach but it embodied the aspirations of the growing, especially Nonconformist, bourgeoisie and helped add an ethical international dimension to the economic ideas of the Anti-Corn Law League.[12] It was also a vision which met with enthusiastic support from within the peace movement, a view taken to extremes by quasi-millenarian Liberal millowners such as David Whitehead of Rawtenstall.[13]

Arguably, too, this world view became distinctive of the emerging Liberal Party, as it



Meeting of the Anti-Corn Law League in Exeter Hall, The Strand, London, in 1846.

moved away from Palmerstonian interventionism towards a more internationalist foreign policy. Thus, Gladstone, while his starting point was that of a Christian globalist, not only supported Cobden on issues such as opposition to war in China (1857) but fully embraced his mindset in terms of free trade, low tariffs, reduced arms expenditure, and the cause of peace.[14] Under Gladstone, free trade became part of the mission of England, and he typically noted in 1876 that 'the operations of commerce are not confined to the material ends … there is no more powerful agent in the consolidation and knitting together the amity of nations'.[15] Such assumptions were prevalent in the Victorian Liberal Party. At the high-thinking end of the party, J. S. Mill agreed that war was 'always deleterious' in its economic consequences and that 'it is commerce which is rapidly rendering war obsolete by strengthening and multiplying the personal interests which are in natural opposition to it'.[16] But the view that free trade was a step to universal peace was widely shared among working-class activists, who participated in a wide number of associations linking trade and peace, for example, in 1865 the Anglo-French Working-Men's Exhibition and the later Workmen's Peace Association.[17]

Free trade and Europe before the First World War

The real dilemma for British Liberals in the mid-nineteenth century lay in selecting the best means by which free trade was to be advanced in the wider world. Was it a spontaneous process, part of God's handiwork, which required simply the removal of the 'artificial' interference of the past or was it a more cooperative or collaborative process in which other nations should be urged to engage? In which case, what form of cooperation was more appropriate: was it simply a matter of setting out a British unilateral model of free trade, which Cobden, for example, widely propagated on his tour of Europe in 1846–7?[18] Here Cobden himself became increasingly wary of being perceived as an agent of 'perfidious Albion', pursuing free trade simply in Britain's own interests, and insisted that nations needed to domesticate the cause of free trade, and adopt lower tariffs unilaterally.[19] This policy was not without success and recent research supports the idea of a considerable lowering of tariffs in the 1840s and 1850s.[20] However, this process bypassed the larger states, including Germany (organised economically as the Zollverein), France, and Austria-Hungary. Nor did free trade advocates succeed in adding free trade to the peace negotiations after the Crimean war.

How far therefore might the British government, as the world's largest trading nation, need to intervene to draw other nations into trade bargaining? Eventually in the context of the Anglo-French war scare of 1859, Cobden was a convert to the need for commercial treaties, although insistent that concessions made by Britain would be offered to all countries, not on a simple bilateral basis. This led to a reappraisal of commercial treaties, which had fallen into disrepute in the 1830s and 1840s as simply bargaining tools, likely to favour vested interests, but now promoted as peace bonds between nations. The subsequent success of the Anglo-French (Cobden–Chevalier) treaty of 1860 in generating a whole rash of further treaties, creating the Cobden–Chevalier treaty network, encouraged some to foresee new forms of European cooperation, not simply as in the past over issues of war but for purposes of trade and taxation, a new public law within the 'Commonwealth of Europe'. Nevertheless, what has been seen in retrospect as the first 'common market' generated less debate at the time than it perhaps deserved.[21] However, free trade gained further support as an important part of the creation of new nations, for example, Italy or Greece, and in this way was associated with the deepening current of internationalism in the 1860s. Liberals also generally welcomed the wider means by which the integration of Europe was furthered: the improvements in travel and communications, including a proposed Channel tunnel (warmly commended by Cobden in the early 1860s); postal and telegraphic unions; as well as the growth of a European civil society as seen in friendship visits, transnational musical societies, trade bodies, and international congresses on a huge variety of issues ranging from free trade to statistics and public health.[22]

The real dilemma for British Liberals in the mid-nineteenth century lay in selecting the best means by which free trade was to be advanced in the wider world. Was it a spontaneous process, part of God's handiwork, which required simply the removal of the 'artificial' interference of the past or was it a more cooperative or collaborative process in which other nations should be urged to engage?

Nevertheless, Liberal opinion remained divided on several issues involving the degree to which economic welfare required the creation of new institutional arrangements. Firstly, commercial treaties remained contentious. The repeal of the Corn Laws had been a radical departure from the past in its unilateral character, setting out a model of free trade which others might follow but which Britain undertook in her own interests, and without prior bargaining with other nations. This changed in 1860 with the return to the negotiating table, and although the concessions Britain made to France were generalised to all nations, this did not prevent considerable criticism of Britain's departure from unilateralism from leading Liberals, including one of the architects of repeal, C. P. Villiers, his brother Lord Clarendon, and Gladstone's future chancellor Robert Lowe; by the 1870s, Gladstone himself would once more become doubtful about the 'higgling' involved in trade negotiations.[23] A second division concerned the creation of a level economic playing field within the European market. How far should free trade Britain benefit from the import of subsidised goods from industries propped up by continental states? Should free trade also mean ensuring equality of conditions across nations? This led to a long-running debate on 'cheap sugar' (its selling price reduced by bounties on its production), with

most Liberals ready to endorse the welfare benefits of maximum cheapness through free imports, although others were ready to promote the advantages of enlightened international regulation, removing subsidies and ensuring equal competition.[24] A third issue concerned monetary stability and the monetary standard, with Liberals divided between those who saw the gold standard as the natural complement of free trade, and a minority who saw the monetisation of silver and a bimetallic standard as promoting greater equality of global economic conditions. The monetary unification of Europe was also extensively debated in the late 1860s, and although it generated more sceptics than converts, the latter included the economist Jevons and the Liberal chancellor Robert Lowe, for whom unification would reduce the price of commercial transactions and so help maintain Britain's competitiveness. This debate was largely at a technical level, but European monetary integration was not without its Liberal supporters in the 1860s.[25]

Monetary unification in the 1860s was not foreseen as a prelude to political union, but free trade and peace were throughout the nineteenth century occasionally linked with the ideal of a federal United States of Europe. This had been a part of continental discourse since Saint-Simon's proposal for a European parliament in 1814. Its first popular flowering was during the continental revolutions of 1848, largely among French republicans and those inspired by Mazzini, with his goal of a brotherhood of nations.[26] In an age with no British restrictions on the free movement of individuals, many such figures sought refuge in exile in England, where they found their ideological home and political defenders in Liberal circles.[27] Less enthusiasm greeted the possibility of a United States of Europe, but this suggestion was taken up by the working-class peace movement in the 1860s, with some support from sympathetic Liberal leaders, for example, Samuel Morley, who, in supporting a proposed international workmen's exhibition in 1870, commended the 'brotherhood of labour' as a step towards a 'United States of Europe'.[28] In the wake of the Franco-Prussian war, academic liberals such as Seeley discussed the United States of Europe, if largely to dismiss it. Thereafter, this federal ideal became the property of the republican and socialist left across the continent, albeit still normally in association with free trade and disarmament. Other European liberals such as the French economist Leroy-Beaulieu occasionally promoted the idea of a 'European economic alliance'.[29] By the 1880s (and until the 1930s), the British Empire would prove a long-term deterrent to the Liberal commitment to a federal Europe, although by 1900 the Cambridge sage, Henry Sidgwick regarded federalism in Europe as 'most probable' in the long term.[30] In the short term, this ideal won over several British Liberal advocates, including the journalist Emily Crawford, the Cobdenite pamphleteer Augustus Mongredien, and the prominent journalist and social reformer, W. T. Stead.[31] The last was closely linked with the peace movement, and in this context, federalism was promoted as the best means towards peace, thereby undermining the priority of free trade itself. More typically, by the end of the nineteenth century, peace activists, while holding free trade to be a desirable and necessary goal, gave more immediate attention to legal and institutional means of achieving international disarmament and peace.[32]

Despite some bifurcation, therefore, between the movements for peace and free trade which Cobden had sought to combine in the 1840s, most Liberals became increasingly aware of the urgent need to resist the growth of tariffs and the political appeal of economic protectionism in later nineteenth-century Europe. For the challenge of economic nationalism had grown rapidly in the wake of the completion of national unification in Germany and Italy.[33] This challenge was fostered intellectually by the revival of the protectionist ideas of Friedrich List, was encouraged materially by the falling incomes for farmers, peasants and manufacturers in the wake of the Great Depression (1873–96), and became financially attractive given the potential tariff income to fund the growing, mostly military, expenditure of the Great (and lesser) Powers in the age of empire. Here, as the late Colin Matthew argued, Cobdenite international harmony promoted by trade was taken for granted and no collective nor British effort was made to counter protectionism;[34] rather tariffs levels rose, markets became increasingly fragmented, and the division of the world into neo-mercantilist blocs loomed. British Liberals were reduced to attempts to warn or to influence, by galvanising fellow-spirits across the world – not always without effect.[35]

In such terrain, the links between free trade and peace were far from lost: tariffs were widely shown to be the source of arms expenditure, and the most avid free traders remained a core component of the peace movement.[36] In the context of the Boer war, the peace movement, to some extent, was more successful in gaining attention, at least until the tariff wave threatened Britain itself. Here the 'tariff reform' movement of Joseph Chamberlain provided the spark for the widespread restatement of Cobdenite ideas, in which the bonds between free trade, peace, and interdependence were reiterated by diverse categories of Liberal, not only F. W. Hirst but J. A. Hobson, L. T. Hobhouse and Bertrand Russell. The first International Free Trade Congress held in London in 1908 (accompanied by a Peace Congress) duly reiterated the core Cobdenite beliefs, now urged by powerful new recruits such as Winston Churchill.[37] The fear of protectionism, as retrograde both morally and economically, also prompted the entry into politics of many younger Liberals, including the novelist E. M. Forster. Free

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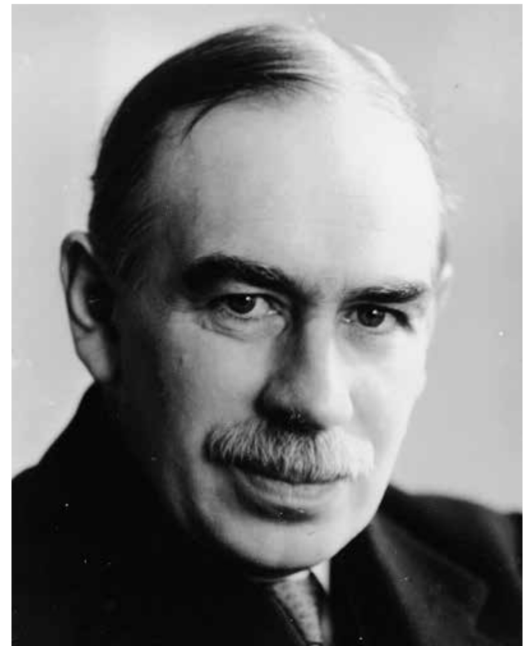

Liberal champons of free trade: Richard Cobden (1804–85) and John Maynard Keynes (1883–1946)

trade as a solvent of hostility between nations was an essential part of the growing critique of 'old school, balance of power' diplomacy, and in this way, the Liberal belief that free trade would act as a solvent of tensions between nations was powerfully restated in Edwardian Britain. The most lucid expression of this 'neo-Cobdenite' worldview was that of Norman Angell, arguing that the complex interdependence of the world made the economic costs of war so great, that future war would have no victors, and that any potential gains were 'illusory'.[38]

Free trade and peace in the age of total war

Paradoxically, the First World War, whose outbreak falsified the long-held belief that economic progress made war impossible, included among its consequences a vigorous restatement of the old Liberal, even Cobdenite, belief that free trade was essential to future peace. Schemes for international government, which flourished as the war developed, sought inter alia to restore and guarantee free trade. This was the moral, for example, of Hobson's biography of *Richard Cobden: The International Man* (1918) while Lowes Dickinson (whose father had painted a fine portrait of Cobden) regarded free trade between nations as an essential part of the antidote to 'international anarchy';[39] the leading Edwardian social reformer Helen Bosanquet also turned her attention to foreign policy in *Free Trade and Peace in the Nineteenth Century* (1924), a work sympathetically reviewed by the economist and future Liberal candidate, Roy Harrod.[40] Another Liberal, Lloyd George's pre-war economic adviser, George Paish, author of The League of Nations Society's tract *The Economic Interdependence of Nations* (1918), later toured Europe in the manner of Cobden in 1846-7 urging the necessity of free trade for the revival of European prosperity.

Lest this restatement of the value of free trade be considered merely a revival (or even, survival) of an antiquated Cobdenite mindset, we need also to consider that post-war Liberal advocates of free trade included many of its advanced thinkers, not least Keynes himself in the immediate aftermath of the peace settlement. Here, while Keynes' damning critique of the peace settlement is well known, his positive proposals for economic reconstruction are too often ignored. Yet central to them was his scheme for a European free trade union, designed to overcome 'the loss of organisation and economic efficiency, which must otherwise result from the innumerable new political frontiers now created between greedy, jealous, immature, and economically incomplete nationalist States.'[41] As an antidote to the dangerous political fragmentation of Europe, the adoption of such a scheme, for Keynes, would typify the 'whole of our moral and emotional reaction to the future of international relations and the Peace of the World'.[42] Later, for example, in 1921 he interpreted 'the ancient doctrine of Liberalism' to include 'general disarmament' as 'the form of economy least injurious and most worth while' and 'by freedom of trade and international intercourse and cooperation, the limited resources of mankind could be employed to his best advantage'.[43] In his thinking on reconstruction in Europe at the time of the Genoa Conference (1922), Keynes saw the real struggle in Europe not as one between Bolshevism and the bourgeoisie but as, in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, between 'liberalism or radicalism, for which the primary object of government and of foreign policy is peace, freedom of trade and intercourse and economic wealth' and 'that other view, militarist or rather diplomatic which thinks in terms of power, prestige, national or personal glory, the imposition of a culture, and hereditary or racial prejudice'.[44] In his 'three dogmas of

peace', alongside the 'general principle of pacifism', and imperial disengagement, Keynes emphasised in equally Cobdenite terms, 'we must hold to free trade, in its widest interpretation, as an inflexible dogma, to which no exception is admitted, wherever the decision rests with us. We should hold to free trade as a principle of international morals, and not merely as a doctrine of economic advantage'.[45] As is well known, Keynes's faith in free trade wavered in the 1930s, while a sizeable number of Liberals rallied to the National Government and its protectionist policies after 1931. But, as Sloman has shown, the economic internationalism of the party as a whole was strengthened, as economic nationalism was held accountable for Europe's growing political tensions: 'the ultimate justification for internationalist policies was the Cobdenite one that nations which traded with each other would not fight each other'.[46] Hence, despite the flurry of Liberal interest in state intervention and planning in the late 1920s, after 1931 'free trade returned to the heart of Liberal policy', with its emphasis on international cooperation restored.[47]

The means towards such cooperation were, however, not always clear-cut. Liberal opinion was divided between those who saw the League of Nations as designed primarily for the prevention of war by means of international conciliation and arbitration and those who saw part of the League's work in recreating an international economy based on free trade.[48] For the most part, the League now became integral to attempts to restore the world economy, with the 1927 and 1933 World Economic Conferences and the cause of tariff disarmament widely supported.[49] However, as the depression and the dictators struck and as faith in the League faded, those Liberals who remained globally rather than domestically oriented, demonstrated growing interest in the idea of a federal Europe.[50] Among liberal economists of the 1930s, including Robbins and Hayek, restraint of sovereignty in the form of common economic policies became part of the necessary price of free trade and avoidance of war; Robbins, for example, opposed Keynes's arguments for national self-sufficiency by reference to the dangers of war between autarchic nation states.[51] Similarly – if arrived at by a different route – leading federalists in the 1930s such as Lothian also emphasised the necessity of economic interdependence.[52] As a result, by 1946 a considerable body of Liberal opinion was ready to endorse the goal of a 'Federal Europe', and, in a more gradual vein, to support moves towards the creation of a European common market.[53] Yet agreement was never total – in the 1950s, the simulacrum of Victorian free trade, the Cobden Club remerged to energise bodies such as the Keep Britain Out movement and the Cheap Food League, although, by and large, this proved the prelude to their supporters' departure from Liberal ranks and eventual absorption within the Thatcherite Conservative party.[54]

By the 1950s, European integration, multilateral institutions, and nuclear arms seemed more likely to defend peace than the propagation of free trade. Even so, the belief that free trade, interdependence, and peace were inherently connected had been a virtually uncontested assumption within British liberalism for more than a century, not only as an economic creed but as an intrinsic part of an open society and of international morality. Such beliefs were essentially cosmopolitan in nature and global in implications, and in the twentieth century became a vital part of the Anglo-American relationship.[55] But for the most part after 1846 they had directed and guided Britain's economic relationship with the Continent, seeking to reconcile individual welfare, growing national independence, and the European common good. Whether by means of unilateral decision-making, bilateral treaties, or multilateral institutions, the promotion of free trade was deemed a primary means towards 'goodwill among nations'. Even so, however powerful such beliefs were, they served only to temper and rarely to overcome the forces of tariff protection, national rivalry, imperial expansion, and militarism in the 'European century'.

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1 Anthony Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England, 1846–1946* (Clarendon, 1997); Joseph Coohill, *Ideas of the Liberal Party: Perceptions, Agendas and Liberal Politics in the House of Commons, 1832–1852* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

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Eugenio Biagini

The 'European Mind' of L
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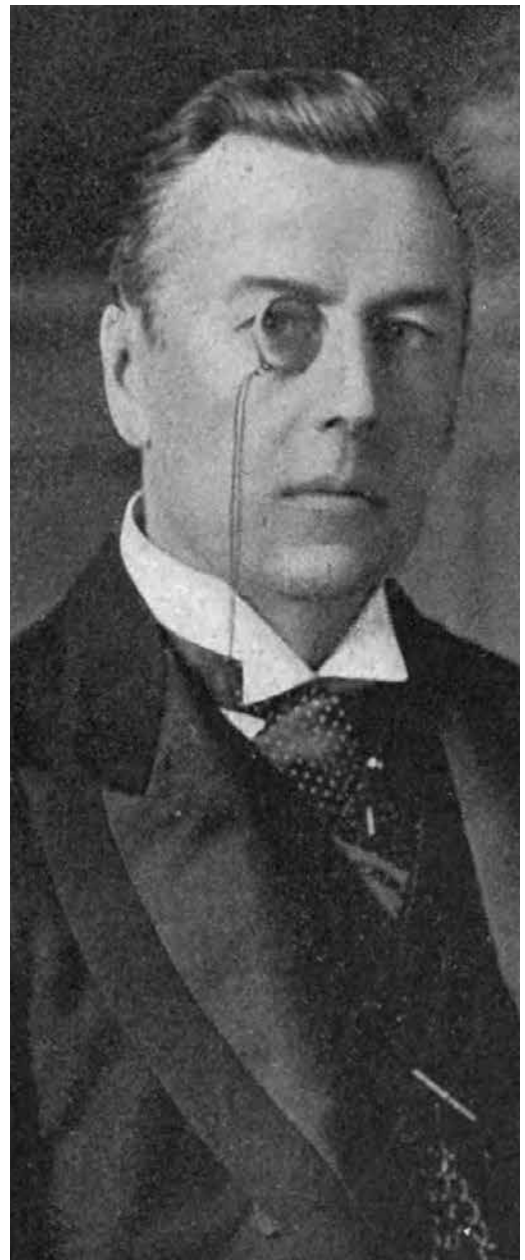

ate Victorian Liberalism
Joseph Chamberlain

Few statesmen are more closely identified with the British Liberal political tradition than William Ewart Gladstone (1809–98). His parliamentary career spanned most of the nineteenth century, and his posthumous influence stretched well into the twentieth century, affecting generations of Liberal, Labour and 'Progressive' leaders.[1] Though less unambiguously associated with liberalism, Joseph Chamberlain (1836–1914) was also very influential – shaping the outlook both of radical Liberals like David Lloyd George and radical Unionists.[2] Both statesmen engaged with ideas and visions of 'Europe' – of which they believed the United Kingdom was a constituent part, though one which projected European influence and values onto a global canvass through the British Empire.

Gladstone's Europe

Gladstone first took office in 1841, in a government that included the Duke of Wellington, the man who defeated Napoleon at Waterloo, after a 'world war' which had lasted for over twenty years. His political career was so long that his last government (1892–4) included H. H. Asquith, who was to lead the British Empire into the First World War. Although in Gladstone's lifetime the catastrophe of another 'world war' was averted, avoiding a recurrence of such a clash of empires was the key concern in nineteenth-century international relations. Like his mentor Lord Aberdeen (1784–1860), Gladstone operated on the Vienna Congress idea that European wars were similar to civil wars, in so far as they were conflicts between 'sister' states, sharing religion, history and culture, and upholding the same system of moral obligation.[3]

His engagement with Europe was facilitated by both his command of modern languages (French, German and Italian in particular) and his frequent travels, albeit to a limited number of destinations. Like most contemporaries from his social background, his education was rooted in the study of ancient Greek and Latin and their classical culture and philosophy. Aristotle and Homer were two of his leading lights.[4] Under the Roman Empire, ancient Europe had known political and cultural unity, which was coextensive with what Victorians regarded as 'Civilisation'. Though Gladstone decried Disraeli's invocation of 'Imperium et Libertas' as a travesty of brutal imperialism, he thought that modern Europe should emulate the achievements of the ancients by exporting what he himself called 'Western and beneficent institutions'.[5]

The legacy of the Roman Empire in establishing ideas of international law and liberty had been consolidated by Christianity, which survived the fall of that empire and became the new framework for European civilisation, defining not only spiritual life, but also morality and standards of social behaviour. Gladstone felt that Christianity had created a deeper European identity, first through the rise of 'national' churches, then through the concurrent operation of congregational forms of Protestantism, which, in Britain and elsewhere, became important expressions of the popular spiritual aspirations in a democratising world. In his mature years, Gladstone was not perturbed by such diversity and felt that Christianity was articulated – rather than fragmented – through its various churches. As he saw it, denominational diversity within the overarching Christian umbrella was extended to include both Jews – as an ancestral pre-Christian, prophetic people – and post-Christian groups such as atheists and secularists. In all its variety, Western European religion was so central to Gladstone's political vision, that in some ways he may be regarded as a thinker who bridged the gap between

William Ewart Gladstone (1809–98) and Joseph Chamberlain (1836–1914)

liberalism and what later came to be known as the 'Christian democratic' tradition.[6]

A great admirer of Dante Alighieri, Gladstone was familiar with the poet's vision of a 'universal monarchy' as a community of free peoples, a commonwealth.[7] Dante's idea of empires as a rational, and indeed divinely ordained, way of organising social life was not only still relevant, but also even more so than it had ever been. For in the second half of the nineteenth century the European empires – the British, the French and those of the Romanovs, Habsburgs, and Hohenzollern – dominated the world and were set to become more and more powerful through technological advances, industrialisation and commercial liberalism. With Dante, Gladstone argued that empires and liberty were not incompatible, provided imperial government became the conduit of civil liberty and regional autonomy. He thought that the British Empire justified its existence precisely because of its emancipatory and civilising power – a view that at the time, and for a generation or two after him, was widely shared even by humanitarian liberals like the young Irish diplomat Roger Casement and the English scholar Gilbert Murray, as well as by Indian patriots, including Mohandas Gandhi.[8]

Thus, in trying to understand what 'Europe' meant to Gladstone, we must first consider that the Europe he knew was *not* primarily based on nation states, but on multi-ethnic or – as Gladstone came to think in later life – multi-national states. It was a Europe in which legitimate government relied not on the 'popular will', but on the dynastic principle. Liberalism stood out from conservatism and absolute monarchism in that it argued that dynastic legitimacy should seek the consensus and support of the people, as represented by the electors, and that good government was about good stewardship. And the UK stood out from other empires because there sovereignty was encapsulated in the notion of 'Queen in Parliament', which reflected both Edmund Burke's idea of dynastic continuity married to popular consent, and his insistence that a good constitution should be able to grow organically through gradual adaptation to changing circumstances.[9] This was a vision that Gladstone fully shared.

Though he was familiar with contemporary developments in the natural sciences, and engaged with evolutionary theory and contemporary scientific developments – which he tried to reconcile with Biblical revelation[10] – he did not see their relevance to politics and especially to international relations. Instead, as already noted above, Gladstone believed that what brought people together was neither race, nor a common language, but rather shared beliefs, which ought to engender brotherly feelings among the powers (again a vision inherited from the tradition of the Vienna Congress). On such spiritual sorority depended the Concert of Europe.[11] Like a gentlemen's club, the Concert had its rules, the most important of which was to avoid unilateralism in foreign policy.[12] The depth of Gladstone's well-known disapproval of Benjamin Disraeli can only be understood if we bear in mind that the latter was perceived to regard 'the European concert … [as] a delusion … the Powers being all selfish and all contemptuous of humanity'.[13] Gladstone believed this doctrine to be false, immoral and unwise. Moreover, the British Empire was based on commerce and as such was vulnerable both to war and the financial and commercial unrest periodically generated in world markets by rumours of war and unilateral action.

These considerations were important for him, for a key dimension of his Christian, imperial and liberal vision was commerce. The latter was not only about trade and material advantages, but also about building bridges between peoples, a view popularised by another Victorian Liberal – Richard Cobden (1804–65). In the speech Gladstone delivered to the Political Economy Club in 1876, on the centenary of the publication of Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, he said, among other things, that '[t]he operations of commerce are not confined to the material ends … there is no more powerful agent in consolidating and knitting together the amity of the nations', arguing that free trade served 'the great moral purpose of the repression of human passions, and those lusts and appetites which are the great cause of war'.[14] Thus he advocated 'a view of international society which had both an economic and political dimension – free trade the regulator of the one, the Concert of the other'.[15]

While the views expressed above were partly derived from Richard Cobden, Gladstone did not share the latter's optimism and was not an 'idealist' in terms of international relations. His view was ultimately rooted in the hard-nosed calculations of the Treasury and the Board of Trade. If he was a 'cosmopolitan patriot', his understanding of the best course in foreign policy amalgamated realpolitik with Christian humanitarianism.[16] He regarded such a combination of 'realism' and moral responsibility as not only good for statesmen, but also essential to the message that they ought to address to their electors, in order to socialise the masses into democratic politics. The danger for a powerful and successful empire like Britain was not a working-class revolution, but the blind chauvinism that displayed itself in periodical outbursts of 'jingoism' (a term coined in 1878). As the franchise was extended to the working classes, Gladstone felt that they too had to be educated to behave like 'club members', and that foreign policy and free trade finance were the two essential disciplines in this school of citizenship whose teachers were statesmen like himself. As pedagogues of liberty, Liberal statesmen should become mediators of a higher understanding of the people's true interest.[17]

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Nations and nationalism

Authority always ought to be restrained by a sense of the rulers' paternal obligation towards their subjects. Whether liberal or not, empires had a special responsibility to the subject nationalities that they dominated. Hence Gladstone's outrage when some of these powers – like the Austrians in Italy in 1848–9, the Ottomans in Bulgaria in 1876 and British Empire in 1879 in both Afghanistan and Zululand – did not live up to the relevant ethical standards of imperial behaviour. His denunciations of these governments have much in common. Gladstone's rousing attack on Ottoman misrule in Bulgaria was fired not by disdain for the religiously different Turks, but by indignation about their abandonment of the common human (and imperial) standards of decency.[18] About what he regarded as unnecessary British imperialist wars in 1879, he said that, in judging the deeds of the Conservative government, the electors should:

> Remember the rights of the savage, as we call him. Remember that the happiness of his humble home, remember that the sanctity of life in the hill villages of Afghanistan … are as sacred in the eye of Almighty God as are your own. Remember that He who has united you together as human beings in the same flesh and blood, has bound you by the law of mutual love, that that mutual love is not limited by the shores of this island, is not limited by the boundaries of Christian civilisation, that it passes over the whole surface of the earth, and embraces the meanest along with the greatest in its wide scope.[19]

The evil of empires arose not as a result of their violating some basic principle of self-determination, but from their tendency to base rule on state violence rather than popular consent. This was the main flaw of the Ottoman 'race', who 'represented everywhere government by force as opposed to government by law'.[20] Despite the frequent references to 'race' in his speeches, Gladstone did not associate with the term any biological overtones. A 'race' was a historical creation with distinctive cultural and political connotations. So, the Turks were a violent race because for centuries they had been socialised into believing that power depended ultimately on ruthless war. By contrast, what he described as the 'mild Mohammedans of India, the chivalrous Saladins of Syria' and 'the cultured Moors of Spain' were shaped by respect for civilisation and its standards.

When empires completely failed to provide a protected environment for rational (and 'national') liberty, then Gladstone championed reform. This could take the shape of 'home rule' or devolution within empires, which he recommended for both Bulgaria in 1876 and Ireland in 1886. If empires failed altogether, Gladstone envisaged the creation of new pan-national states. These were like empires, in that they brought together people over a vast territory along models of integration that combined ethnicity, language and culture with a political tradition. For Gladstone the 'nation' was a non-politically-normative concept. Far from being the revolutionary principle that it represented and was to represent for both Giuseppe Mazzini and Woodrow Wilson, it was little more than a notion that ought to evoke a sense of 'common good' or wider collective interest than the region or the locality. Moreover, under 'normal' circumstances, it was fully compatible, and indeed complementary with empire (something best illustrated by position of the Scots within the British Empire). 'Nation' was thus different from 'nationalism', which Gladstone – like Bismarck – came to regard as the most powerful source of mass political motivation and mobilisation of his time.

There was no reason why 'a people rightly struggling to be free' – whether the Irish, the Sudanese or the Canadians – should not remain subject to an empire and find the right amount of freedom within the constraints of multinational imperial entities. For the purpose of the state was not to articulate what we now call 'identity politics' or to represent national aspirations, but to address within a territorial setting specific economic and social needs, defined by history and tradition. It was functional, not metaphysical. The state was 'ordained by God' to restrain evil – not to flatter collective pride.

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Thus, Gladstone was both a statesman who 'understood' nationalism, and one of the longest serving and most energetic defenders of the British Empire. As such, he was interested in identifying the factors preventing territorial amalgamation, more than in those promoting national identity. His main concern was to understand why empires fall, not why nation states rise.

Ireland was the most difficult challenge the British Empire faced in the late nineteenth century. Like John Stuart Mill,[21] from as early as 1868 Gladstone had discerned his 'mission' in the 'pacification' of Ireland. He believed that the best opportunity for integrating Ireland into the United Kingdom had been lost in 1800. Then the Irish Catholic elite had supported the Act of Union in the expectation that this would come with political rights for them. But they were bitterly disappointed when George III vetoed their desire for 'Emancipation'. They then started to campaign for reform, under the inspired leadership of a country gentleman, Daniel O'Connell, and secured their goal by 1829. For Gladstone, O'Connell was a great liberal, almost the equivalent of what Cavour was to Italy.[22] While the latter was the prime minister of an independent and ancient state – the Kingdom of Sardinia – and was faced by an uncompromising and 'irresponsible' empire, Austria, O'Connell was the leader of a nation which had long operated in tandem with Britain and was now part of a parliamentary

United Kingdom within which it was fully represented by its own MPs. Unlike the Italian regions under Austria and her satellite principalities, even before Emancipation Ireland had enjoyed all the liberal freedoms (of the press, religion and public meeting). In all these differences between the two cases one could find the explanation as to why Italy had to rise up in arms and fight for its independence, while Ireland managed to secure what she needed by peaceful agitation and election campaigns.

What Ireland did not yet have by the time Gladstone acceded to the premiership in 1868 was equality under the law. The latter was the aim of Gladstonian reforms from 1869 (with the disestablishment of the Irish Protestant Episcopal Church, which represented only a minority of the population) to 1881 (with the Land Acts, which initiated the transfer of land ownership from the landed gentry to the farmers) and the three electoral reforms of 1883–5 (ending electoral 'corruption', extending the franchise to all householders and introducing more equal electoral districts). By 1885 Gladstone had established a uniform electoral system throughout the British Isles, with most areas being represented through first-past-the-post, single-member constituencies under a residential household franchise but without property qualification.

However, it soon appeared that 'equality' within a unitary state was not enough for Ireland. Instead of 'pacifying' the Irish, these reforms unleashed a further wave of democratic nationalism. Consequently, at the 1885 general election, the Liberals were squeezed out of Ireland, where most of the southern and western constituencies went to Charles S. Parnell's National Party, while a majority of those in the north-east went to the anti-Catholic Conservative Party. On a much smaller scale, a parallel rise of democratic nationalism took place both in Scotland – where a new organisation, the Crofters' Party, secured a group of seats in the north – and in Wales, where the nationalist Cymru Fydd made inroads into the traditional two-party system, demanding both land reform and the disestablishment of the Church of England.

As we have seen, Gladstone was keenly aware of the power of nationalism and what nowadays we would describe as 'identity politics'. He believed that the only way to handle these forces was to harness them to the chariot of the imperial state, an aim which could best be achieved through parliamentary devolution and land redistribution. The latter, he thought, would satisfy the nationalists' demands and also create a new institutional mechanism which, in turn, would articulate the Irish 'national interest' – in so far as it was distinct from the wider UK interest – within the wider British Empire. This strategy was based on the one adopted for Canada in 1867 and ultimately on the 1840 Durham report, which, as Osterhammel has noted,[23] made democracy 'harmless' for the establishment and contributed to its dissemination throughout the world. When applied to the UK itself, devolution was an integrationist strategy with an explicit pluralist agenda. The UK was to be a partnership of four nations – England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales – involving the regional elites in the redefinition of both the character and interest of both the UK and British Empire. Each of the four nations had something to offer and each could be relied upon by the imperial government, provided their cultural distinctiveness was fully recognised and their self-government established through the system of home rule.

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Joseph Chamberlain, separatist nationalism and imperial federation

Driven by the logic of competition under a two-party system, the Conservatives adopted the opposite strategy, which involved an assimilationist approach. Under Lord Salisbury, the Tories opposed home rule, denouncing it as the first step towards the disintegration of the empire, and argued that the way forward demanded not constitutional, but merely social reform within a centralised UK. In international relations they were 'realists' and rejected Gladstone's constructivism and multilateralism. Their espousal of a social-imperialist stance helped to split the Liberals, with an anti-home-rule wing abandoning Gladstone's party and, under the guidance of the nationalist Radical leader Joseph Chamberlain, entering into a permanent 'Liberal Unionist' alliance with the Tory Party.

Chamberlain's eventual rise to the position and role of chief instigator of new radical Conservative Party policies was as extraordinary as Gladstone's trajectory from 'rising hope of those stern and unbending Tories' (which is how Lord Macaulay dubbed him in the 1839) to the standard-bearer of Liberalism. Chamberlain had liberalism in his blood as much as Gladstone might have appeared to have had Toryism in his. Hailing from a prominent London Unitarian family, like many other upper-middle-class Nonconformists, Joseph was educated at University College School. In 1852, at the age of 16 he was taken out of school to enter the family business. Two years later he was sent by his father to Birmingham to run a screw manufacturing company in partnership with other Unitarian businessmen. Driven by religious zeal, from the start he found time to be involved in attempts to 'improve' the poor – teaching literature, history, French and arithmetic to slum children in Sunday school classes. Under the influence of the radical Nonconformist minister George Dawson (1821–76), he developed a keen interest in the social question.

Both his business and political career prospered. By 1874 he had accumulated a fortune which enabled him to retire and become fully

involved in local politics, serving as mayor of Birmingham between 1874 and 1876. This was a crucial period for his career, during which he developed both his confidence in the power of government to ameliorate society by direct intervention, and a solid base of electoral support. His celebrated 'municipal socialist' schemes were part of a general shift in British local authority 'governmentality' towards interventionism, and in this respect not totally original, but their success in Birmingham stimulated a national debate on the subject. The press was already familiar with Chamberlain as an influential campaigner for free secular schooling, through the National Education League (1869–77). Together with his regional reputation and support, his skills in organising pressure groups propelled him to the forefront of national debates about liberalism and democracy, especially after he became one of the architects and a leading light of the National Liberal Federation (whose opening meeting was held at Birmingham in May 1877).

An MP from 1876, within four years he found himself in the cabinet, to which he was promoted by Gladstone. Chamberlain's work on the organisation of the National Education League (1869–77) and the National Liberal Federation (from 1877) had brought him to the forefront of national debates, and his municipal socialist schemes – whereby public services were established by local authorities and run like profit-making concerns but for public benefit – had been immensely successful.

At the time, Gladsome was preaching and practicing strict economies at the Treasury, but the reduction of central government expenditure was perfectly compatible with the increase of local government expenditure – in fact municipal socialism was largely complementary to Gladstonian retrenchment at the centre.[24] It was only from 1885 that the two Liberal statesmen began to diverge. In the aftermath of the extension of the franchise and the reforms of 1883–5, Chamberlain issued a Radical manifesto in which he embarked on what he regarded as the updating of liberalism for the new democratic age. He claimed that 'Government of the people and by the people' now meant 'Socialism', though the term was at that time very vague and he simply meant that in future, Liberalism would be about addressing the social question.[25] However, social reform – which until then had been a largely technical and bipartisan aspect of government – would now be politicised, for the government could not continue to be 'neutral' in these matters. The methods of 'Municipal Socialism' were to be adopted by Whitehall.

Besides being intrinsically novel, this approach had important implications for both the impending debate on Irish home rule and the wider discussion about the relationship between state and society. One implication was that, if poverty was to be reduced by state intervention, then what Britain required was not devolution, but the rational reconstruction and empowering of the imperial executive at its centre.[26]

One implication was that, if poverty was to be reduced by state intervention, then what Britain required was not devolution, but the rational reconstruction and empowering of the imperial executive at its centre.

At the time, Chamberlain was beginning to move towards a more imperial understanding of liberalism, partly under the influence of his friend Sir Charles Dilke, the champion of 'Greater Britain', and Sir John Seeley, the Cambridge historian of *The Expansion of England*.[27] His enthusiasm for the settlement colonies – which 'expanded both 'England' and representative self-government – was shared by other radical figures, such as William Forster (educational reformer, Irish chief secretary and champion of 'ethical' intervention in foreign crises), the historian James Froude and – among a younger generation – Joseph Powell-Williams, Hugh Arnold-Forster and James Bryce.[28] The Imperial Federation League, founded in 1884, brought many of these figures together.[29]

Chamberlain had started to develop this new radicalism from 1882, when he proposed public works to relieve distress in Ireland. For the purpose of the present article, it is important to note that his strategy was partly inspired by contemporary French republican social reform, and particularly by Charles de Freycinet (1828–1923). The latter had much in common with Chamberlain, including a Protestant upbringing, a technical, rather than classical, education, and a strong interest in the English social question.[30] Passionate about the power of science to improve society, Freycinet had developed a major plan to renovate the French provinces through an ambitious programme of infrastructures, literally driven by the railways.[31] Freycinet was also the architect of a new imperialism which sought to modernise and transform Africa through the construction of a trans-Sahara railway line and the application of democratic *dirigisme* and energetic state intervention in the republic's overseas territories.[32] Chamberlain was impressed by what the French were able to do with their colonies. In 1895 he came up with his own version of the Freycinet 'doctrine of tropical African estates', which applied state agency to regional development.[33] In particular, like Freycinet, Chamberlain stressed the importance of the railways and the economic potential of African colonies, if properly developed by government initiative.[34]

Thus, while historians have rightly been attentive to the clash between Chamberlain's imperialism and French expansionism in Africa, culminating with the Fashoda incident in 1898,[35] it must also be said that the British statesman's conversion to radical Unionism was partly inspired by his admiration for continental European social imperialism, which he thought would empower and fulfil the potential of traditional liberalism. Rather than a 'betrayal' of his radical past, his adoption of social imperialism was, from his point of view, a natural adaptation of his old principles to a new situation. This is well illustrated by his

Chamberlain's conversion to social imperialism was one instance of a wider shift in European liberalism, one which saw many of his contemporaries on the 'left' of liberal politics … adopting similarly social-imperialist strategies as a way of responding to the rise of socialism.

attitudes towards humanitarian intervention in the Balkans.

There is both continuity and change between his Liberal and Unionist phases in Chamberlain's attitude to ethnic violence in the Ottoman Empire. In 1876 Chamberlain had supported the Bulgarian Horrors Agitation, though without sharing in the evangelical outrage felt by most other Nonconformists, and in 1882 he advocated intervention in Egypt, partly to stop anti-Christian riots.[36] In 1895–6, when pogroms broke out in the Ottoman Empire, resulting in the massacre of thousands of Armenians, Gladstone (in his last public speech) again invoked the Concert of Europe. By contrast, Chamberlain took a rather more aggressive stance. He first proposed a joint European military action against Constantinople, with Britain acting together with Italy and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Then, in December 1895, he wrote to Lord Salisbury proposing that Britain should instead seek the cooperation of the United States, and a joint British–US naval squadron should be sent to Constantinople to demand the end of the massacres.[37] Both Salisbury and his nephew, Arthur J. Balfour, dismissed the idea as impracticable, but within months the Russians did more or less what Chamberlain had proposed. The initiative was successful: when the Russians threatened to bombard Constantinople, the Ottoman government became more cooperative.[38]

The episode suggests that Chamberlain could be a better judge of the great powers' ability to influence the situation in the Ottoman Empire than his Tory colleagues. However, his hope for a joint British–American action was ahead of its time and outstripped the contemporary US ambitions in the Mediterranean. By contrast, cooperation with Italy and Austro-Hungary – a return to European military group effort, similar to the one which resulted in the Battle of Navarino (1827) and Greek independence – would have required a consistently multilateralist foreign policy: however, both Chamberlain and Salisbury were at best opportunists in terms of their attitude to international cooperation. Yet, this episode showed that when it came to taking action in an international crisis, in the first instance he looked to other European powers – in this case, Italy and Austria-Hungary. He expected that they would intervene not only because of shared geopolitical spheres of interest, but also because of a sense of moral obligation akin to Gladstone's idea of collective responsibility for the preservation of 'decency' in imperial government. As the Armenian crisis indicated, he also looked to America, which he saw as an extension of the British Empire, an 'empire of liberty' created by people who were 'kith-and-kin' of the British. Chamberlain was interested in contemporary post-Darwinian theories of race, and – through his third wife, who was American – had developed a fascination with the racialist hope of a grand 'Anglo-Saxon' alliance, an Anglo-American, or even an Anglo-American-German entente of the 'Teutonic Peoples' (in fact, he was an enthusiastic proponent of an Anglo-German alliance).

In this he departed from the then prevalent attitude in both parties, which traditionally had been reluctant to enter into permanent international 'entanglements'. By contrast, Chamberlain – a man of vision and fertile imagination – was always ready to borrow from successful German, French or American experiments (in his previous career a as businessman, he had done precisely the same in the fields of technology, industrial production and marketing). Likewise, when it came to attitudes to settlement colonies, Chamberlain was much less pragmatic and 'insular' than most of his colleagues.[39] For him, the colonies were Britain's new constitutional, social and demographic 'frontier', a conviction which consistently inspired his policies. Thus, in 1886 he opposed Irish home rule because he believed that there should be no weakening of the imperial bond at the centre of the system: the day of small nations had passed. It was not the time to devolve powers to the periphery, but instead to tighten the existing union, assimilating provinces to the imperial *metropole*. The British Empire should become like the United States on a global scale, a great democratic empire. It was in 1903 that he launched his programme of imperial federation built on a customs union and the idea that 'we have to cement [and] … consolidate the British race' in order to meet 'the clash of competition', which was commercial, but could easily also become military.[40] An imperial *Zollverein* would be the first step towards a deeper union. As an imperial federation, the British Empire – with a 'white' population of 60,000,000 – would match the US with its population of 70,000,000).[41]

Chamberlain's conversion to social imperialism was one instance of a wider shift in European liberalism, one which saw many of his contemporaries on the 'left' of liberal politics – including Leon Gambetta (1838–82) in France, Francesco Crispi (1818–1901) in Italy and Friedrich Naumann (1860–1919) in Germany. All adopted similarly social-imperialist strategies as a way of responding to the rise of socialism.[42] Likewise, Chamberlain's economic programme and adoption of tariff reform mirrored European developments. France and Germany were less dependent on foreign imports than Britain, and therefore better able to guarantee a steady supply based on domestic production (the equivalent of which for Britain was imperial production).[43] In terms of industrial policy, Chamberlain was concerned about the steady, but apparently unstoppable, decline in British manufactured exports going to continental Europe.[44] He thought that Britain should imitate the policies adopted by France, Germany and the United States. These included, in the commercial sphere, 'reciprocity' of concessions (instead of unilateral free trade) and tariff

protection of industries. The latter, he believed, were threatened by abusive labour practices no longer allowed in Britain: free trade ceased to be a positive force when it became the means whereby exploitation replaced dignified labour conditions.[45] In so far as free-trade 'globalisation' threatened the allegedly higher standards of British employment practice, he denounced it.[46] For the same reason, in a further departure from a long-tradition in British policy, he also rejected the 'free movement of people', not only because of competition, but also because of their negative cultural influence: 'They come here … and change the whole character of a district. (Cheers.) The speech, the nationality of whole streets has been altered'.[47]

In adopting such rhetoric, he was both interpreting and stoking widespread fears whose immediate motivation was a refugee crisis: the immigration of Eastern European Jews fleeing pogroms in the Russian Empire. Within months of his delivering this speech, the Conservative and Unionist government introduced, with the 1905 Aliens Act, the first example of anti-immigration legislation in modern British history.

Conclusion

Where would Gladstone and Chamberlain stand in today's debate about Europe, 'Brexit' and global free trade? This is a counterfactual question, not a historical one, but it is a question which implicitly – and sometimes explicitly – has been raised in recent public debates.[48] Moreover, even before the 2016 'Brexit' referendum, similar questions about the 'meaning' of British history have frequently been discussed.[49] And it must be noted that such debate had already started in Gladstone's day: it was Otto von Bismarck who first articulated the view that Gladstone was the champion of 'a federative Europe bound to keep the peace by a web of common sense, a Europe in which the interests of the whole would outweigh particular interests.'[50] By the same token, Chamberlain's response to immigration sounds like much of the rhetoric emanating from the Conservative and Brexit camp in 2016–17. However, his attitudes to both Europe and the Empire were the opposite of the insularism and 'Little Englandism' which dominates Theresa May's government. Inspired by French and German models, Chamberlain sought to transcend traditional British sovereignty within a wide imperial union, based not on 'free trade', but on a customs union and, eventually, a super-state, the then-equivalent of what the EU was to become in Eurosceptic nightmares.

The case with Gladstone is more complex, because here we find a multifaceted intellectual complexity and ability to engage with various aspects of the contemporary world as the latter changed. It is easy to say that he would have disapproved of various arguments about British 'exceptionalism', recently proposed by politicians, historians and political scientists in order to advance a unilateralist approach to foreign policy.[51] While Gladstone was prepared to take unilateral action when this was inevitable – his invasion of Egypt in 1882, for example, though he had initially planned it as a joint Anglo-French 'international intervention' operation – he strongly condemned and disapproved of unilateralism as a general philosophy in foreign affairs.[52] Instead, he would have agreed with the criticism that John Bruton, Ireland's former prime minister, levelled against David Cameron in February 2016, when he contrasted the Conservative government's move towards Brexit with the British tradition: 'Two hundred years ago, when European states were much less interdependent than today, [at the Vienna Congress] the then British foreign secretary, Lord Castlereagh, persuaded the European powers to make, in his words, "a systematic pledge of preserving concert among the leading powers and a refuge under which all minor states may look to find their security".'[53]

Interdependence, cooperation and free trade came with the free movement of workers in general. Not only was there no restriction on the free movement of people before 1905, but the century witnessed one of the largest-scale movements of people, with millions leaving Germany, Italy, the Scandinavian countries, the Russian Empire, as well as Britain and Ireland to settle in America, Australia, New Zealand and various African colonies.

On all of these issues, it is easy to see where Gladstone stood. However, any further comparison between 'free trade' then and 'globalisation' or EU policies now breaks down when we consider that in the late nineteenth century Britain was neither merely a 'nation', nor a multinational United Kingdom: it was instead a global empire, supported by the largest and most dynamic industrial economy in the world. Britain was the only superpower; other countries were merely regional powers. This informed both Gladstone's paternalistic humanitarianism and Chamberlain's radical imperialism. And it is in the global, imperial significance of the system which Britain controlled and championed that we must look not only for the rationale of Gladstone's and Chamberlain's engagement with ideas of Europe, but also for the profound difference between their world and ours.

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The author would like to thank Ian Cawood and two anonymous readers for their comments on a previous draft of the present article.

It is in the global, imperial significance of the system which Britain controlled and championed that we must look not only for the rationale of Gladstone's and Chamberlain's engagement with ideas of Europe, but also for the profound difference between their world and ours.

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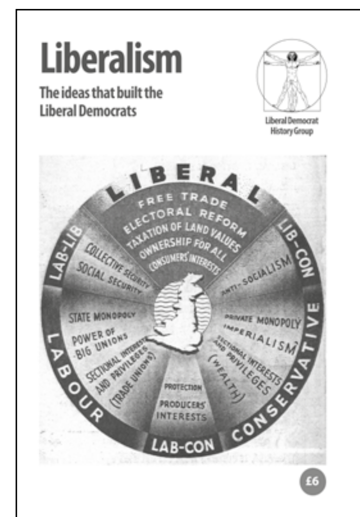

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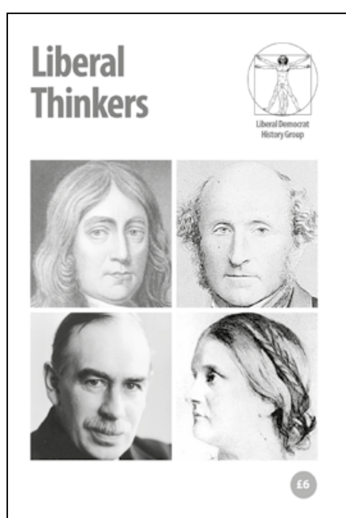

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David Grace

‘Pacifism is not enough The Life of Philip I

Philip Kerr, the 11th Lord Lothian, devoted his life to the pursuit of peace and played important roles in the two world wars of the twentieth century. His ideals were high, some would say utopian, but his place in public affairs was also high and he was well versed in the minutiae of politics. Whilst closely involved in the problems of war and its consequences, his lifelong preoccupation was how to build a peaceful world. Despite his influential involvement in war and peace in Europe, he was not himself a campaigner for European federation; but his many writings and speeches on federalism have been held to inspire many who campaigned and still campaign for just that. He began as a Unionist and an imperialist and ended a Liberal and a world federalist. His path from minor aristocrat to British ambassador in Washington never strayed far from centres of power.

The Kindergarten

Kerr was born on 18 April 1882 into an aristocratic family, the son of Major General Lord Ralph Kerr, the third son of the 7th Marquess of Lothian, and of Lady Anne Kerr, the daughter of the Duke of Norfolk. He was brought up a Roman Catholic and sent to the Oratory School in Birmingham whence he matriculated to New College, Oxford, obtaining a first in Modern History. He took the examination for All Souls but did not get in. At the age of 22 he took up a post in the Transvaal and then in Lord Milner's coterie of bright young men in South Africa. Having defeated the two Boer territories – the Transvaal and the Orange Free State – in 1902, the British were running them as colonies alongside Natal and the Cape Colony. Milner had been high commissioner since 1897 and recruited a group of young, mainly Oxford, graduates to advise him. Afrikaners, resentful of these young administrators running their country, dubbed them the ‘Kindergarten’. Kerr joined this group in January 1905 and they lived, ate, rode and hunted together; but, above all, under the influence of Milner, they worked to unite the colonies and to keep South Africa within the British Empire. Kerr read the Federalist Papers and a new biography of Alexander Hamilton that showed how the American federalists had successfully campaigned in 1787 for the new constitution of the USA. This was his introduction to federalism. The Kindergarten advocated a federal union and this became the preferred option in the memorandum approved by Milner's successor, Lord Selborne. To promote their ideas the Kindergarten prepared two books and started a journal, edited by Kerr and published in English and Afrikaans, *The State / De Staat*. However, General Smuts of the Transvaal convinced a national convention that a unitary government would be better, because he expected that Afrikaners would dominate it and it would be free from government in Whitehall.

The Round Table

Kerr returned to England in 1909. He and his Kindergarten colleagues had become convinced that the British Empire itself should become a federation. They planned to recruit supporters in each of the dominions: Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the new one to be formed when the South Africa Act 1909 came into effect the following year. They set up the Round Table Movement and established an office in London with Kerr and Lionel Curtis on salaries of £1,000 each. Curtis saw them as influencing elites behind the scenes, but Kerr felt they should educate and convert more openly. He established and edited ‘*The Round Table, a Quarterly Review of the Politics of the British Empire*’ which first came out in November 1910. The journal

n; nor patriotism either'
Kerr, Lord Lothian

Philip Kerr, 11th Lord Lothian (1882–1940)

still exists today but has lost its original federalist objective.

Kerr wrote many of the articles himself but suffered a nervous collapse in the autumn of 1911, which he described as affecting his nerves and his ability to read and write rather than his body. It took him three years to recover. Despite his poor health Kerr travelled to Egypt, India, China and Japan. He wanted India in the imperial federation, and the Round Table Movement supported the aim of India's progress toward becoming a dominion. In 1912 Kerr went on to Canada and the United States, where he attended the convention of the Progressive Party which nominated Theodore Roosevelt for president. Now and in later travels, Kerr visited nearly every state and met many influential Americans. His conviction grew that an imperial federation would have to be closely involved with the United States. In 1913, on medical advice, he took a six-month rest cure which included staying in St Moritz with his friends Nancy and Waldorf Astor. Nancy became his closest friend for the rest of his life. He had always been thoughtful and anxious about religion and had come to doubt Roman Catholicism. In 1914 Nancy introduced him to Christian Science, which he followed for the rest of his life and which indeed played a part in his death.

It soon appeared that the Round Table Movement would not find agreement on imperial federation. Although groups in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa supported the idea, those in Canada, the oldest dominion, urged caution. This was perhaps unsurprising given that the first three had only become self-governing dominions in 1901, 1907 and 1910 respectively, whereas Canada's status dated back to 1867. At the Imperial Conference in May 1911, the prime minister of New Zealand, Sir Joseph Ward, called for an imperial federation but was voted down by his colleagues from Great Britain, Canada and South Africa. Clearly the moment was too soon, but would the right moment ever come?

At this stage Kerr was still a Unionist and had met with Unionist leaders to discuss the possibility of becoming a member of parliament, but he took no position on Milner's proposal for Imperial Preference. The *Round Table* had Liberal readers and was welcomed by Churchill himself in 1910. Whilst Milner opposed Irish home rule, Kerr and the Round Table Movement stuck to their principles and proposed a federal Britain with devolved governments in Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

He was beginning to move toward world federalism, which might start with the British Empire and the United States: 'The cure for war is not to weaken the principle of the state, but to carry it to its logical conclusion, by the creation of a world state.'

The First World War and Lloyd George

When war came, Kerr tried unsuccessfully to enlist and was determined to support the war effort. He returned to writing and editing the *Round Table*, in which he set out his view of Britain's war aims as liberty and democracy. In an article in 1915 on 'The Foundation of Peace' he showed great foresight in arguing that '… the peace must not be vindictive'.[1] He also continued to campaign for an imperial federation, arguing for an imperial legislature to deal with external affairs and defence. He was beginning to move toward world federalism, which might start with the British Empire and the United States: 'The cure for war is not to weaken the principle of the state, but to carry it to its logical conclusion, by the creation of a world state'.[2] In 1916, foreshadowing his role in the Second World War, he urged the United States to take part in the conflict. As usual he saw a moral dimension, with the war as a struggle between right and wrong, and he rejected the notion of neutrality in such a struggle.

Kerr joined Milner in a group critical of Asquith's handling of the war. In the summer of 1915 Milner campaigned for conscription, and in January 1916 Asquith introduced it. Kerr himself was liable under the Military Service Act, but now he applied for and obtained exemption arguing that editing the *Round Table* was civilian work of national interest. In December 1916, Lloyd George became prime minister and formed a war cabinet of five –including Milner, who arranged for Kerr to join the No. 10 secretariat, which became known as 'The Garden Suburb' because of the huts in the garden in Downing Street where they worked. This was a great concentration of power in Lloyd George's hands and foreshadowed later development of the cabinet secretariat. Traditional civil servants disliked the new system and Asquithians were even less complimentary, describing Kerr and his colleagues as *illuminati*, 'a class of travelling empirics in Empire'.[3]

At the age of 34, Kerr was now 'almost as close to the centre of world affairs as it was possible for a man to be',[4] as he himself put it. On taking office, he had to resign from editing the *Round Table*. Now his views would influence government decisions much more closely than when written in a low-circulation journal.[5] Nevertheless, the *Round Table*'s efforts to influence its two hundred American subscribers were perhaps rewarded when the United States declared war on Germany in April 1917. The Imperial War Conference also met in London that spring, and dominion prime ministers were enrolled into a new Imperial War Cabinet. Milner, Kerr and their friends took the opportunity over dinner to promote imperial federation to the visiting premiers, but the conference itself only resolved on voluntary cooperation after the war.

Kerr also advised on Palestine, supporting the demand for a Jewish national homeland in Palestine. The Round Table Movement believed this would hasten the advance of democracy in the Middle East. In addition, it was also felt in Downing Street that the United States and Russia would look positively on the initiative. Kerr also welcomed the first Russian revolution in

March 1917, as the tsarist monarchy had been a flaw in his argument that Britain was fighting for democracy. His formulation of the war's aims as being the democratising of Europe came to figure more and more in Lloyd George's speeches. Achieving peace and, above all, a settlement that would maintain that peace was the higher priority, but Kerr was certain that peace would be more likely to last between democracies. Nevertheless, Lloyd George sent him to Switzerland twice in late 1917 and early 1918 for secret negotiations with Austro-Hungarian diplomats, in which Kerr promised to preserve the Habsburg Empire. When the war finally ended, Kerr was to play a very different role at the peace conference in Paris.

The peace conference

When the Allied Powers gathered in 1919 to negotiate peace, the Round Table Movement was well represented not only by Milner, Curtis and Kerr but also by supporters and friends from the United States, Canada and Australia. As well as arguing for particular British interests, as was his job, Kerr had a persistent vision of the United States and the British Empire guaranteeing world peace – a vision which ran up against entrenched isolationism in the United States. President Wilson himself had proposed the formation of the League of Nations, but Kerr was sure the league could not guarantee peace because it rested upon the idea of national sovereignty, which he had already identified as the main cause of war.

Winston Churchill, now secretary of state for war, wanted Britain and the allies to step up military intervention in Russia to fight the Bolsheviks. Kerr was equally anti-Bolshevik but advised against direct intervention, preferring that Britain should only provide arms to the white Russians, and his view prevailed. Churchill and many others began to complain that Kerr had too much power for an unelected bureaucrat. Not only did he control access to Lloyd George, but he also read all the papers and memoranda that the prime minister could not be bothered with and he stood in for him in negotiations. Lord Curzon said he constituted a second Foreign Office and condemned him as 'a most unsafe and insidious intermediary being full of ability and guile'.[6]

The peace conference faced the critical issue of what terms to impose on defeated Germany. Georges Clemenceau, the French prime minister, was determined that Germany should pay heavily; but Woodrow Wilson wanted Germany to take its place in the international community on terms of equality with other nations. Lloyd George vacillated both at home and abroad, taking a different line at different junctures. On some occasions he called for heavy reparations to be paid by Germany and on others he warned of the dangers. Kerr's view was that, although sanctions on Germany could be justified, it would be foolish to push the country into an impossible position. Over the weekend of 22 and 23 March 1919, Lloyd George took his closest advisors, including Kerr, to spend the weekend in Fontainebleau to try to resolve the issue. He allocated each of them roles, such as German officer or French widow, and they acted out the rival viewpoints. Lloyd George concluded from the exercise that the peace terms must not destroy Germany. Kerr had the unenviable job of writing up the discussion and by Monday morning had produced what became known as the Fontainebleau Memorandum. Lloyd George presented this to the other members of the Council of Four – Wilson, Clemenceau, and Vittorio Orlando the Italian prime minister – recommending moderate terms that would guarantee a lasting peace and, with great prescience, warning that in the end, if Germany felt unjustly treated, 'she will find means of exacting retribution from her conquerors'.[7] The Treaty of Versailles eventually included both Article 231, the 'war guilt clause', declaring Germany's responsibility for the war, and Article 232 restricting her liability because of her limited resources. Lloyd George may have been satisfied, having compromised, as he put it, between Jesus Christ (the idealist Wilson) and Napoleon (the crusty Clemenceau), but the same could not be said for either Wilson or Clemenceau. Kerr had the task of drafting those articles; and when the Germans objected to much of the draft treaty, but especially Article 231, it was Kerr who had to reply setting out why they were guilty and why reparations followed from their guilt. He later came to regret these articles, as he saw the consequences for Germany even before the rise of Hitler, and he repeatedly called for revision of the treaty.

In November 1919, the American Senate's rejection of the League of Nations Treaty showed that the real world was still a long way from '[a] settlement based on ideal principles', by which Kerr meant a settlement which '… can be permanently applied and maintained only by a world government to which all nations will submit their private interests'.

Federalism

In November 1919, the American Senate's rejection of the League of Nations Treaty showed that the real world was still a long way from '[a] settlement based on ideal principles', by which Kerr meant a settlement which '… can be permanently applied and maintained only by a world government to which all nations will submit their private interests'.[8] He continued in Downing Street until 1921, when he left to become a director of the *News Chronicle* effectively appointed by Lloyd George; but at the end of the year he returned to private life to devote himself to Christian Science and the study of international relations. In 1922 and again in 1923, he spent time at the Institute of Political Studies in Williamstown, Massachusetts, where he gave three lectures, later printed as 'The Prevention of War'. He now recognised that imperial federation was a dead letter but instead he sought a world government. He identified the consistent

cause of war as being the division of the world into separate states, each claiming absolute sovereignty. Violence within states was outlawed and prevented by the power of the state, but simultaneously states reserved the right to use violence against each other. Drawing on his American audience's history, he compared relations between states with life in the Wild West in the nineteenth century, where disputes were settled by bluff or the gun. The lectures considered the psychological effects of national sovereignty: 'It is this worship of the national self which causes the inhabitants of every state to be content with limiting their loyalty to their own fellow-citizens …'[9] Just as nationalism had extended family loyalty to fellow-citizens, world patriotism would be needed to extend it to all humanity before a world government would be possible. Modern opponents of federalism condemn it as centralism, but Kerr knew better. He identified centralism as the enemy of democracy and argued that only the federal system could guarantee a high level of popular participation. Today's divisions over Brexit echo this old dispute.

In 1925 Kerr became secretary of the Rhodes Trust which Cecil Rhodes had established with the aim of extending the British Empire but Kerr's objective in selecting Rhodes scholars was to identify and train people who would become leaders devoted to English standards of public service and to a united and peaceful world. Thus he continued his old policy of educating the ruling classes to work for federation.

Lothian the Liberal in opposition and in government

Kerr's work with Lloyd George had converted him from Unionism to Liberalism just as Liberals started to fight amongst themselves and the future of the Liberal Party was becoming doubtful. Kerr helped to set up the Liberal Industrial Inquiry, which produced the famous Yellow Book. In the decade of the General Strike he became interested in industrial relations and proposed 'self-government for industry' through the establishment of boards involving management and trade unions in each industry and an overall board at national level. Keynes wrote to Kerr disagreeing and criticising '… the impracticality, or uselessness, of inscribing pious ideals on a political banner of a kind which could not possibly be embodied in legislation'. It would be better if everyone were sensible, he continued, 'But a political programme, I think, must go rather beyond this.'[10] Kerr's ideas were not unlike the development in 1962 of the National Economic Development Council, known as Neddy, and the little Neddies in each industry. At Lloyd George's request, Kerr also produced a 114-page draft Liberal manifesto for the 1929 election, but Lloyd George chose to fight on the shorter and more punchy appeal of 'We Can Conquer Unemployment'.

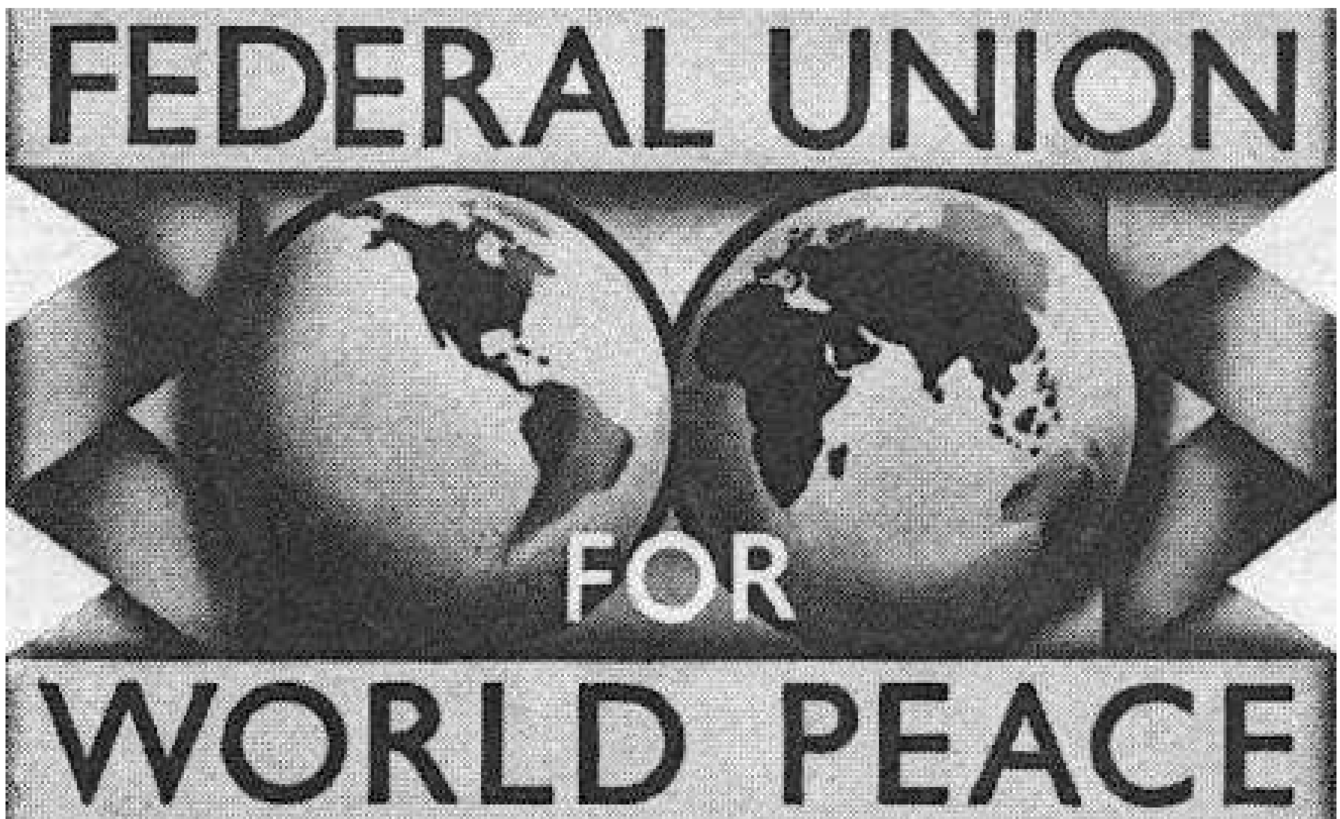
Kerr continued to write and speak against national sovereignty as the cause of war; in 1933 he even blamed the economic depression on national sovereignty.

In 1930 Kerr inherited the title of 11th Marquess of Lothian together with the estates and the money. Prime Minister Ramsay Macdonald invited Kerr, Lloyd George and Seebohm Rowntree to propose an economic recovery programme. They also conducted negotiations with Macdonald to explore the possibilities of governing in coalition with the Labour Party, but nothing came of this. Kerr felt that party leaders might like a permanent arrangement between Liberals and Labour but their memberships would never stand for it. He visited Russia with the Astors and George Bernard Shaw and met Stalin. Although Shaw returned entranced and virtually said 'I have seen the future and it works',[11] Kerr contented himself with telling the Liberal Summer School that Russian revolutionary ideas would have a great impact on the world. When Macdonald formed the National Government in August 1931, Kerr became Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, a cabinet-level post, although Lloyd George refused to take part.

Following the general election of October 1931, which returned a much more Conservative National Government, Kerr became under-secretary of state for India. It was now British policy for India to become a self-governing dominion, but not yet as Gandhi wanted. In 1932 Kerr and Secretary of State Sir Samuel Hoare visited India to report on widening the franchise for local and national elections. Kerr wanted both central and local government to be responsible to much wider Indian electorates but Hoare did not. In the end, they recommended increasing the Indian electorate from 7 million to 36 million, with property and education qualifications, and extending the vote to more women and to some untouchables. Churchill was furious and declared, 'Lord Lothian is misleading the country again.'[12] Following the Ottawa Conference, which fixed imperial tariffs, Kerr and other Liberals resigned from the National Government in September. Kerr continued to speak in the House of Lords, and the India Bill embodying his proposed reforms passed into law in 1935.

Pacifism is not enough

Kerr continued to write and speak against national sovereignty as the cause of war; in 1933 he even blamed the economic depression on national sovereignty. But his most enduring contribution was the Burge Memorial Lecture given at Lincoln's Inn in May 1935. There was widespread fear of another war and pacifism had widespread appeal. Not only had the Cambridge and Oxford Unions passed pacifist motions (1927 and 1933), but in the wider world 135,000 people had joined the Peace Pledge Union founded by Dick Shepherd and supported by Bertrand Russell, Donald Soper and Siegfried Sassoon among



others. Kerr began by pointing out that the peace movement had found no way to stop war. He asked, 'What is peace?', and answered that it was not merely the negative absence of war but the positive state of society 'in which political, economic and social issues are settled by constitutional means under the reign of law' and violence is forbidden even between nations. Peace could not just happen. Within countries it was created by the state. He went on to analyse the changing role of the state; but whatever form the state took it retained the right to use violence against other states, so that within states there was law but between states anarchy. He reviewed the popular ideas of the cause of war such as injustice, economic competition, capitalism and nationalism and dismissed them all. Capitalists compete peacefully within countries and socialism could not prevent war. There were also many states containing different nationalities. He discussed the history of warfare and peacemaking, particularly the experience of 1919. He did not deny that nations are loath to surrender their sovereignty but declared that we cannot prevent war as long as we build our international structures like the League of Nations on the principle of that sovereignty. He then reviewed the performance and failures of the league.

He explored how a federation of nations might come about. He recalled that the central idea at the peace conference in 1919 was that Britain, France and the United States would together provide the power to enforce peace, as Britain had previously done within its empire. As these three were liberal democracies, there was nothing to fear from their power. (Perhaps it would be fair to say that this was Kerr's central idea rather than a view widespread amongst the negotiators.) He still hoped for such a combination of democracies but he feared the alternative was a system of competing alliances such as led to war in 1914. He regarded it as inconceivable that the world could continue with the anarchy of twenty-six states in Europe and over sixty states in the world, each armed with tariffs and bombers. The peace movement of the future would combine the democratic virtues with self-sacrifice and discipline. Its members would 'see all men and nations as one brotherhood and recognise that the troubles of the world are due not to the malignity of their neighbours but to the anarchy which perverts the policies of all nations'[13].

Appeasement

Kerr's lifelong obsession with peace may help explain why he was an appeaser in the 1930s. He did not welcome Hitler's rise to power, commenting that while a national resurgence in Germany was a healthy response to the defeat of 1918 and the depression which followed, 'dictatorship based on racialism and violence'[14] would lead to inner decay and corruption. In 1935 the Nazis had taken control of the German Rhodes Committee and Kerr visited Berlin to support the embattled trustees. He obtained a meeting with Hitler who ranted about the communist menace and asked that Britain, France and Germany be treated as equals. Kerr asked Hitler for a ten-year guarantee of peace and the Führer agreed that there would

be no use of force over boundaries with France or the Austrian question. Kerr believed that Hitler wanted peace, and not only advised Foreign Secretary Sir John Simon as much, but also wrote in *The Times* predicting peace if Germany were treated as an equal.

Kerr also corresponded with von Ribbentrop about cooperation on limiting armaments, received him at his home (Blickling Hall near Norwich), and protested to him about Nazi brutality. He raised the cases of individuals persecuted by the German government. Ribbentrop was non-committal and Kerr regarded him as a lightweight. Much has been made of this visit, but Kerr was in the habit of receiving many visitors, including Nehru who refused to cooperate with the new India Act as Kerr urged. Kerr also frequently visited Clivedon, the Astors' home. They became known as the Clivedon set of appeasers although Kerr always maintained that they had no collective policy, unlike his old Round Table friends. At bottom he was driven by his own guilt and regret about the Versailles Treaty and hoped that treating Germany better would moderate the Nazis' worst policies. Kerr's view was that if the Germans believed they would be treated fairly, but also that force would be met with force, peace could be maintained and the internal repression reduced. When Germany reoccupied the Rhineland, his response was 'it was no more than Germans walking into their own back yard'.[15] His focus remained on hopes of a world pacified by Anglo-American power.

In 1937 Kerr again met Hitler and pointed out to him that Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden had recently confirmed that Britain would fight to defend the empire, France and the Low Countries but had not mentioned Eastern Europe. He suggested to Hitler that Germany should guarantee the independence of those countries and form a relationship with them akin to Britain's relationship with the Commonwealth. His meeting seemed to have one small effect, but an encouraging one for Kerr. He had protested about Nazi harassment of Christian Scientists, so Hitler lifted a ban on their activity. Kerr did admire the energy and unity that Hitler had brought to Germany, but his comment after visiting labour camps in Germany harked back to his view of Germany before the First World War. Although he could see the healthy cheerfulness of the young Germans, he complained that 'they are not taught to think for themselves'.[16]

When Chamberlain's Munich Agreement, in 1938, avoided war by allowing Germany to occupy the Sudetenland, Kerr welcomed it as the population was largely German; but he did warn that the future depended upon whether the democracies were prepared to stop further expansion. When Hitler occupied the Czech Republic in March 1939, Kerr finally abandoned any faith in the dictator's intentions. He wrote to a friend, 'Up until then it was possible to believe that Germany was only concerned with recovery of what might be called the normal rights of a great power, but it now seems clear that Hitler is in effect a fanatical gangster who will stop at nothing to beat down all possibility of resistance anywhere to his will'.[17]

Union Now and Federal Union

That same month in 1939, a Rhodes scholar, Clarence Streit of the *New York Times*, published *Union Now*, calling for a federal union of the democracies. Streit had sent drafts to Kerr who publicly endorsed the idea along with the Round Table. Oxford now produced another set of young graduates not unlike the Round Table in their idealism and search for peace. In reaction to Munich, Patrick Ramsey, Derek Rawnsley and Charles Kimber had set up a group known as Federal Union which also sought a federation of democracies. Kerr endorsed and advised them and on their behalf invited prominent people to join them. By 1940, this group had grown to over 10,000 members organised in 283 groups around Britain, with the support of *The Times* newspaper and 100 members of parliament, including Clement Atlee, as well as the Archbishop of York, Julian Huxley, Ramsay Muir, Lionel Robbins, Seebohm Rowntree and many others. This was a febrile time as war approached and many realised the truth of Kerr's words, 'Pacifism is not enough nor patriotism either'.

Federal Union published many pamphlets and books starting with *The Ending of Armageddon*[18] by Kerr himself. Their impact dissipated as the crisis of 1940 deepened but their work had an unforeseen but important effect on post-war Europe. On the Italian island of Ventotene, Mussolini had imprisoned some of his opponents including Altiero Spinelli and Ernesto Rossi. They had leisure on that cold and windy island to discuss what to do after the war. Another redrawing of the map of nations, as in 1919, seemed doomed to failure. Rossi contacted his old friend Luigi Einaudi (president of Italy after the war) who sent him a selection of Federal Union's writings. I have seen the actual editions in a glass case on the island, but Kerr's work was not amongst them. In any case Spinelli was aware of Kerr's influence and in his autobiography, *Come ho tentato di diventare saggio*[19] ('How I tried to become wise'), he wrote, 'I was not attracted by the foggy and contorted ideological federalism of a Proudhon or a Mazzini, but by the clean, precise thinking of these English federalists'. Thus inspired, Spinelli and Rossi secretly published *The Ventotene Manifesto*,[20] the founding document of the European Federalist Movement which played a considerable role in the development of what became the European Union. The federal idea had travelled from Hamilton, Madison and Jay's *Federalist Papers* in the America of the 1780s to Milner's Kindergarten in South Africa in the 1900s, to Kerr's Round Table in the first four decades of the twentieth century, and on to Italy

This was a febrile time as war approached and many realised the truth of Kerr's words, 'Pacifism is not enough nor patriotism either'.

and then Europe in the second half of that century. The states to be federated had been British colonies, then the whole British Empire, then the Anglo-Saxon democracies, and finally the centuries-old antagonists within Europe.

British ambassador in Washington

Throughout his life Kerr had frequently travelled to and around the United States. He had always hoped that the Americans would share with the British Empire the burden of keeping the peace. As secretary to the Rhodes Trust he had visited no fewer than forty-four of the forty-eight states. He once said, 'I always feel fifteen years younger when I land in New York'.[21] In 1938 the foreign secretary, Halifax, persuaded Kerr to accept the post of British ambassador in Washington against strong opposition from the Foreign Office. Not only did the officials dislike the appointment of an amateur, but many had opposed his policy of appeasement, which they considered made him unsuitable for the post. Kerr's old Kindergarten friend, John Buchan, now Lord Tweedsmuir, was governor general of Canada and encouraged Kerr at all costs to accept the post but counselled him against making pro-war propaganda in office. Kerr took up his post on 30 August 1939, four days before the start of the Second World War. His task was a delicate one: to persuade the Americans that Britain needed their support but not to give the impression that we would lose the war, which was what the American ambassador in London, Joseph Kennedy, was advising. After visiting London in 1940, Kerr spoke to the press on his return to the States describing the situation in the UK and the spirit of the British people thus, 'They mean to beat Hitler and are confident in the end they will do it'.[22] Kerr broke new ground as an ambassador, travelling and speaking well beyond the Washington diplomatic circuit and charming the press. He had to overcome American suspicion of his aristocratic background and began by presenting his credentials to Franklin Roosevelt in his usual rather shabby suit and not in the traditional top hat and striped trousers. One journalist reported that he looked like a professor at a teachers' college. He also removed the guardsmen from the embassy entrance.

'Britain's Ambassador to the US'

One of Kerr's Rhodes scholars, Adam von Trott zu Solz, managed to escape from Germany and met secretly with him in a Washington hotel to ask him to persuade Roosevelt to suggest peace terms to Hitler. Trott's idea was to alienate the German people from Hitler, but Kerr was doubtful that the Germans would overthrow their leader. In July 1944, Trott would be involved in the plot to kill Hitler and would be executed.

Kerr also tried to overcome the American fear of propaganda, saying that he was only telling the truth. He saw his role as educating the Americans about the United Kingdom as well as educating the British about the United States. Kerr's judgment of American public opinion was accurate and useful to Halifax and later to Churchill. His initial assessment of American public opinion in December 1939 was that the vast majority of Americans were anti-Hitler and anti-Stalin but also strongly opposed to going to war. When Churchill became prime minister in May 1940 he confirmed Kerr's appointment despite previous disagreements, notably over appeasement and India. Following the collapse of France in May 1940, and during the Battle of Britain, on 19 July Hitler offered to make peace with Britain. Halifax and Kerr were willing to hear the terms but Churchill instructed that they were to make no reply.

Kerr continued to believe in his long-term plan of the United States abandoning its stance of neutrality to work with the British Commonwealth in maintaining world peace. In the short term, moreover, success in the war depended upon American involvement soon. He argued that the British fleet protected the interests of the United States as well and, if it fell into the hands of a victorious Germany, the Atlantic would become the front line. He made this argument not only to build the case for the States to enter the war but also to promote Britain's urgent need for ships. In July 1940, Kerr explained to Roosevelt that

Britain had entered the war with 176 destroyers of which only 70 were still afloat. He asked him to supply 40 to 100 destroyers and 100 flying boats. In the end there was a deal whereby the Americans provided fifty obsolete destroyers in return for the leases on bases in the Caribbean and for a British promise never to sink or surrender their fleet, which Kerr himself delivered. Kerr was undoubtedly the main conduit for these negotiations and crucial in persuading Churchill and the war cabinet what needed to be agreed. Churchill avoided the American ambassador Joseph Kennedy, but Kerr himself was friendly with him and inspired his son John F. Kennedy to write a book in 1940 called *Why England Slept*, calling for American rearmament.

There remained a financial problem. American neutrality legislation required the British to pay cash for the destroyers. Visiting Britain in October 1940, Kerr learned that the country's dollar reserves were almost exhausted and he persuaded a reluctant Churchill to write to Roosevelt outlining the position. By then Churchill had come to appreciate Kerr noting that he had become 'an earnest, deeply-stirred man … primed with every aspect and detail of the American attitude'[23] and was willing to follow his advice. He was however shocked when Kerr, returning to New York on 23 November 1940, announced to the astonished press, 'Well, boys, Britain's broke; it's your money we want'.[24] Britain's parlous finances were supposed to be a secret and a drop in sterling followed that announcement. Over the next few months Roosevelt and Churchill, with Kerr's help, worked out the system of lend-lease which overcame the financial and legal problems.

In December Kerr suffered a kidney infection but because of his Christian Science beliefs refused medical help. In bed he worked on his address to the American Farm Bureau Federation, which was read out on his behalf in Baltimore on 11 December. The speech rehearsed the disasters of the previous seven months and warned of the danger to the United States if Britain fell. He concluded that 'the only nucleus around which a stable, peaceful, democratic world can be built after this war is if the United States and Great Britain …'[25] possessed sufficient military power together to overcome any totalitarians. Thus his final public pronouncement echoed the long theme of his life, the need for Britain, its Commonwealth and the United States to guarantee peace, although on this occasion the federation of democracies was not mentioned. He died the following day and the Americans gave him a state funeral in Arlington National Cemetery, a film of which you can find today on YouTube.[26]

Federalists have always been regarded as utopian but nothing in the history of the twentieth century has disproved the central idea that Kerr never stopped proclaiming – that national sovereignty is the root cause of war.

Conclusion – a life for peace

It is trivial to note that Philip Kerr was born with a silver spoon in his mouth, that he followed in many ways a traditional career path for one of his class and era through Oxford, imperial service, government and diplomacy. Yet this is to ignore his unusual views and real achievements which others of that background did not share. He was certainly handsome and charming – attributes not unhelpful in public life. He travelled, spoke and wrote widely but no one has suggested that his oratorical skills or his prose style were out of the ordinary. It was the content of what he said and wrote that distinguished him. Beatrice Webb may have dismissed him as an 'ultra-refined aristocratic dreamer, with sentimentally revolutionary views'.[27] Many on the right also thought him unsound because of his advocacy of world government. Career civil servants tended to envy and even despise his role. Robert Vansittart, permanent under-secretary at the Foreign Office called him 'an incurable superficial Johnny know-it-all'.[28] Some career politicians shared that view. Yet he won over and influenced key people in Britain and across the British Empire and, above all, in the United States. His idealism did not prevent him from being an effective negotiator and solving practical problems.

Whilst Kerr's own focus was the empire, the world and the Atlantic, his writings did influence European federalists, as Spinelli himself acknowledged. He did explicitly support a European federation in an article in 1938[29] but, like Churchill after him, when he said Europe he did not always mean to include the United Kingdom. Although his many articles and speeches did not break new ground in political theory, they certainly transmitted the federalist arguments inherited from Madison, Hamilton and Jay, and indeed Immanuel Kant, to a wider world of British and European politicians, civil servants and activists. This was not political science but polemic with a strong ethical basis. Many found it irritating, idealistic and impractical. Yet as Kerr warned in 1922, the prevention of war depends upon the creation of a supranational state because mere benevolence will never keep the peace among nations any more than it does between individuals. Federalists have always been regarded as utopian but nothing in the history of the twentieth century has disproved the central idea that Kerr never stopped proclaiming – that national sovereignty is the root cause of war. Surely the experience of the twenty-first century with its echoes of the 1930s, financial crashes and revived, aggressive nationalism shows that what is utopian is to believe that war can be avoided without federation.

David Grace is a European Affairs consultant, Liberal since 1974, read History and Law at Cambridge, was president of the Union, later president of Jeunesse Européenne Fédéraliste, secretary of Federal Union, parliamentary candidate for both Westminster and the European Parliament, vice-chair of the European Movement.

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Robert Ingham

The Liberal Contribution

Address given by Winston Churchill at the Congress of Europe in The Hague (7 May 1948)

'The Council of Europe is a Liberal conception. It is a realisation of a dream of European Liberals for two centuries.' This was the claim of the Liberal Party's 1951 election manifesto. The Council of Europe had been established in 1949 out of the ashes of the Second World War and heralded a new era of internationalism and 'the end of the era of national self-sufficiency', as the manifesto put it. This article will examine the relationship between the Liberals and the Council of Europe, both at the time it was set up and subsequently, assessing whether there was a distinctively Liberal contribution to the UK's participation in the organisation.

Liberals and the creation of the Council of Europe

The primary impetus in the UK for the creation of a multinational organisation of European states came from Winston Churchill, who had spoken of the need for Europe to unite during the Second World War and, in a speech in Zurich in September 1946, called for the creation of a 'United States of Europe'. Churchill gathered together an eclectic group of people of like mind, including Bertrand Russell, Victor Gollancz and Bob Boothby. Lady Violet Bonham Carter, Asquith's daughter and a prominent Liberal, joined the group in March 1947; and other Liberals involved included Juliet Rhys-Williams and the academic Gilbert Murray.[1] It was unclear from the start what the group was aiming to achieve. Churchill, said Bonham Carter, was 'rambling off into long passages of purple prose' and there were deep but ultimately unresolved philosophical debates about whether European unity could appeal to the 'Soul of Europe' without also dealing with hard economics.[2]

This gathering eventually took shape as the Committee for United Europe, part of a broader European Movement, prominent members of which included the Belgian politician Paul-Henri

to the Council of Europe

Council of Europe headquarters, Strasbourg

Spaak and the Spanish author and former diplomat Salvador de Madariaga, who was influential in British Liberal circles. This group organised a congress in The Hague, in May 1948, which sketched out the basis for the Council of Europe. Liberal representation included Violet Bonham Carter, Lady Rhys Williams, Roy Harrod and Frances Josephy, chairman of the executive of the Federal Union, who argued vociferously for a federal Europe.[3]

Also prominent in these debates was Lord Layton, the chairman of the Liberal *News Chronicle*, an academic economist and former Liberal parliamentary candidate. Layton had lectured in 1946 in favour of a federation of European nations excluding the UK and the Soviet Union, which would form part of a new semi-federal global order. Encouraged by Churchill to join the United Europe committee, his contacts with European politicians helped facilitate the congress in The Hague. Layton was closely involved in the economic debates that took place there and which led to the founding in 1948 of the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (which evolved in due course into the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, OECD). His wife, Dorothy, who was president of the Women's Liberal Federation, also attended the congress in her own right.[4]

The Council of Europe was founded on 5 May 1949 by the Treaty of London, and its parliamentary assembly met for the first time on 10 August 1949 in Strasbourg. The Labour government had initially decided to send only Labour politicians to the assembly, but was persuaded to appoint an all-party delegation. There was space for just one Liberal and Layton was put forward,[5] although it was subsequently claimed that Layton was present in an individual capacity rather than as a representative of the Liberal Party.[6] This opened a new chapter in Layton's already long and varied career. He was proposed by Churchill as the British vice-president and served in that capacity until 1957. As such he was involved in the drafting of

the European Convention on Human Rights and helped smooth the path for German accession to the Council of Europe.[7]

The Liberal perspective on the Council of Europe 1945–55

There was nothing specific in the Liberal Party's 1945 manifesto about greater cooperation between European countries, although there was a general commitment to an international rule of law. In 1950 the party called for 'quicker action' in developing the Council of Europe and went on to refer to the need to 'make European currencies convertible with one another and remove restrictions of [sic] trade among ourselves'. The manifesto gave explicit support to a European court of human rights and to German accession to the Council of Europe. The 1951 manifesto, quoted at the start of this article, contained no policy proposals in relation to Europe. However in 1955 a single anodyne reference to the Council of Europe was accompanied by an expression of 'wholehearted support' for the European Defence Community and the Coal and Steel Community.

By this time, the Council of Europe was increasingly being seen in the UK as an irrelevant talking shop that had been superseded by newer initiatives with more specific objectives. 'Rarely, if ever, have I felt such despair about European Unity!' complained Lady Violet in 1950, describing the procedural rows and arguments between 'Federalists and The Rest' at a meeting of the European Movement's international executive.[8] Attending the assembly in November 1950 she recorded an 'interminably boring discussion on structure' which culminated in a walk-out by federalists, including Josephy.[9] Bonham Carter blamed Churchill's lack of grip and opposition by the Foreign Office for the UK's decision not to embrace the new initiatives for European defence and economic cooperation that were growing up apart from the Council of Europe.[10] Layton spoke passionately in the assembly in favour of the Coal and Steel Community and sought to establish institutional links between the Council of Europe and the new body. He spoke similarly in the House of Lords in a debate on European defence, calling for close links between the Council and other nascent European institutions. However, he was concerned that 'If the Council of Europe develops … as an organisation for general purposes, supplemented by special, and sometimes limited, institutions for particular tasks, it will have no political organ with legislative or mandatory power covering the whole of the countries concerned'.[11] There could be no hiding the fact that there were two different views of how European countries should work together and there was no political will to reconcile them.[12]

If Churchill's United Europe committee was excited by the prospect of establishing a pan-European political bloc, the same could not be said of the House of Commons, which devoted little time to considering this new development. MPs were not invited to debate or vote on the establishment of the Council of Europe, something deplored by Liberal MP Wilfred Roberts, who blamed the Labour Party, which he described, in a general debate on foreign affairs, as 'the greatest obstacle to the further development of European unity'.[13] Roberts argued that a democratic Germany needed to be treated as an equal partner and not dismantled by the allied powers and thought that something more than a loose association of independent states was needed to stop the spread of communism.[14] The minister winding up the debate for the government was Christopher Mayhew, a fervent pro-European who later defected to the Liberals. He rejected the charge of obstruction and threw back a challenge which applied to the Liberals as much as to other critics of the government:

> My question is, what precisely do they want us to do? Why do they not forward some precise proposals … Are they in favour of political or economic federation? They do not say so. What do they want? What powers do they want the Assembly to have, or what powers now given do they wish to be taken away?[15]

The work of the Council of Europe was next debated in the Commons in November 1950 and Emrys Roberts, MP for Merionethshire, spoke for the Liberals. He listed what he saw as the main achievements of the Council: a full employment plan, a social security code, a policy on refugees, and the Convention on Human Rights, which was opened for signature on 4 November 1950 and which Roberts described as 'an immense advance in the history of human freedom'. Roberts pointed out that the convention had been weakened by national governments in three key respects: there was no article dealing with the right to vote in free and fair elections (democratic rights were added by means of a separate protocol in 1952); states could choose not to opt into the jurisdiction of the court; and states could choose not to allow individuals the right to bring cases before the court. Roberts called on the government to ratify the convention and not to make use of the opt-outs. The Council, he said, was 'the chief instrument for building up a real community in Europe'.[16]

The work of the Council of Europe was next debated in the Commons in November 1950 and Emrys Roberts, MP for Merionethshire, spoke for the Liberals. He listed what he saw as the main achievements of the Council: a full employment plan, a social security code, a policy on refugees, and the Convention on Human Rights, which was opened for signature on 4 November 1950 and which Roberts described as 'an immense advance in the history of human freedom'.

Donald Wade offered the Liberal perspective during the next Commons debate on the Council of Europe, in 1953. He had been a delegate at the Strasbourg assembly and described it as 'at its lowest … a valuable and worthwhile experiment'. Although debates were sometimes of a high quality, and there was value in parliamentarians from different countries becoming acquainted with each other's perspectives, the assembly lacked teeth and was too remote from other institutions, such as NATO.[17] Wade was

followed by the Conservative Bob Boothby, a veteran of the European Movement, who was blunter in his assessment: the Council of Europe was suffering from a 'death agony of frustration' due to disagreements between national governments about how far to push European cooperation and integration.[18] It was presumably in this context of ambivalence about the usefulness of the Council of Europe that Liberal MPs chose not to participate in debates on the work of the organisation in 1955 and 1957.

Bringing human rights back home

The European Court of Human Rights, which hears cases of alleged breaches of the European Convention on Human Rights, came into being in 1959. The UK chose not to permit individuals to apply to the European Court of Human Rights and also refused to accept the compulsory jurisdiction of the court. This essentially neutered the court's role in monitoring the UK's compliance with the treaty and reflected the view of politicians in both major parties that it would be a waste of the court's time to receive applications from the UK as the British parliament and judiciary were between them perfectly capable of delivering compliance with the convention.

While a small number of Labour MPs challenged the government on this matter in the Commons, Lord Layton raised the issue in the Lords in an exchange with Viscount Kilmuir, the Lord Chancellor, on 18 November 1958. Layton's speech was described by his biographer as 'the most cogent of his life'.[19] It was an academic tour de force on the history and contents of the convention. Layton's argument was that in setting up the Council of Europe and drafting the convention the UK had agreed to pool sovereignty with its European neighbours in order to help strengthen democracy and the rule of law in Western Europe. Using an argument that was to become familiar, he emphasised the extent to which the convention was 'in the British tradition … [owing] much to British ideas and to British lawyers, politicians and civil servants'.[20] Although he was supported by Lord Beveridge, Layton did not persuade the Lord Chancellor. Kilmuir argued that the right of individual petition would simply encourage frivolous and vexatious petitions because 'no one seriously says that English Common Law does not protect the rights and freedoms, at least to the extent which the convention says'.[21] As for the supremacy of the Court, Kilmuir, who was one of the drafters of the convention, said that it had been drafted not as 'a rigorously defined system of law' but as a 'number of general principles which could be applied to the different legal systems of the countries concerned'.[22] In other words, an adverse finding of the Court should be treated as advice for the government to consider rather than as something that might directly affect the law.

Layton's argument was that in setting up the Council of Europe and drafting the convention the UK had agreed to pool sovereignty with its European neighbours in order to help strengthen democracy and the rule of law in Western Europe. Using an argument that was to become familiar, he emphasised the extent to which the convention was 'in the British tradition … [owing] much to British ideas and to British lawyers, politicians and civil servants'.

However, this was not a party campaign. The 1959 election manifesto did not mention the European Convention or human rights: in fact, it did not mention Europe at all, other than a vague reference to the UK 'leading a partnership' in Europe. The 1964 manifesto referred to the Liberals having a role in ensuring that a future chance to join 'a European Political and Economic Community' was not lost, but also did not mention the European Convention. When Harold Wilson announced on 7 December 1965 that the UK would accept the individual right of petition and the compulsory jurisdiction of the Court it was in answer to a question from Terence Higgins, a newly elected Conservative MP.[23]

Although individuals could now petition the Court, according to the convention they could do so only after all domestic legal options had been exhausted. Cases inevitably took years to reach Strasbourg and were extremely costly. The next aim was to incorporate the convention rights into domestic legislation, so human rights arguments could be considered and determined by the domestic courts. However, the Liberal manifestos in 1970 and in the two 1974 elections did not mention human rights. There matters might have rested had it not been for the perseverance of Lord Donald Wade, formerly Liberal MP for Huddersfield West, who made four attempts in the late 1970s and early 1980s to pilot a Bill of Rights Bill onto the statute book, which would have incorporated the European Convention into domestic law.[24] Wade's campaigning ensured that the 1979 manifesto included a whole section on human rights, including incorporating the convention rights into domestic law and advocating in particular:

- The right to see, correct and add comments to one's personal records held by public and private bodies.
- The right of individual privacy.
- The right of free association with others, including the right to be represented through a trade union.
- The right to work without having to be a member of a trade union and the right to cross a picket line without intimidation.
- The rights of those in police custody, by means of revised Judges' Rules.

Human rights entered the political mainstream during the 1980s, particularly with the founding of the Charter88 pressure group, and incorporation of the European Convention was one of the achievements of the Cook–Maclennan agreement between the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties which led to the Human Rights Act 1998.

Unlike in countries with a written constitution and a constitutional court, it was not appropriate for UK legislation to be struck down by the courts if it was found to be incompatible with convention rights. The ingenious solution enshrined in the Act was that courts could issue a declaration of incompatibility and then look to parliament to

remedy the situation. This placed a new onus on parliament to monitor human rights matters and, in particular, to hold the government's feet to the fire once a declaration of incompatibility had been issued. In 2001, when the Human Rights Act came into force, the two Houses established the Joint Committee on Human Rights which fulfils this role. It has been singled out for praise by the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, as a model of how parliaments can ensure human rights are upheld. Liberal Democrat peer Lord Lester of Herne Hill was hugely influential in the establishment of the joint committee and in shaping its objectives and working practices during his fourteen years' service on the committee. A lawyer with extensive experience of human rights cases, Lester had been a special adviser to Home Secretary Roy Jenkins in the mid-1970s. Leaving Labour for the SDP, Lester was increasingly prominent in public policy debates on constitutional matters in the 1980s and 1990s.[25] He more than anyone in the UK parliament ensured that successive governments from 2001 paid attention to the jurisprudence of the European Court, no matter how awkward or inconvenient the judgments of the Court.

British Liberals in Strasbourg

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe records 562 UK parliamentarians who have been members of the assembly, of which twenty-seven were Liberals or Liberal Democrats.[26] The full list of UK Liberals and Liberal Democrats, including the years in which they were full or substitute delegates is included in the table below.

Numerous prominent Social Democrats – including Roy Jenkins, William Rodgers, Robert Maclennan, Dick Taverne and John Roper – were also members of the Parliamentary Assembly while still in the Labour Party.

The preponderance of Liberal Democrats elected after 1997 in the list reflects the fact that the composition of the UK delegation to the Council of Europe was (and is still) based on the party composition of the House of Commons. It is also noticeable that the Liberal delegates were principally drawn from the Lords during the 1960s, which may have reflected the unwillingness of Liberal MPs at that time to devote time and energy to work in Strasbourg, or a conscious decision on the part of Jo Grimond and Jeremy Thorpe to send Liberal peers.

The Assembly's website provides data on the reports for which members acted as committee rapporteurs and the motions, declarations and questions they tabled. This is an imperfect measure of members' level of activity in the Assembly because members can speak frequently without tabling documents or acting as a rapporteur, or can be heavily involved in committee work without being vocal in plenary sittings. Nevertheless, the available data shows that thirteen of the twenty-seven Liberal and Liberal Democrat members were active contributors to the Assembly (these are marked in the table with an asterisk). The range of issues with which Liberal and Liberal Democrat members were involved was considerable, from Europe's architectural heritage (Beith) and desertification in the Mediterranean Basin (Mackie) to political prisoners in Azerbaijan (Bruce) and crucifixes in Italian classrooms (Rowen).

In recent times, two very different Liberal Democrats were amongst the most active in the Council of Europe. Charles Kennedy made an impact in Strasbourg during his five years as a

British Liberal and Liberal Democrats members of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly			
Lord Layton	1949–57	Russell Johnston*	1985–2008
Donald Wade	1951–55, 1963–64, 1970	Lord Mackie*	1986–97
Roderic Bowen	1955	Emma Nicholson*	1992–2015†
Arthur Holt	1956–59*	Mike Hancock*	1997–2015
Lord Rea	1957	Peter Brand	1999–2000
Lord Grantchester	1958–66*	Malcolm Bruce*	2000–05
Mark Bonham Carter	1959–60	Nick Harvey	2005–07
Jeremy Thorpe	1960–62	Jenny Willott	2005–07
Lord Henley	1965–66	Mark Oaten*	2007–10
Lord Gladwyn	1966–73	Paul Rowen*	2007–10
David Steel	1970–76, 1997–99	David Chidgey*	2009–10
Lord Beaumont*	1975–86	Charles Kennedy*	2010–15
Alan Beith*	1976–84	Jeremy Browne	2015
Stephen Ross*	1984–87		
* The member is recorded as having acted as rapporteur on a report or tabled a written question or motion. It is not possible to analyse which members spoke in debates.			
† Conservative before 1995			

British Liberals – from Lord Layton to Russell Johnston – have made their mark in the Council of Europe, reflecting the longstanding Liberal commitment to internationalism and European cooperation. Layton, Donald Wade and Lord Lester also deserve recognition for championing the European Convention on Human Rights in the UK parliament, helping to bring rights drafted by British lawyers for other countries.

delegate before his untimely death. His status as a former party leader, who had opposed the war in Iraq and championed human rights, ensured that his speeches were listened to attentively. By far the most active Liberal Democrat in the Council of Europe Assembly was Mike Hancock, who spoke as often as he could (often getting round the Assembly's rules limiting members to three speeches every sitting week) and whose mastery of procedure and capacity for straight talking ensured his colleagues took notice.

However, by far the most significant Liberal contributor to the work of the Parliamentary Assembly was Lord Russell Johnston, who was associated with the Assembly for over thirty years and was its president from 1999 to 2002, one of only four Britons to have performed the role. This was a significant period in the history of the Assembly. With the fall of the Berlin Wall, what had been a rather quiet gathering of Western European nations, all broadly committed to the respect of human rights and democratic norms, was transformed by a sudden influx of Eastern European parliamentarians. Four countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Georgia – joined the Assembly during Johnston's time as president. The Assembly took on a new role in supporting the development of democratic institutions and the rule of law in Eastern Europe and acting as a means by which the new democracies could prepare for European Union membership. The Assembly found its procedures tested as never before by the rapid increase in membership and the new issues it had to consider. Conflicts between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Georgia and Russia, and over the little-known region of Transnistria (involving Moldova, Romania and Russia) were now played out in the Assembly's committee rooms and chamber.

Johnston was ideally placed to take on this challenge. A committed internationalist, he had been Liberal spokesperson on foreign affairs and on European matters as well as a member of the European Parliament from 1974 to 1979, before direct elections. He was an intellectual and a humanitarian, always ready to argue his case from first principles. His speeches to the Scottish Liberal conference linked his analysis of the domestic political and economic situation with events in Cambodia, Chile or Spain and explained how liberalism brought new insights to each problem. Perhaps most importantly, Johnston adopted a pragmatic and convivial approach to the disputes and difficulties he encountered, ensuring that even the continent's most intractable and bitter disputes could be debated in Strasbourg and thus demonstrating the Assembly's continuing usefulness.

Conclusion

British Liberals – from Lord Layton to Russell Johnston – have made their mark in the Council of Europe, reflecting the longstanding Liberal commitment to internationalism and European cooperation. Layton, Donald Wade and Lord Lester also deserve recognition for championing the European Convention on Human Rights in the UK parliament, helping to bring rights drafted by British lawyers for other countries back home. The incorporation of Convention rights into UK legislation was one of the most significant constitutional developments of the last century and owed much to the pioneering work of Wade and the negotiations between Robert Maclennan and Robin Cook which shaped the Blair government's legislative programme. However, this was mostly a story of individuals rather than of party initiatives. It is striking how little the Liberal Party had to say about Europe during the 1950s, for example, when the great debates about the nature of European cooperation were underway. As William Wallace describes elsewhere in this edition, the fundamental divisions between social and economic liberals played their part in paralysing the party leadership. However, it is hard to escape the conclusion that the party as a whole often missed chances to lead debates on Europe and on human rights.

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5 Pottle, *Daring to Hope*, p. 59.
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7 Hubback, *No Ordinary Press Baron*, pp. 208–11.
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9 Ibid., pp. 94–5.
10 Ibid., p. 208.
11 HL Deb, 9 Apr. 1952, cc. 142–5.
12 Hubback, *No Ordinary Press Baron*, pp. 212–14.
13 HC Deb, 17 Nov. 1949, c. 2266.
14 Ibid., cc. 2263–7.
15 HC Deb, 17 Nov. 1949, c. 2332.
16 HC Deb, 13 Nov. 1950, cc. 1463–69.
17 HC Deb, 23 Oct. 1953, cc. 2332–8.
18 HC Deb, 23 Oct. 1953, c. 2342.
19 Hubback, *No Ordinary Press Baron*, p. 212.
20 HL Deb, 18 Nov. 1958, c. 609.
21 Ibid., c. 624.
22 Ibid., c. 625.
23 HC Deb, 7 Dec. 1965, c. 235.
24 D. Brack (ed.), *Dictionary of Liberal Biography* (Politicos, 1998), pp. 368–9.
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William Wallace

How the Libera[l Party Became] Committed to E[urope]

It was not inevitable that the Liberal Party should have become identified with support for European unity. Throughout the post-war years until the 1960 Liberal Assembly, a significant minority within the party saw European integration as incompatible with free trade, not as a step towards economic and political cooperation. When the 1961 Assembly committed the party unequivocally to support Macmillan's first application to join the European Communities there was near civil war in France over Algeria, Italy was governed by Christian Democrats supported by the CIA against a Communist opposition, and West Germany still had a number of judges and officials who had also held office in the 1930s: plenty of reasons to be wary of commitment, only sixteen years after the Second World War. A number of leading Liberals had been involved in the Council of Europe in the late 1940s, supporting transatlantic cooperation and West European integration as steps towards a democratic world order; Clement Davies praised the Schuman Plan of 1950 for a European Coal and Steel Community as 'the greatest step towards peace in the annals of European history.'[1] Yet even for many party members, the European continent seemed remote and insecure; for all except those who had fought from Italy or Normandy through to Germany, it remained much more foreign than Canada, Australia or New Zealand. The conversion of a party of local activists and enthusiasts for the distant goal of world government into an active supporter of European integration was above all due to the charismatic persuasiveness of Jo Grimond as leader, with the support of a small group of key advisers.[2]

Free trade was a fundamental tenet of political liberalism in the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. Richard Cobden had committed the infant Liberal Party to free trade and open borders, as making for peace and international cooperation, and permitting retrenchment in military spending. Protection and economic nationalism, he and others argued, made for war. The party later split both on Ireland and on free trade, with Joseph Chamberlain opting in the 1890s for Imperial Preference. Many Liberals did not distinguish between their economic interest (often as businessmen or mill-owners) and their idealist commitment to peace and international harmony. The impact of John Maynard Keynes on Liberal Party thinking between the wars, and the support that Lloyd George and others gave to his commitment to a more active state role in managing the economy, led to the party giving out confused – even contradictory – messages about free trade and the size of the state in the interwar years.

In the immediate aftermath of the First World War, what Roy Douglas describes as 'the Liberal civil war' revolved around how to respond to unemployment and industrial adjustment; Liberals in parliament split three ways on issues of temporary protection and the 'safeguarding of industries'.[3] Lloyd George's establishment in the 1920s of 'a wide range of Inquiries, which were at least as well staffed and financed as Royal Commissions', deepened the contradictions between the Cobdenite commitment to free trade and retrenchment and the emerging Keynesian support for an active and interventionist state. The Beveridge Report, and Sir William Beveridge's welcome into the Liberal Party, and entry into parliament in the Berwick by-election of 1944, strengthened the image of a Keynesian social liberal party. During the Second World War, however, commitment to international institutions and open borders for both Keynesians and Cobdenites remained global, as against regional – partly because Liberals resisted a return to British 'imperial preference.' Sir Percy Harris, then one of the party's longest-serving MPs, warned in 1944 that regional economic federations 'in proportion as they are exclusive in character must contain a threat to international harmony.'[4]

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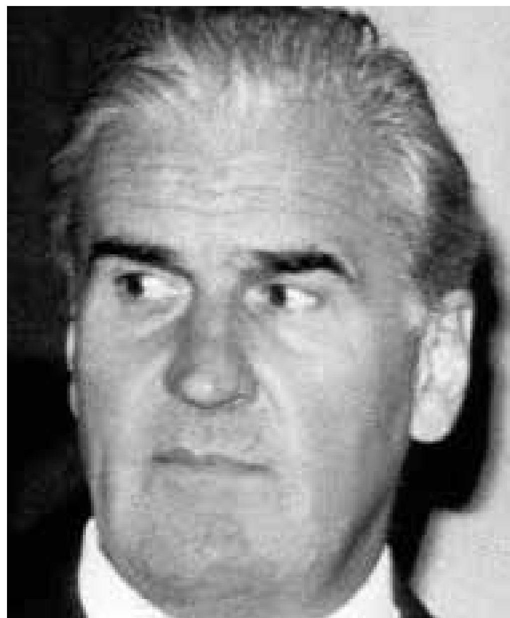

Top: Clement Davies, Oliver Smedley
Bottom: Walter Layton, Jo Grimond

The Liberal Party after 1945

The war had provided divergent lessons for Liberals, and for others who joined as peace returned. The distinction between liberals and libertarians was not then as evident as today. Exiles from the continent such as Friedrich von Hayek, who had moved to the London School of Economics at the invitation of Lionel Robbins in 1931, had revolted against the corporatist states of interwar Europe, and saw the only way to protect *The Constitution of Liberty* (the title of one of Hayek's works on political economy) as paring back the role of government and taxation in the economy, leaving private enterprise free to flourish. Beveridge had been one of the leading members of the Academic Assistance Council in the 1930s, formed to help professors from Germany and other Central European countries who had fled to Britain; some of these came to see Britain as a model free society in contrast to what they saw as a naturally authoritarian continent, and taught their students to share their view of an exceptional free England.[5] With a Labour government in power, strengthening the grip of the central state over the economy, over local authorities and over individual citizens, Liberalism and anti-socialism overlapped as motivating instincts within the party.

Attitudes to cooperation with our European neighbours did not stand alone. They were mostly part of contrasting mindsets – as they still are. Opponents of state intervention were often also committed to the British Empire and Commonwealth (as they then were) as forces for good in world politics, alongside the Anglo-Saxon USA. Commitment to free trade meant opposition to agricultural protection and the arguments for food security which marked continental agricultural policies; cheap food for Britain came from Canada, the USA, Australia, New Zealand and our African and Caribbean colonies. Global defence commitments kept open 'the sea lanes' for British trade; so free traders were often strong supporters of Britain's global status and high defence spending. Proponents of Keynesian interventionism were more open to cooperation with the continent, recognising the benefits of cooperation between employers and workers that continental partnership brought. And they were often much more critical of British imperial policy in Malaya, Africa and Cyprus in the post-war years.

These opposing mindsets ran across all of the political parties – linking support for nuclear deterrence to the concept of a 'global Britain' with an exceptional role derived from its partnership with the USA and its leadership of the Commonwealth, and conversely linking opposition to nuclear deterrence to opposition to the 'illusions' of global status. It is striking – and saddening – how little the arguments about Britain's role in the world have changed since the 1950s. In all three parties, experience of the European continent in the Second World War was a strong indicator for support for the European Movement after 1945 and for close British engagement in the political and economic reconstruction of Western Europe: Denis Healey, Lord Carrington, Edward Heath, against Enoch Powell, Hugh Gaitskell, Harold Wilson and others who spent the war in Africa and India or in economic and transatlantic roles. Few of the leading figures in the post-war Liberal Party had witnessed conflict on the continent; but many of those who formed the core group around Jo Grimond had. Grimond himself had been a staff officer in the 53rd division as it fought its way from Normandy to Hamburg, Desmond Banks a colonel in the artillery, Frank Byers a colonel on Montgomery's staff. Mark Bonham Carter had been captured by the Italians in Tunisia, escaped from an Italian prison camp when Italy surrendered and joined the Guards Armoured Division as it fought its way into Germany; the experience, including the emotion of liberating a concentration camp, made him 'a passionate European'.[6] Richard Wainwright had been a conscientious objector in the Friends Ambulance Unit, who had been with the unit as it followed the army from Normandy through Antwerp to Germany as it collapsed.[7]

There was also an age difference in attitudes to regional cooperation. Older Liberals held more often to the view that global free trade, with the distant objective of world government, was superior to regional schemes. Young Liberals, particularly in university societies, were more attracted by the idea of 'federal union' to unite a war-torn Europe. The 1948 Liberal Assembly, meeting a month before the Hague Congress on European Union, supported the creation of 'a political union strong enough to save European democracy and the values of Western civilization', although accepting an amendment pressed by Lord Samuel, Lady Violet Bonham Carter and others to insist that this should not conflict with Commonwealth, UN or transatlantic links. Clement Davies as party leader insisted that there was no contradiction between European integration and the goal of world government; he was repeatedly critical of what he called 'the imperial mind' that governed British foreign policy.[8]

One of the older generation of Liberals was much more directly in touch with those who were designing the institutions of West European cooperation. Walter Layton, who became a Liberal peer in 1946 and served as the group's deputy leader from 1952 to 1955, had been an economics lecturer in Cambridge alongside Keynes when they and others were called into government in the First World War. During that war he worked in allied economic planning in London, Paris and Washington; 'one of several lifelong partnerships formed then was with a young Frenchman, Jean Monnet, who played a key role in persuading France of the need for systematic wartime planning'. Layton's remarkable and varied career included an advisory role (again, alongside Keynes) at the Versailles conference, efforts to renegotiate the financial reparations placed on

Clement Davies as party leader insisted that there was no contradiction between European integration and the goal of world government; he was repeatedly critical of what he called 'the imperial mind' that governed British foreign policy.

Those who joined – or rejoined – the party in 1957–9 were radical in the sense that they rejected the post-war consensus of Britain as still a world power, with global military and imperial responsibilities. They were internationalists, opposed to the post-imperial nationalism that characterised the Suez intervention. Most knew little of continental European politics; but they were sympathetic to Grimond's political approach, and followed his lead.

Weimar Germany, and leadership of the British delegation in the abortive efforts in 1931 to create a European customs union – as well as editing *The Economist* and chairing the board of the *News Chronicle*. In the Second World War he re-entered government service, again working with Monnet on transatlantic economic assistance.[9] In 1943, when he left public service, he gave a series of lectures on the theme of a united Europe. He attended the Hague Congress of 1948, and as the only Liberal in the British delegation to the first Assembly of the Council of Europe, in 1949, was elected a vice-president.[10] Layton was both passionately in favour of European integration and well informed about how it might be managed. His son Christopher, in turn, became a key adviser to Grimond on economic and European issues between 1957 and 1966.

Committed internationalists in the Liberal Party also had the Liberal International as effectively a European network. The Liberal International was formally instituted at a conference in an Oxford College in 1947, after two preparatory meetings in Brussels and rural Norway. Sir Percy Harris had been one of its enthusiastic supporters, and Clement Davies, Lord Samuel and other senior British Liberals helped to shape the manifesto. The only non-European on the LI's initial executive was from Canada; Belgians, Swiss, Scandinavians, French and Italians were the most active, with the distinguished Spanish intellectual Dr Salvador de Madariaga representing the many states where Liberals were still in prison or exile. 'The Liberal Party as a body, however, remained bleakly incurious about the affair';[11] local campaigning, on domestic issues, preoccupied most party members far more than international concerns. The LI manifesto recommitted to world peace and 'a world organization of all nations', with no specific reference to the uncertain situation across Europe. One sign of tensions to come within several Liberal parties was that the organisers discovered at a late stage in the preparations for the founding Oxford conference that Friedrich von Hayek was planning the initial meeting of the Mont Pelerin Society in Switzerland on overlapping dates, with a number of intellectual liberals invited to both.[12]

The Liberal Party however had little clarity on policy, and little capacity for coherent policy development, in the ten years after 1945. The 1952 Assembly passed a resolution in favour of unilateral free trade, against the views of those who – like Walter Layton – had worked in government during and after both world wars and who supported active measures to promote economic growth and industrial recovery. What policy thinking there was took place within factions, free traders on one side and radical Liberals on the other. The Radical Reform Group (RRG), created in 1952 'to save the soul of the Liberal Party', contested with the free traders across a range of policies, including industrial policy and European cooperation; but the free traders had the advantage of greater access to financial supporters for a cash-strapped party. The RRG dissociated itself from the party after a 'stormy' Assembly in 1954, losing some of its prominent members to Labour – including Dingle Foot and Wilfred Roberts, both former MPs – when the group reaffiliated to the party in 1956.[13]

It was the shock of the Suez intervention that turned the party round – and that attracted back into the party Liberals who shared Clement Davies's disdain for the 'imperial mind' that Suez clearly displayed. Those who joined – or rejoined – the party in 1957–9 were radical in the sense that they rejected the post-war consensus of Britain as still a world power, with global military and imperial responsibilities. They were internationalists, opposed to the post-imperial nationalism that characterised the Suez intervention. Most knew little of continental European politics; but they were sympathetic to Grimond's political approach, and followed his lead.

The retreat of the free-traders

In the autumn of 1961, Michael Steed and I spent a week campaigning in the early stages of the Orpington by-election. We stayed with Marjory Seldon, a stalwart of the local Liberal Party. But we saw little of her husband, Arthur, who had left the party on the issue of free trade.[14] Only some years later did I understand the origins of the Institute of Economic Affairs, and how the disputes within the party about our approach to the European Economic Community had been linked to the raucous arguments in the 1958 Liberal Assembly, to the departure from the party of an influential group of small-state economic liberals, some of whom went on to win over many within the Conservative Party to their ideas.

Many of the leading figures in the Liberal Party for ten to fifteen years after 1945 had held to this view, and formed a powerful opposition within the party to Grimond's determined support for the United Kingdom to join the EEC. They were a colourful, even eccentric crew. S. W Alexander was a successful journalist, pouring out articles and books promoting free trade; he was also a Liberal candidate in 1950, and chair of the London Liberal Party. Anthony Fisher, who first met von Hayek in 1945, was then a dairy farmer. Urged by von Hayek to make money rather than become directly involved in politics, he discovered intensive chicken farming on a visit to the USA, and introduced the battery cage to Britain. Buxted Chickens made him a very wealthy man; from which, in 1955, he founded (with Oliver Smedley) the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA).[15]

Oliver Smedley was at that time a vice-president of the Liberal Party. His behaviour at the 1958 Liberal Assembly made a significant contribution to the confusion that reigned. Michael

McManus records that there 'were a series of unedifying squabbles between Oliver Smedley, unofficial leader of the party's remaining hard-line free-traders, and some of the party's younger members, who felt that his calls with "unilateral free trade" were archaic and impractical'.[16] And then there was Edward Martell, considered by Roy Douglas and others to have been, with Philip Fothergill, one of the key figures in the party's survival and recovery after the Second World War. A man of immense energy, elected with Sir Percy Harris to the London County Council in 1946, 'one must not discount his services to Liberalism in the late 1940s because of the astounding political adventures on which he was later to embark'. He was an effective fundraiser; 'although a man with the makings of a dictator, he supplied the Liberals with a ceaseless flow of ideas, and a great deal of enthusiasm.'[17] He left the party in the mid-1950s to establish the anti-socialist and anti-union People's League for the Defence of Freedom. The free-traders lost influence as new members came into the party, and as Grimond as leader set out a more Keynesian and European approach. They drifted away into other bodies, leaving a Liberal Party with a more anti-Conservative bias than the anti-socialist stance they had espoused.

Oliver Smedley took his belief in free markets and untrammelled capitalism to the limit – and beyond it. As he moved away from the Liberal Party, after the 1960 Liberal Assembly decisively voted down his opposition to Common Market membership, he became a pioneer of pirate radio – a cause espoused by the IEA in several pamphlets, together with open competition in TV and less regulation of tobacco. Operating on the edge of the law and from chartered ships or coastal batteries, the cut-throat competition between these entrepreneurs was such that one of his rivals burst into Smedley's house in mid-1966, knocked over his housekeeper, and threatened Smedley – who shot him dead. Pleading self-defence before Justice Melford Stevenson, one of England's most conservative judges, he was acquitted. Commercial radio survived in a more respectable and regulated fashion, but the BBC's authoritarian monopoly – as free marketers saw it – was broken.[18]

Grimond reshapes party policy

Jo Grimond became leader in November 1956, on the day that British forces landed in Port Said, followed by the humiliating Anglo-French withdrawal from the Suez Canal. He inherited a party that was chaotic in its structure and undisciplined in its approach to policy. He resolved the problem of reshaping party policy by working in parallel to the party's formal structures, attracting a number of first-class thinkers to advise him. He began with a series of articles in *Liberal News* in the Spring of 1957, under the heading 'Where Liberals Stand'; the first of these was in support of European integration, and a later contribution proposed abandoning the manufacture of British nuclear weapons in favour of stronger conventional forces in Western Europe, and withdrawal from all bases east of Suez except Singapore. The two themes were linked: the Conservative reaction to the failure of the Suez intervention was to stress our independent nuclear deterrent and the special relationship with the USA, rather than to move with the French closer towards West European integration. The 1958 Assembly, regardless of Grimond's prompting, passed a resolution in favour of unilateral free trade. The team around Grimond, with Arthur Holt now chair of the Liberal Publication Department and a small team of parliamentary staff assisting on policy, were nevertheless moving ahead with a different approach.

Grimond published *The Liberal Future* under his own name before the 1959 election, drawing on the same network of expert advisers and others. Its international chapters carry the same themes of modernisation, adaptation to economic and technological change, and to Britain's transformed place in the world: a recognition that 'we live at the tail end of the age of the nation state' in which sharing of sovereignty is needed …

Less official bodies such as the Unservile State Group and the New Orbits Group contributed published papers and books along similar lines.[19] The Unservile State Group consisted primarily of academics from Oxford, Cambridge, the LSE and Edinburgh, with Jo Grimond himself as a member and Elliott Dodds as chair. Its opening volume, published in 1957, included a chapter on 'Britain in the World' which criticised 'the imperial hangover' and the 'cloud of self-deception' that still shaped British foreign policy; it argued for 'some surrender of sovereignty' in defence and trade with our European partners, though recognising that public opinion would require careful persuasion to accept 'any sort of European political union'.[20] A further chapter, 'Colonies to Commonwealth', criticised the confusions of Conservative decolonisation and the support for white regimes in central and southern Africa.

Grimond published *The Liberal Future* under his own name before the 1959 election, drawing on the same network of expert advisers and others. Its international chapters carry the same themes of modernisation, adaptation to economic and technological change, and to Britain's transformed place in the world: a recognition that 'we live at the tail end of the age of the nation state' in which sharing of sovereignty is needed, that the Commonwealth and Europe offer competing frameworks for such sharing, that 'the haziness of the whole Commonwealth idea' is a fundamental weakness, and that 'a Liberal foreign policy towards Europe would be based on the firm belief that Britain is a part – a leading part – of Europe and that international bodies should be executive and not merely advisory.'[21] Grimond went on to criticise the post-Suez shift in British defence policy towards independent nuclear deterrence, arguing instead for closer cooperation within NATO and with our European neighbours. Here was a coherent alternative view of the world to Conservative orthodoxy, in which faster decolonisation, greater scepticism about the future coherence of the Commonwealth, and more modest ambitions in defence, went with support for closer European integration.

The 1959 manifesto said little directly about European unity. This may perhaps have reflected some continuing hesitation within the party, with the leadership unwilling to push the remaining dissidents further. Commitments to 'stop the manufacture and testing of nuclear weapons by this country' and to pursue interracial partnership in Africa demonstrate the radical world view of which European integration was becoming, for Grimond and his closest advisers, an intrinsic part. Half the parliamentary candidates in that election mentioned Britain's relationship with the European Communities in their election addresses.[22]

The modest successes of the 1959 election brought the party a gradual rise in membership and in income – enabling the expansion of its policy staff and the creation of a number of policy committees, combining sympathetic experts with party activists. The first of a new series of pamphlets around the theme of modernisation for Britain, issued under Grimond's chairmanship from the autumn of 1960, was *Britain Must Join*, unequivocally calling for UK entry to the EEC. A later paper, *Growth not Grandeur* (1961), advocated following the French model of economic planning, reductions in overseas commitments and defence spending, and a recognition that economic sovereignty was no longer viable.[23] Prime Minister Macmillan's parallel moves towards economic planning and negotiations with the EEC, combined with the resistance of his own right-wing to these moves and the government's difficulties with funding its nuclear deterrent and defence programmes, added popular credibility to these linked proposals. New members who poured into the party in 1961–2 largely accepted Grimond's modernisation agenda, including its European, anti-colonial and end-to-world-status elements. By 1963 commitment to European integration had become party orthodoxy, with only a minority of rural activists and candidates opposed.[24]

The collapse of the first British application to join the EC, in January 1963, did not remove the issue from British politics – though it reduced the political saliency of one of the Liberal Party's most recognisable policies. Both the Conservatives and Labour had demonstrated deep internal divisions on this partly symbolic issue, related to the defence of sovereignty, attitudes to the white Commonwealth, and assumptions about Britain's place in the world. Modernisers within the other parties noted Liberal opposition to defence spending and deployments east of Suez, and condemnation of support for white Rhodesia, beginning the long process through which internationalist members of both other parties realigned towards the Liberals. The Liberal manifestos in both 1964 and 1966 committed the party to full membership of the European Communities. Labour's forced withdrawal from east of Suez in 1968, following its own (poorly prepared and unsuccessful) application to join the 'Common Market' in mid-1967, suggested that Grimond had got it right: that economic reform and post-imperial adjustment required accession to the EEC.

It should be emphasised that Liberal commitment to European integration, before the UK joined in 1973, was not based on any deep understanding of the policies or institutions of the EC among more than a handful of people.

After Grimond

Jeremy Thorpe, who succeeded Grimond as leader in 1967, was committed to the modernisation agenda, including the commitment to European integration. Joining the European Communities was not a controversial issue within the party under his leadership. 'Bomber Thorpe', who had advocated military intervention against the unilateral declaration of Rhodesian independence, nevertheless deplored the direct action of the radical Young Liberals against the white South African regime, similarly resisted Young Liberal support for the Palestinians against Israel, and above all fought against the determined efforts of Young Liberals to commit the party to unilateral nuclear disarmament.[25] The Liberal Party was therefore split on major international issues in the late 1960s, but not on Europe. The return of the Conservatives under Edward Heath in 1970, with his own version of a domestic and international modernisation agenda, led to the revival of the UK application to join the European Communities, in which the shrunken group of six Liberal MPs could again play a significant role within the Commons on votes where both other parties were split. Informal whipping within the pro-EC wing of the Labour Party, in 1971–2, as Labour MPs entered different voting lobbies, built personal contacts and mutual respect. The surge in by-election votes for Liberal candidates, including victories, in 1972–3 increased the attractions of cooperation with the Liberals to members of other parties.

It should be emphasised that Liberal commitment to European integration, before the UK joined in 1973, was not based on any deep understanding of the policies or institutions of the EC among more than a handful of people. Apart from Christopher Layton, Gladwyn Jebb (Lord Gladwyn), who moved from the cross benches to the Liberals in the Lords in 1965, becoming Lords deputy leader and spokesman on foreign affairs from 1966, was a major source of expertise and continental contacts; he had been involved in European negotiations from 1947, and was ambassador to France from 1954 to 1960. Derek Ezra, who became a Liberal peer in 1983, but as chair of the National Coal Board had remained outside party politics until then, was probably also a source of informal advice; he had been a Young Liberal before the war, and had been involved in European negotiations since the initial proposals for a European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1950, including a period in the early 1950s as a member of the UK delegation to the ECSC in Luxembourg.[26] Arthur Holt's nephew Stephen became one of the first academic experts on European integration. Some Liberal activists,

Jeremy Thorpe, Edward Heath and Roy Jenkins share a platform during the 1975 referendum campaign

in addition, were also active members of the European Movement, which gave them contacts with continental speakers and with broader European developments.

Surveys of voters in the 1960s showed a higher proportion of Liberal supporters in favour of entry into the Common Market (as the EEC was popularly labelled) than Labour or Conservative voters. One survey of suburban voters, in 1962, showed 62 per cent of Liberal supporters in favour of joining; but across the country as a whole, the proportion of 'pro-European' Liberal voters never reached 50 per cent.[27] In rural constituencies, from where elites and institutions in London looked remote, European unification looked even more unwelcome. It remained a source of tension within the party that so many voters in the seats that it won did not share the enthusiasm of its London and suburban members. In 1971–2, Emlyn Hooson dissented from his parliamentary colleagues on several votes, responding to the views of Montgomeryshire voters. Twenty years later, on the legislation implementing the Maastricht Treaty on European Union, nineteen Liberal Democrat votes were crucial to John Major's ability to defeat Conservative rebels, but Nick Harvey chose to represent the more sceptical views of the voters of North Devon.

Successful accession, in 1973, transformed the domestic debate. Liberals now needed to take positions on the direction and development of European institutions and their policies. The February 1974 election manifesto declared that Liberals were 'effective but constructive critics of the policies of the Common Market.' In this they were informed by the critical views of a German Liberal EC commissioner, Ralf Dahrendorf, who moved to Britain in 1974 to become director of the London School of Economics; he later became a British citizen and a Liberal Democrat peer (in 1988 and 1993 respectively). The bitter divide within the Labour Party over EC membership, which led to refusal to take up places in the nominated European Parliament in 1973, gave the Liberals more opportunity to learn the details of European policy, with Russell Johnston MP and Lord Gladwyn as part of the British delegation. But it was the commitment to a referendum on EC membership, given by the Labour government that had returned to office in 1974 as a gesture to its left-wing anti-Europeans, that engaged Liberal activists in campaigning on European issues, arguing the strengths and weaknesses of EC policies, and working with pro-Europeans in other parties as the campaign proceeded.

The pro-European campaign in the 1975 referendum was a genuinely cross-party exercise – in contrast to the campaign of 2016, which was tightly controlled from the Conservative prime minister's office. The pro-Europeans within the other parties in 1975 recognised that they needed Liberal support to be sure of winning. Regional campaigns were managed by coordinators from across the three parties; in the north-west, for example, these were Peter Blaker MP for the Conservatives, John Roper MP for Labour, and Helen Wallace (then chair of the Manchester City Liberals) for the Liberals. Experience of working together in a well-organised and successful campaign created links at national, regional and local levels which laid some of the foundations for the later SDP–Liberal Alliance.[28]

The divisions on Europe within the Labour Party were not resolved by the decisive outcome of the 1975 referendum. They similarly formed part of conflicting mindsets. Commitment to state planning and sovereignty, resistance to NATO membership and to nuclear weapons as such, went along with a depiction of the European Communities as a free market enterprise; while in contrast an internationalist (European and Atlantic) acceptance of constraints on UK sovereignty, and a preference for regulated markets over direct state control, made for enthusiasm for the EC. Europe, and nuclear weapons, were almost the most important symbolic dividing lines between left and right in the Labour Party in the late-1970s. But they coincided with more liberal attitudes to civil liberties, and to sexual freedoms, than many on the Labour left were yet willing to accept. The relationship between David Steel, who became leader of the Liberal Party on Jeremy Thorpe's resignation in 1976, and Roy Jenkins – which was a crucial factor in the formation of the Liberal–SDP Alliance – had been forged in the late 1960s when Jenkins was Labour home secretary and Steel a newly elected MP promoting a private member's bill to legalise abortion.

Jenkins's appointment as president of the European Commission, in 1977, symbolised the alienation of Labour 'moderates' from the leftward drift of their party. The clear and consistent support of Liberals for European integration was thus a powerful attraction for future cooperation. Informal conversations after Labour's defeat in the 1979 election developed into proposals for the Liberals to make space for an allied new party, for which commitment to European union would be one of its founding principles. The surge of popular support for the Liberal–SDP Alliance, in 1982–3, was dashed by the Argentinian occupation of the Falklands and the subsequent victorious British recapture of the islands, which re-established popular support for Britain's image as a global power with a powerful, and independent, role. But the alliance survived, to re-emerge after the 1987 election as the Liberal Democrats. Grimond had laid the foundation for this, in his broad modernisation agenda, in his repeated calls when leader for a 'progressive alliance', and above all in his commitment to international cooperation through European integration.

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1 David Dutton, *A History of the Liberal Party in the Twentieth Century* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 157.
2 This article is a blend of personal recollection and research. The author joined the Liberal Party at the end of 1959, was president of the Cambridge University Liberal Club in 1962 and returned from three years in the USA in 1965 to research and write a Ph.D. thesis (for Cornell University) on 'The Liberal Revival: the Liberal Party in Britain, 1955–1966', taking a month off in 1966 to work as assistant press officer to Pratap Chitnis in the general election. His wife (Helen) joined the Liberal Party before him, and was president of the Oxford University Liberal Club in 1965; her father was an active participant in the Radical Reform Group. A copy of the Ph.D. thesis is lodged in Nuffield College Library, Oxford.
3 Roy Douglas, *History of the Liberal Party, 1895–1970* (Sidgwick and Jackson, 1971), pp. 154–5.
4 Quoted in Scott Clarke and John Curtice, 'Liberal Democrats and Integration', ch. 4 of David Baker and David Seawright (eds.), *Britain for and against Europe* (Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 92. Harris had joined the Liberal Party before the First World War, was persuaded by Herbert Gladstone to stand as a candidate in the 1906 general election, and first elected in 1916.
5 Geoffrey Elton's idealisation of Tudor England, which I and my contemporaries absorbed as history students in Cambridge, was one classic example of this.
6 Jane and Leslie Bonham Carter, personal information.
7 Matt Cole, *Richard Wainwright: the Liberals and Liberal Democrats* (Manchester University Press, 2001), pp. 31–3.
8 Alan Butt Philip, 'The Liberals and Europe', in Vernon Bogdanor (ed.), *Liberal Party Politics* (Clarendon Press, 1983), pp. 219–20; Wallace, 'The Liberal Revival', p. 332.
9 After the Second World War, Jean Monnet was the architect first of France's post-war economic planning system, and then of the Schuman Plan, which led to the European Coal and Steel Community; he then became the first president of its 'High Authority'.
10 Christopher Layton, 'Walter Layton', *Dictionary of Liberal Biography*, (Politico's Publishing Ltd, 1998), pp. 217–19.
11 John H. MacCallum Scott, *Experiment in Internationalism* (Allen and Unwin, 1967), p. 18.
12 Richard Moore tells me that he invited Milton Friedman, then not yet a world-famous free market economist, to address the Cambridge University Liberal Club; free market liberals and social liberals at that point did not find their philosophies incompatible.
13 Wallace, 'The Liberal Revival', pp.13, 19. Desmond Banks was one of the leading members of the RRG; Jo Grimond attended many of its meetings, and the young Jeremy Thorpe was an active member; Michael McManus, *Jo Grimond: Towards the Sound of Gunfire* (Birlinn Ltd, 2001), p. 124.
14 Arthur Seldon's Wikipedia entry, accessed in August 2017, states that he was 'involved' in the Orpington by-election; if so, this was an extremely discreet involvement.
15 Anthony Fisher became increasingly caught up with American libertarian thinking, funding an American parallel to the IEA which became the Atlas Network of free market institutes; he was involved also in founding the Adam Smith Institute. Both his daughter and his granddaughter, Rachel Whetstone, worked within this institutional network before Rachel and her husband Steve Hilton worked for David Cameron and the Conservative Party. See also Richard Cockett, *Thinking the Unthinkable: Think-tanks and the Economic Counter-revolution* (Fontana, 1995).
16 McManus, *Jo Grimond*, p. 133.
17 Douglas, *History of the Liberal Party*, p. 250. Bear in mind that on policy issues Roy Douglas was close to the free traders, and opposed joining the Common Market; so this should count as a sympathetic assessment.
18 Adrian Johns, *Death of a Pirate: British Radio and the Making of the Information Age* (Norton, 2011).
19 Peter Sloman's Wikipedia article on the Unservile State Group is the most comprehensive review of this group of Oxbridge academics, financially supported through the early 1950s by Elliott Dodds and later by Richard Wainwright. Its volume – George Watson (ed.), *The Unservile State* – was published in 1957, and followed by a long series of pamphlets. For the New Orbits Group, see Trevor Smith's article in *Journal of Liberal History* 95, Summer 2017.
20 Watson (ed.), *Unservile State*, pp. 265, 269.
21 Jo Grimond, *The Liberal Future* (Faber, 1959), pp. 159, 163, 164.
22 Butt Philip, 'The Liberals and Europe', p. 222.
23 Wallace, 'The Liberal Revival', pp. 77–9. Grimond published his own volume on policy in 1963, *The Liberal Challenge*, which repeats his perception of 'the decline of national sovereignty' (p. 227) but focuses in its international chapter more on security and defence than economic integration. It includes the blunt statement that 'Liberals believe that Britain should not attempt to keep its own deterrent.' (p. 248)
24 Some of those who flocked into the party in the early sixties shed their internationalism as they left the party; I recall a former Young Liberal who stood as a Conservative in Huddersfield in the 1970 election, proclaiming his opposition to Europe as well as to immigration.
25 Thorpe was particularly opposed to the digging up of the test match cricket pitch before England were to play the South African team, which captured public attention as well as establishment condemnation.
26 Some younger party members invested in learning about the European institutions which in principle they supported. Helen Wallace (then Rushworth) studied at the College of Europe in 1967–8; Simon Hughes and Graham Colley were there in 1974–5. Levels of understanding of the EC within the Conservative and Labour Parties in the 1960s and early 1970s were similarly limited.
27 Wallace, 'The Liberal Revival', pp. 383–6. See also David Butler and Donald Stokes (eds.), *Political Change in Britain* (Macmillan, 1969), ch. 14.
28 John Roper, for example, became a Social Democrat MP, and later a Liberal Democrat peer.

Julie Smith

Liberal Parti

As the UK was negotiating its departure from the European Union, one Liberal voice appeared frequently on the British media: the European Parliament's Brexit coordinator, former Belgian prime minister, Guy Verhofstadt. He was invited to speak because of the parliament's role in approving any withdrawal agreement, but his parallel role as leader of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe in the European Parliament (EP) was undoubtedly significant to his thinking about the future of the European Union. Yet for a British audience, Liberal Democrats included, Verhofstadt's language and clear Euro-federalism served only to highlight the differences between the most committed pro-Europeans in the EU27 and attitudes in the United Kingdom, even of Europhile Liberal Democrats.

The Liberal Democrats have long been portrayed as the most pro-European party in British politics, and indeed the early conversion of the Liberals to the European cause (see Wallace elsewhere in this volume) and their impassioned calls for an 'exit from Brexit' after the 2016 referendum on EU membership might make this portrayal wholly appropriate. Yet for many years their pro-Europeanism remained muted as the party's campaign strategists believed it was unlikely to win votes by espousing pro-European policies. Thus, while the Liberals and later Liberal Democrats were signed up to the manifestos of the European Liberal 'family' for every set of European

ies in Europe

Parliamentary elections from 1979 onwards, the discourse in the UK was typically less enthusiastic than in many other European Liberal parties. With notable individual exceptions such as Andrew Duff, the most pro-European British party fell far short of the federalist zeal of some of its European sister parties. What appear pro-European positions in the UK may appear subdued and even intergovernmental in EU terms. Meanwhile, so-called 'like-minded' parties within the Liberal family could seem anything but like-minded to those on the left of the Liberal Democrats.

So, what brings European Liberal parties together if their views appear so different? What do they have in common and what do they seek to achieve? The aim of this article is to outline the development of relations between Liberal parties in Europe since the creation of the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1952. It looks at the factors that led parties which sometimes seem radically different to join forces and remain within the Liberal family, while noting the fragmentary nature of European-level party cooperation, where alliances have often shifted around the time of the five-yearly elections to the European Parliament, as shown by the ever-changing titles used to denote Liberals and their allies at European level.[1] It argues that some parties have sought to link up with Liberal parties (or indeed leave the Liberal family) less for reasons of ideology than as a result of the sheer practical understanding that larger groupings have more influence within the European Parliament.

Origins of European integration and of Liberal cooperation

The European communities established in the 1950s, which paved the way for what we now know as the European Union, were created by predominantly Christian Democrat politicians in office throughout the six founding member states. Yet, if European integration was a Christian Democrat initiative, European Liberals were favourably inclined. Indeed, the logic of peaceful cooperation so powerfully advocated by Robert Schumann in his eponymous Declaration of May 1950 fitted well with the ideals that had underpinned the creation of the Liberal International just a few years earlier.[2] Yet, the prospects for Liberal parties were rather limited in Europe in the middle of the twentieth century as centrists of right and left sought to take on a Liberal mantle while parties of the far right and far left continued to threaten Liberal values which had been so deeply challenged in the early years of century.[3] Thus, while Liberals have been in office at various times since the end of the Second World War, they were rarely key governing parties in West European countries in the early years of European integration.

The establishment in 1953 of the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community in Strasbourg saw the appointment of the first European parliamentarians. At that time, members of the Common Assembly were all members of their respective national parliaments, 'double-hatted' to represent their constituents in their national parliaments and to represent the 'peoples of Europe' in the Assembly. Government ministers meanwhile would represent the member states in the Council of Ministers (and from 1974 in the European Council, which brought together presidents and prime ministers), as the dual legitimation of Europe was established. The nature of party politics in the founding member states was such that only three party 'families' were present in the early days of the Assembly: Christian Democrats, Socialists/Social Democrats and Liberals, although the Socialists were often rather reluctant Europeans in the early years. (Other parliamentary parties did exist in certain states, but they were either too small or too extreme to be allowed to send delegates to an Assembly whose membership consisted largely of MPs who were already supportive of the embryonic integration process.)[4]

The symbolism of representing the people was not lost on the Liberal MPs taking their seats in European forums. When the Common Assembly met for the first time in 1953, the Liberal delegates opted to sit with fellow Liberal parliamentarians

The European Parliament chamber in Strasbourg

from other countries in a 'Liberals and Allies Group' rather than congregate on national lines: politics 'beyond the nation state' had begun. Yet, while symbolic representation may have started in the 1950s, it was wholly divorced from any electoral dimension at the European level. Moreover, even though the MPs quickly identified like-minded colleagues in the 1950s, questions about what constitutes a 'Liberal' party in Europe were, and remain, contested as the integration process evolved from the ECSC to include both the Atomic Energy and the Economic communities, before becoming the European Union (EU) in 1993, and membership expanded from just six member states in the 1950s to twenty-eight when Croatia joined in 2013.

Who are our sister parties?

The show of unity that began in the early 1950s masked considerable disagreements then as now. The term 'Liberal' is never sufficient to indicate a convergence of views. As Emil Kirchner has put it: 'no clear definition has emerged as to what Liberalism is or what Liberal ideology consists of.'[5] Where social democrats might to refer to a coherent set of values and principles, this cannot be universally assumed of Liberals for whom there is no guiding canonical text, such as *On Liberty*, to which the Liberal Democrats look but others may not. The works of Friedrich Hayek might give a more apposite rendering of the views of some continental Liberals.

Liberal parties in Europe cover a large swathe of the political spectrum, so finding common cause on policy matters has not always been easy. Broadly speaking, they are divided into social liberals and economic liberals, although the labels only partially explain the different attitudes and policy preferences of those who call themselves Liberal. On economic matters there are marked differences between those who adopt a more interventionist approach to policy and the economic liberals who sit firmly on the right of the spectrum. Where the Liberal Democrats are broadly conceived as being on the centre-left of British politics, some of their sister parties are clearly on the right, reflecting economic liberal origins. Such divisions are reflected in several states by the creation of more than one Liberal party – sometimes both or all within the ELDR/ALDE family – thanks in part to electoral systems that are more conducive than the British first-past-the-post system to the emergence of new parties. For example in the Netherlands there exists the economic liberal VVD of Prime Minister Mark Rutte and the social liberal 'D66'; there are similar divisions in Denmark between Venstre and Radikale Venstre.[6]

Nor did all the parties that would seek to cooperate with the Liberals always see themselves as Liberal. Hence moves to create a party federation ahead of the first European Parliament saw the establishment of the Federation of Liberal and Democratic Parties of the European Community (ELD), a title that explicitly acknowledged the hybrid nature of the grouping. These disparities were rendered even more apparent over the years as the ELD become the European Liberal, Democrat and Reform Party (ELDR), and even more so with the creation in 2012 of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE).[7] The fact that the Liberals were seated to the right of the European People's Party in the European Parliament hemicycle gives a graphic indication of where the party families were seen to fall on the political spectrum, even though the views of several parties would place them more clearly on the centre-left alongside the Liberal Democrats.

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The differences that characterised the Liberal 'family' at the outset of integration would only become greater as the European Union expanded geographically, notably to countries that had been behind the Iron Curtain until thirty years ago. Repeated enlargements of the communities/union brought in countries with little experience of Liberalism and, in the cases of the most recent enlargements, rather transient parties and fluid party systems. Those new democracies frequently saw the emergence of so-called Liberal parties which materialised and declined with considerable rapidity, having few real roots. A country with three Liberal parties one day might soon find itself with none, raising questions about which parties to accept and how long they would last. Yet, despite the shaky foundations, the newcomers strengthened the Liberal family. As Graham Watson noted, four of the countries that joined the EU in 2004 proposed Liberals as their nominees for the European Commission.[8] By 2018, leaders of Liberal parties were the second most numerous in the European Council, with eight compared to the nine EPP prime ministers, a remarkable presence given the challenges facing Liberalism in Europe – a far cry from the early years of integration. Moreover, several of Europe's Liberal prime ministers came from Central and East European countries (the Czech Republic, Estonia and Slovenia) at the time of writing, an extraordinary situation given the rise of 'illiberal democracy' in so much of that region. Moreover, the vagaries of national politics also saw a more unusual new member join ALDE in 2009: Ireland's Fianna Fail. Not previously seen as Liberal, it might in some ways have been more comfortable in the European People's Party had its rival Fine Gael not already become a member.

The electoral imperative

The Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community had very few powers and its appointed members met only infrequently. As the ECSC was joined by the Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) and the Economic Community (EEC) in 1958, the Common Assembly

was expanded and renamed the European Parliamentary Assembly. Its members were still appointed from national parliaments and its role remained limited to being 'consulted' on European legislation and having the ability to kick out the European Commission, albeit with no commensurate rights to a say in composition of the new Commission. However, the member states always intended that the European Parliament should be directly elected. As progress was made towards holding such elections in the 1970s, Liberal parties in Europe, like the Christian and Social Democrats, looked at ways of creating an electoral vehicle for the proposed elections. Thus, in March 1976, the Federation of Liberal and Democratic Parties in the European Community (ELD) was established. As the name implied, this was not a party as conventionally understood. Rather, it was an umbrella organisation that brought together Liberal parties from across the communities, as well as other parties that felt themselves to have more in common with the Liberals than with either of the other main party families, in a confederal structure.[9]

When the first direct elections to the European Parliament were held in June 1979, the ELD had a common manifesto, agreed by the constituent parties. As with the European People's Party representing the federalist Christian Democrats and the Confederation of European Socialists (later to become the Party of European Socialists), the manifesto was a lowest common denominator document, being the product of negotiation among member parties – a phenomenon that would persist forty years on. And if national parties acted as the gatekeepers preventing meaningful moves to create a genuinely transnational party, two other factors played a key role as well: finance and the ongoing draw of the 'national' for voters and media, just as much as for political parties.

The creation of party federations was a natural corollary of direct elections, but these new organisations were very poorly resourced, dependent in part on financial support from their group in the European Parliament until such funding was banned, and from the outset groups were not permitted to use group funding to support election campaigns, making transnational electioneering very difficult. In contrast to the extra-parliamentary party federations, party groups in the European Parliament were well funded, with financial support, as well as speaking times in the plenary and places on EP committees all being granted according to the size of the groups. There was thus always a strong incentive to have a larger, potentially more diverse group prior to direct elections. The logic remained unchanged in the elected Parliament – money and influence followed the size of the group and it was therefore important to maximise electoral support in European Parliamentary elections. Yet, the membership of the groups in the European Parliament was only partially related to the outcome of the elections, since parties could join and leave groups, whether or not they had campaigned on the grouping's transnational manifesto.[10] Moreover, the elections were essentially a series of national second-order elections, with the focus of attention – such as there was – on national leaders and domestic issues rather than European.[11] Few of the voters would have considered they were voting for ELDR rather than the Liberal party in their own country.

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That the elections were fragmented was in large part a result of the electoral systems in place. The MEPs' pragmatic resolution to the question of the appropriate electoral system, which had so vexed the drafters of the Treaty of Rome in 1957, was to decree that there should be common principles for the electoral rules, but each member state was permitted to determine its own system. Thus, in the first set of elections the UK opted for a first-past-the-post system in accordance with the rules of national elections. The upshot was that the Liberals lost the two MEPs they had had prior to the elections. It would take until 1994 and the fourth set of direct elections before this lack of representation would be rectified. So egregious was it seen to be that during the 1992 British presidency of the European Council, leader of the ELDR group and French MEP Yves Galland placed twelve UK flags on his desk to represent the Liberal MEPs he argued were missing because of the electoral system.[12] While Graham Watson and Robin Teverson managed to break through on the old system, it was not until a change in the rules at EU level that Liberal Democrat voters would be more accurately represented in the European Parliament. From 1999, all member states have been required to use some form of proportional representation – albeit not the same form across the Union. The regional-list system adopted by the UK under the New Labour government enabled Liberal Democrats to secure representatives across Britain from 1999 until 2014, when the electoral arithmetic saw a decline to a single MEP.[13]

It is not only the Liberal Democrats who have found it difficult to secure representation in the European Parliament. The German Free Democrats (FDP), for decades the 'king-maker' in German politics – frequently a strong ally of the Liberal Democrats, but at times on opposite sides of policy debates – also failed to see any MEPs elected between 1994 and 2004. The lack of Liberal representatives from two of the largest member states was for many years compounded by a lack of Liberals in France and Spain. While historically there were Liberals in France, indeed there were three French parties in ELD when it was founded, they were a relatively small force in European politics. Nor were all those French MEPs in ELDR necessarily Liberals as conventionally conceived. One such grouping were the *Giscardiens* of former President Valéry Giscard

d'Estaing. That their membership was pragmatic rather than arising from ideological impulses became clear when in 1991 Giscard sought to take the whole ELDR parliamentary group into the European People's Party where he believed he would have more influence.[14] Liberals were very clear that they had little in common with the Christian Democrats and rejected they proposal out of hand. Yet, movements of parties in and out of the party groups in the European Parliament and in and out of the wider European parties has been a feature of politics within the EU. Thus, for example, the rather oddly named Portuguese Social Democrats left the Liberals for the EPP in 1994. The reasons for such moves were often about joining a larger group that benefited from greater resources and administrative support, something the EPP pushed strongly while Helmut Kohl was German chancellor and Klaus Welle the secretary general of the EPP. The upshot of such moves was a larger group in the European Parliament but one that was ideologically less coherent, ultimately sending some European federalists towards the Liberals, as they believed the EPP has lost its federalist zeal, as discussed below.

Creating a European Liberal Party

Over the years, two forces altered the nature of party politics at EU level: the prospect of treaty reform (the 1993 Maastricht Treaty on European Union) and the collapse of communism in Europe would make party fragmentation clear and yet paradoxically increase the incentives for closer cooperation. Maastricht increased the powers of the European Parliament but changes in the decision-making procedures typically required absolute majorities of MEPs, ensuring that party cohesion and cooperation with other mainstream groupings remained important.

Changes in EU treaties saw the idea of 'political parties at European level' enter the lexicon, with a strong endorsement of their role in European level-democracy (an innovation in the Maastricht Treaty). As a reflection of this change, in December 1993, member parties of the ELDR council voted to create the European Liberal, Democrat and Reform Party (ELDR). Now a party in name, yet still lacking the infrastructure and resources enjoyed by the group in the European Parliament, the creation of the ELDR Party reflected the broader ambition to establish parties at the European level, although the impact of this was not obvious to ordinary citizens, who continued to vote predominantly along national lines just as they had done in the first elections held in 1979. Nonetheless, the dynamics of party politics did develop in the European Union, even if citizens seemed oblivious to the changes.

When the European Parliament created a budget line for European-level political parties following the creation of a Party Statute in 2004, there was finally an opportunity for more Liberal party activity. From that point, 85 per cent of funding from EU-level political parties could come from the relevant European Parliament budget line.[15] This was enhanced by the creation of a Liberal party think tank, the European Liberal Foundation (ELF). Both initiatives ensured that there was funding for Liberal member parties to engage in EU-related activities. Yet changes in the legal framework of cooperation and even the provision of funding did little to create a strong sense of a genuinely European-level party, rather than a federation of national Liberal parties. The preparations for European Parliament elections might include drafting a manifesto, but it remained the product of competing national preferences. Drafting teams could be appointed, but the final say on the content would come down to the representatives of the constituent member parties, supporting their preferred policies. The upshot was that the ELDR/ALDE manifestos, like those of the other main party families, remained anodyne, lowest-common denominator documents, many years after the first European Parliament elections were held.

So anodyne have transnational party manifestos been over the years that at times it was hard to tell them apart. One issue that has marked the parties out is their attitudes towards further European integration. The EPP originally declared itself to have a 'federal vocation'. Yet as that party grouping expanded in line with Kohl and Welle's quest to be the largest group in the EPP, its federalist nature was watered down. (Indeed, how could it not be with the British Conservatives sitting as 'allied members' from 1992 until 2009?) Some of the more federalist French and Italian MEPs left the EPP and created a new federalist EU party, the European Democratic Party – like ELDR and the EPP a formally constituted 'Party at EU level'. EDP MEPs shared the more federalist views of ELDR but were not willing to join the Liberal party. Thus, a new European Parliament group, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, was established in 2004, bringing together federalists from the EDP and ELDR in the third largest European Parliament group.

At the time of the 2009 European Parliamentary elections, the EDP and ELDR parties were still formally separate. By 2012, however, the EDP had withered and the ELDR Party resolved formally to rename itself the ALDE party. By the time Europe's citizens headed to the polls in 2014, the elections looked set to be different – finally, after years of discussion among politicians and academics, the Lisbon Treaty had paved the way for the appointment of the Commission president. Thus ALDE, like the other main EU-level parties, nominated its candidate for the Commission presidency in the event of securing the largest number of seats in the European Parliament. Initially, it looked set to be a race between ALDE leader in the European Parliament, Guy Verhofstadt, and

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the Finnish European Commissioner Olli Rehn. Rehn then pulled out leaving a choice of Verhofstadt or no one, and Verhofstadt was duly chosen by ALDE delegates. There was concern about the nomination among the Liberal Democrat leadership, however, anxious that Verhofstadt's presence in the election campaigns might remind the Eurosceptic British press of the federal dreams espoused at least in some parts of Europe. Little attention was paid to the Spitzenkandidat process in the UK, as Labour had similar reservations about Martin Schulz as the Socialist candidate and the Conservatives' departure from the EPP ensured that Jean-Claude Juncker was not their candidate – a point that was all too apparent in David Cameron's opposition to his nomination as Commission president. While the UK's lack of engagement with the Spitzenkandidat process might have been extreme, it was scarcely unique: with the exception of Germany and Luxembourg, there was little coverage of the new process.

If EU-level politics have yet to gain traction at the electoral level, parties at the EU level do matter in other ways. They serve as forums for discussion among member parties, at Congresses and other sectoral meetings, and can enable politicians to get to know their colleagues from sister parties in a way that can be useful when they hold office nationally and thus attend the Council of Ministers or the European Council. In particular, eve-of-summit meetings are an important opportunity for prime ministers to coordinate ahead of the meetings. Thus, ahead of the March 2018 European Council meeting that accepted the Commission's proposal for the Brexit transition deal, eight Liberal prime ministers met, along with five Liberal Commissioners. Liberal Democrat leader Vince Cable was also present and secured the support of his Liberal counterparts for the party's position that there should be a referendum on the eventual Brexit deal. Such support was immediately reported to the press, although there was some confusion as to whether there was formal agreement on this position. What was clear was a statement from long-term Dutch prime minister, Mark Rutte, that the UK would be welcome to remain in the EU should it change its mind. International support for a member party was thus visible and caught the attention of the national media, highlighting the role of the transnational ALDE party.

Turning to the future, as the EU looks to the 2019 European Parliamentary elections, work is already in hand for an ALDE manifesto. Liberal Democrats have been consulted on manifesto – anyone on the ALDE email list would have received an email soliciting their views in February 2018 and asserting 'Together, we can build the best Liberal manifesto ever!' Yet, while Liberal Democrats' views are being sought like those of any other ALDE members, the expectation was that by the time of the 2019 European Parliamentary elections the United Kingdom would have left the European Union. The timing of its departure was indeed favoured by other Europeans as marking a clean break at the end of one parliament (2014–19) and ahead of the selection of the next set of key EU positions – Commission president, president of the European Council and High Representative on Foreign Policy being the most significant. ALDE has member parties from non-EU countries; the Liberal Democrats can undoubtedly remain part of ALDE and indeed, the ability to network with other Liberals across Europe will be crucial for keeping close ties to the EU as the UK relinquishes its place in the various EU institutions, but the nature of the Liberal Democrats' role in ALDE will inevitably change. Indeed, it already has: the recommendation at the 2017 Annual Congress in Amsterdam was that Liberal Democrats should not vote on the future of the seventy-three seats in the European Parliament that would be vacant in the event of the UK's departure from the EU. Brexit will not only affect the UK and EU institutions, it will also affect EU-level political parties.

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1 Over the years, Liberals in the European Parliament and later in the transnational European party federation and then party were joined by radicals and others who felt uncomfortable with the name 'Liberal', leading to the naming and renaming of the European Liberal Democrats and Reformists to the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, with several other titles along the way.

2 See Smith, *A Sense of Liberty*.

3 See inter alia Watson, *Building a Liberal Europe*, p. 1.

4 In France, for example, both the Communists and Gaullists were represented in the national parliament, yet neither was deemed 'coalitionable' and hence not sent to Strasbourg.

5 Emil Kirchner (ed.), *Liberal Parties in Western Europe* (CUP, 1988), p. 2, cited by Smith, 'Between Ideology and Pragmatism', p. 109

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Peter Hennessy and Duncan Brack

Shirley Williams, th

In 1971 Shirley Williams (Baroness Williams of Crosby) was one of the sixty-nine Labour MPs who voted, against their party's three-line whip, to support Britain's application to join the European Economic Community. Ten years later she was one of the 'Gang of Four' who founded the Social Democratic Party (SDP). She served as President of the SDP from 1982 to 1987, supported the party's merger with the Liberal Party in 1988, and led the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords from 2001 to 2004. She retired from active politics in 2016.

In October 2017 the historian Peter Hennessy (Baron Hennessy of Nympsfield and Attlee Professor of Contemporary British History at Queen Mary University of London) and Duncan Brack, Editor of the *Journal of Liberal History*, interviewed Shirley Williams about the importance of Europe and the European project to her political beliefs and career.

PH: Shirley, when did you first acquire your own certain idea of Europe?

SW: A very long time ago. My mother, a life-long conscientious objector and pacifist, had always been very internationalist. She was the author Vera Brittain; her book, *Testament of Youth*, was widely read on the continent as well as here, and she travelled a great deal talking about it. So it was through her that I got to know Germans, Frenchmen, Belgians – lots of people who would come for meals at my parents' house.

he SDP and Europe

I became professionally fascinated at the time of the Coal and Steel Community. Coal and steel were the fundamental ingredients of warfare; every war, right back to Napoleon and even earlier, had essentially depended upon control over these two key resources. So when Jean Monnet, the great French statesman, a wonderful man and a true internationalist, thought about the first steps towards uniting Europe – and that was his objective, his dream – he very sensibly saw that the way to start was to control the raw materials of war. I got to know Monnet a bit, and others, and I began to organise a sort of youth movement, first with the Fabians, then later at Oxford University where I was a student, consisting of people with a passionate commitment to the idea of a united Europe. And when I got to the House of Commons after I was first elected in 1964, for the first time in my life I came across the sort of people who had been heroes to me, like Roy Jenkins.

[The Coal and Steel Community was first proposed in 1950 and established in 1952.] After some rather short-lived consideration, the then Labour government decided to have nothing whatsoever to do with it. They seemed to be under the impression that in all other countries except our own, these industries were private (which they were not) and not nationalised (which they were). Thanks to the fear that Britain might be required to denationalise the coal mines, the government wanted nothing more to do with it and stayed well away. The Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, wasn't actually very interested in Europe. His passion was for social justice in this country; Europe was somebody else's problem, not his.

PH: The other great opportunity to join, and to shape it, really, was the Messina talks in 1955, when the Conservatives were back in government – but for a different set of reasons, they were also very wary, and didn't think it would come to anything. Do you think that the British, or at least some of them, have an emotional deficit over the idea of Europe?

SW: I think the Tories had an emotional deficit. They saw these developments as a challenge to the history they were so proud of. Essentially, they saw the European Community as second rate – they thought the Empire was what mattered. They hadn't yet come to terms (as they did, to be fair, over the next twenty years or so), with the idea that the Empire was over. They saw Britain going down the drain, ceasing to be the leading power of Europe, ceasing to be the great imperial power in the world, and I think they didn't in the least fancy the idea of joining this bunch of what they regarded as second-rate countries, and having to be part of a group in which we were an equal, not better than an equal.

PH: You must have been very hurt when Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell, whom you admired greatly, delivered that impassioned speech against Britain in the Common Market, at the 1962 Labour Conference.

SW: 'A thousand years of history' [the phrase Gaitskell used in opposing British entry to the EEC]. We all broke into tears.

PH: You literally cried when you heard it?

SW: Yes – and Bill Rodgers broke down in tears as well. We were both absolutely shattered. And Roy Jenkins. Because we'd all – Roy most of all, because he was very close to Gaitskell – seen ourselves as intimate admirers, if I can put it that way. But Gaitskell just got it wrong about Europe, I think partly because his wife was Jewish, and she never let him forget the Holocaust and its progenitors in Germany. Eventually, I think, he began to accept the concept of a united Europe, but he had quite strong personal reasons to find it a bad idea, and he never became enthusiastic about it.

PH: You were very keen that Harold Macmillan should succeed with the first application in 1961, I'm sure.

SW: Yes, but I didn't think it would succeed. I'd spent some time in France and I was conscious of the fact that the French had quite bitter feelings about the way in which the British thought of France as essentially having stepped out of the battle in the Second World War, and the way in which de Gaulle had been treated; a lot of Conservatives in Britain, and especially military people, agreed with Churchill, who declared that 'the greatest cross I had to carry was the cross of Lorraine'. This was not a helpful thing to say as the cross of Lorraine is a very important symbol

'I think the Tories had an emotional deficit. They saw these developments as a challenge to the history they were so proud of. Essentially, they saw the European Community as second rate – they thought the Empire was what mattered.'

in France, of French nationalism and French courage.

PH: The second application was made in 1967 by Harold Wilson, and was blocked again by de Gaulle. And then Ted Heath got us in, in 1973.
SW: That's right. But Ted got us in rather marginally, and Ted was not popular with the Conservative Party; it wasn't an enthusiastic application.

DB: Can you explain why the Labour Party kept on changing its position on Europe, from opposition to UK membership of the EEC under Gaitskell to making the second application under Wilson, then to opposition again in the early 1970s and then to supporting membership in the mid-1970s? What was going on there?
SW: Mostly because of internal left–right battles. Although I think that the left of the Labour Party then was considerably less theoretical than it has since become, it has often seen Europe as a threat to their values. Mr Corbyn, for example, has never understood the whole nature of Christian Democracy in Europe, and has tended to read the European Union as being a great deal more conservative than it actually is. To give you an example, in Germany every firm that has more than (I think) 2,000 employees is obliged to consult their workforce on all major issues such as redundancies, pensions, apprenticeships, and so on, rather than simply implementing the decisions of the bosses. For another example, most people don't realise that it was Mrs Merkel who insisted on a minimum wage in Germany which is substantially more generous than anything we've got in Britain, and which includes people who are unskilled workers, and refugees, in a way that we wouldn't dream of doing. Of course the Conservative Party isn't interested, but the Labour Party has yet to learn that the European Union is potentially a genuine force for social democracy, much more concerned about greater equality among its people than we have any idea about. And this makes me quite angry, because I feel that Europe is consistently sold short, and we don't understand what a force for progress it could be.

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DB: So support for British membership of the EU has always, then, tended to be associated with the right wing or the moderate wing of the Labour Party?
SW: That would be correct.

DB: Looking back at the decision to defy the three-line whip in the vote in 1971, which Roy Jenkins led, did you have any inkling then that that might lead eventually to a split in the Labour Party?
SW: Yes, of course I did. We all did, because of the scale of the revolt. By the bye, the vote considerably understated what it could have been; there were quite a few others who agreed with us but were persuaded not to vote with the Conservatives. To my certain knowledge a number of people refused to come over the hill because although they wanted to make sure that the vote in favour was adequately strong, they didn't particularly wish to put their position as a future Parliamentary Private Secretary at risk. So once they had counted the figures, and got them broadly right, they then graciously disappeared from the scene.
DB: Did you find the decision to defy the three-line whip difficult?
SW: No, not for me. I was quite clear where I belonged.

PH: So Harold Wilson, when he returned to power in 1974, started a process of renegotiating the terms of entry which led eventually to the referendum of 1975. You knew Wilson and got on with him very well, I know. Harold, I always got the impression, was by heart a Commonwealth man but by head a Europe man.
SW: Correct. Harold Wilson was absolutely brilliant in the way that he handled the whole thing; he showed his usual ability not so much for strategy as for tactics. Essentially what Harold said to himself was: 'we have to come to terms with these people, but we've got to find a good reason why we didn't the first time round'. (The answer was partly de Gaulle, but not only – it was also a lack of enthusiasm among British civil servants and British politicians.)

So Harold then says, 'I'm going to renegotiate this' (a lesson there for some of the Brexiteers), 'and I'm going to renegotiate it through somebody who is broadly trusted and well-liked by the British public', and that was Jim Callaghan. So he sent Jim off – he was very unenthusiastic about Europe, much less enthusiastic than Harold himself – to do the renegotiation, which he did rather well. And when he came back, Harold was able to say: 'Well, we haven't got all we wanted, but we've got the most that Jim, who was a brilliant negotiator, could have got for us'. And so he took a neutral position, in a sense, between what we might get and what we were actually getting, and gradually built a stronger level of support for staying in than one would have seen at the beginning. That's what I thought was so clever.

PH: Of course, the only consistent party throughout all these years, right through to now, is the Liberals.
SW: As ever! But Jeremy Thorpe was so tied up with his own complicated life that he never really showed a great enthusiasm for Europe. I know he was pro-European, but he didn't really give it first priority. And neither was Jo Grimond a passionate tactician over Europe. He was a strategist, living in a world of poetry and spirit – lovely, but not much about negotiating hard trade terms. David Steel I think very cleverly managed to take the Liberal Party through to being enthusiastic Europeans, which made the Liberals quite distinctive from either the Conservative or Labour parties.
DB: Did you work much with the Liberals during the referendum campaign in 1975?
SW: Yes, we worked a great deal with the Liberals, but also we worked quite a lot with Conservatives like Michael Heseltine and so on. It was a genuinely all-party thing. And that was one

reason why the campaign was so effective, and had a tremendous push in it, an excitement, a feeling of happiness, achieving something and getting somewhere. All that was absent in 2016.

PH: Wasn't it during the 1975 referendum, Shirley, that there was a wonderful piece of film of you and Harold Macmillan in Parliament Square?
SW: Harold Macmillan was by this time quite an elderly gentleman. He was very polite and gracious, but quite shaky, and did not find it very easy to walk right across Parliament Square, which he was obliged to do as a former Prime Minister and the man who was seen to be leading the move to join Europe. It was after dark and there was smoke in the air from little bonfires – it was one of those wonderful autumn evenings, magical, in a way – and Macmillan slowly began to slip towards thinking that he was at the Somme or some other great First World War battle; I became aware, walking beside him and, to some extent, helping to hold him up, that he was dreaming of where he'd been sixty years before. He looked around, and he suddenly saw all these bonfires which were being lit by young people in Parliament Square – it was a very touching moment – and the smell of bonfires in the air, and the fog, and being in the middle of this huge space full of young people, carried him a long way towards not being quite sure where he was. He was close to breaking down, I think it would be fair to say, physically and spiritually, and I realised then that he had never really put behind him the experience of the First World War. It wasn't the only time that happened, but I think that that was the first time I had realised how deep and profoundly affected he had been by the war. He seemed to many people quite a jolly man, living a good life, but really, deep down, there was a profound sense of tragedy. He said 'never again' to me as I stood besides him.

PH: Looking back to that moment, the two-thirds/one-third majority in '75 to stay in … could you ever have imagined the circumstances, even over four decades, that would lead to us coming out?
SW: I wouldn't have believed you then, particularly after that clever feint by Harold Wilson over the renegotiation, and also because some of the Labour Party's leading figures were very strongly pro-Europe. George Thomson, for example [a member of Wilson's cabinet, European Commissioner 1973–77] was always very strongly pro-Commonwealth as well but he never thought there was a clash between the two; he always thought the one could complement the other in a way that would be extremely exciting, and that would create a new world of international politics. The only country that seemed, for a while, to be rather unenthusiastic was the United States, but that was largely, I think, for the straightforward reason that they didn't really know very much about what the European Community was meant to be about, and saw it largely in economic terms. But by this time we had begun to understand that for people like the French, and particularly people like Jean Monnet and so on, this was all about ending war forever in Europe. And if you were young – student age, perhaps – you saw this as being obvious, and inevitable, and wonderful; that was where the enthusiasm for it came from, then and earlier, from those of us who at that time were in our twenties or early thirties. We saw this as bringing about a new world.

'The reasons why the four of us [the Gang of Four] decided to break away and create our own party had much more to do with our individual commitment to Europe than anything else.'

PH: In the 1980s, Mrs Thatcher, in many ways, did a second negotiation on membership. 'Our money must come back.' It took years, and it coarsened the tone of the relationship between Britain and the European Union.
SW: Yes: it coarsened it, and it changed the nature of the relationship. It went back to being about economics.
PH: You must have regretted that.
SW: I don't know that I regretted it as much as I perhaps should have done, because I'd been trained in Oxford as an economist. One of the things I realised was that the step towards, for example, a single currency, was very difficult in countries whose economies were so very different from one another, and I think there was always a problem (and has been ever since) about the later absorption of countries in Eastern Europe. By then Mrs Thatcher was seen by many to be the disciple of the free market, and was treated as close to royalty in these countries – she got the red-carpet treatment in Poland, Bulgaria, Romania and so on – I think because she was seen by them as the essence of what it was all meant to be about: a free market, a free society, no control from powerful big government.

DB: How important was support for British membership of the European Community in the formation of the SDP in 1981, alongside everything else?
SW: Oh, much the most important. The reasons why the four of us [the Gang of Four] decided to break away and create our own party had much more to do with our individual commitment to Europe than anything else. And we got within a matter of days hundreds and hundreds and hundreds, thousands and thousands of letters, a lot of them containing donations; I think the majority of them were deeply concerned about the possibility of Britain breaking away from Europe.
DB: Throughout the lifetime of the SDP, I don't remember Europe being an issue where there was much dissent within the party?
SW: There was almost none.
DB: But David Owen, eventually, voted for Brexit. Would you have predicted that, when you were together in the SDP?
SW: I'm not sure how long it will last. David is a man with very strong opinions, but he also is quite capable of changing them, as he's done in terms of what political party he supports, quite frequently. I know him well, and he's a man of

'When one looks at the areas where Britain is strong, things like science, engineering, aerospace, the sustaining of nature … and when one look also at our culture and the emergence of things like great writing, great art and so forth, all these things suggest that our natural home is Europe, not floating around looking for somebody that we can seize on and make into an ally, whether or not their own proclivities and values are the same as ours.'

passionate views, but those views to some extent reflect the major issues of the time. He may have decided for the time being to go for Brexit, but I don't somehow feel that it's a lasting commitment.

PH: Shirley, when you look at the whole sweep of the forty-six years of our membership of the EU, much of your professional life was devoted in one way or another to getting us in and keeping us in. It's almost coterminous with your life, really, certainly at the top of politics. It must be very difficult to contemplate now that it's almost certainly going to be all over within the next few years. Do you wonder what you might have done, or what you might have said, or that you and Roy could have played it this way rather than that way, to avoid the path from entry to Brexit?

SW: Well, first I have to say quite loudly and clearly that my view is that it's not all over. I think there is a real chance that as people get to know more and more about what is actually happening, they will begin to think very hard about whether they want to go in this direction. There is an awful lot of factual information which is only gradually becoming known. I'll give you one example from my old constituency, where British Aerospace, the main employer, has already announced that they are going to have 2,000 redundancies, and that won't be the end of it, I think, unless we're very lucky. We've seen the way in which the United States is not sympathising with us, or with anyone, over international trade. The illusion of the Brexiteers that somehow Britain can write the menu is absurd. It's not writing the menu now, and it's not likely to start writing the menu in 2019 or 2020.

We know already that it is not easy for us to live with the new American President, because some of the things that he wants are things that we do not want, like the possible ending of the Iranian nuclear deal. We find ourselves, inevitably on issues of that kind, closer to our European neighbours than to our American neighbours. The special relationship isn't really there any more, and the way in which the present President treats the memory and the legacy of Barack Obama, and the way in which he has taken his stand on major issues internationally, suggests that he has no interest in bringing it back. And his views on race relations are not ones that exactly commend themselves to many members of the Commonwealth. So we are putting at risk not just ourselves, but also our relationships with the rest of the world. That seems to be something that a lot of our Conservative colleagues are completely unaware of.

The third thing I would say is that when one looks at the areas where Britain is strong, things like science, engineering, aerospace, the sustaining of nature (because we are getting better and better at that), and when one look also at our culture and the emergence of things like great writing, great art and so forth, all these things suggest that our natural home is Europe, not floating around looking for somebody that we can seize on and make into an ally, whether or not their own proclivities and values are the same as ours.

PH: Can I frame the question another way? Do you not think, looking back at the referendum of 1975 in which you played such an active part with Roy Jenkins, that there is something that you and Roy, and the group around you, might have done, might have said, might have tried, in the intervening years, that would have headed all this off, that would have kept us in quite nicely?

SW: I tried to play my part in last year's campaign. I went to the people who were supposed to be in favour of Remain. I offered them three months of unadulterated time, up and down the country, since I had retired from the House of Lords. I offered to pay all own expenses. I came up with speakers for Labour audiences, people like George Robertson [Labour cabinet minister under Blair and former Secretary General of NATO]. They all agreed to speak on mixed platforms, to people of different parties but sharing the same commitment to Europe – Greens, Lib Dems, quite a lot of Labour people, some Conservatives. One lesson that I had learned from 1975 was 'do not present a party argument', present an all-party argument, and then let people discuss it as much as they will, because they will be so attracted to the idea of being free to have a real discussion across parties that they will pour in to listen; in 1975 they did, in their hundreds.

PH: What happened when you made that offer?

SW: Nothing happened at all. I rang them up and said 'would you help me do this?', and they said no. I came up with the names of my half a dozen outstanding Labour friends, people who had immense respect, who had held very high office, who were very well liked in the Labour Party, all of whom were very strong pro-Europeans. But when I asked them: 'can you help me by providing people to take leaflets out and advertise the meetings, and so on?', they said 'no, we can't'. They said to me in quite clear terms that they weren't interested in addressing Labour audiences. At the end I got the impression that a lot of the Remain power, and the Remain finances, went for one particular objective which I had been foolish enough not to fully understand, and that was to kill off UKIP. UKIP was the only really serious threat to the Conservatives. I am very angry about this, right up to this moment …

PH: In 1975, you and Roy Jenkins, and Ted Heath, sang a song of Europe pure. But this time, the people who were leading the Remain campaign were by and large caveating their support for Europe. There was a note of regret, it doesn't work here, it's no good there … hardly anybody sang a song of Europe pure.

SW: Hardly anybody. There was no song of Europe.

PH: And that's what you would have done.

SW: Yes.

Reviews

Verhofstadt's last chance

Guy Verhofstadt, *Europe's Last Chance: Why the European States Must Form a More Perfect Union* (Basic Books, 2017)
Review by Sir Graham Watson

Guy Verhofstadt is a remarkable politician. Flemish Liberal (PVV, then VLD) MP and deputy prime minister of his country for seven years, opposition leader for the following seven, prime minister for nine years and now leader of the Liberal ALDE Group in the European Parliament, he has been one of the three dominant figures in recent Belgian politics. In his greatest ambition, however – to be a dominant political figure at EU level – he has thus far been unsuccessful.

Partly it is because the ideas he espouses have been ahead of their time. He attained the leadership of his country only after a fundamental change in his thinking – from 'baby Thatcher' to centrist – and a consequent repositioning of his party. His dream of a federal Europe has led him to advocate policies too ambitious for either his political counterparts or the general public, yet he has pursued it doggedly. I recall a conversation in 2008 with Jean-Claude Juncker, then PM of Luxembourg, when Juncker regaled me with his exasperation in European Council meetings at what he saw as Verhofstadt's lack of Euro-realism.

But partly, too, it is due to a conviction which puts federalist ideology ahead of party political philosophy. Is Guy a Liberal? I sometimes wondered about this in the years after I recruited him as my successor to lead the ALDE Group. I believe that in his convictions he is, though many former colleagues complain that in his style of leadership he is most definitely not. That Liberalism is not what defines him is well illustrated by both the act and the method of his (unsuccessful) attempt in January 2017 to bring the MEPs of Italy's Five Star Movement into the European Parliament's Liberal Group.

Guy Verhofstadt is a federalist at all costs: and in this, at least, he cannot be accused of trimming. Paddy Ashdown trimmed on Europe on more than one occasion by advocating a referendum. He argued that we needed to do this as a 'shield' against Tory attacks. Yet Paddy's advocacy of a referendum – and, subsequently, Charles Kennedy's – helped prepare the ground for and lent credibility to Cameron's disastrous decision to call one.

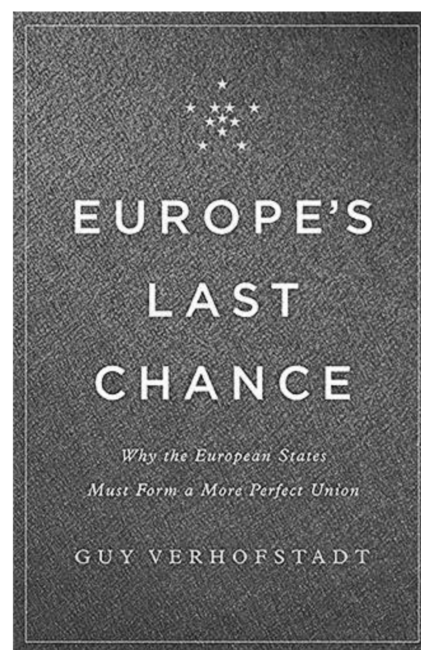
I once protested at a conservative-sponsored dining club that the problem with UK politics was that centre-ground politicians no longer set out their ideas in print. My concern was the lack of critical thinking among moderate Conservatives, on the EU in particular. Verhofstadt has set out, in *Europe's Last Chance*, a well-argued case for a federal Europe.

He starts by regretting that the views of the founding fathers of today's Europe have been lost in the mists of time. He reminds us of Heinrich von Brentano (to whom the book is dedicated) and his 1952 model EU constitution. He believes that 'a United States of Europe' would have succeeded, especially had von Brentano's idea of a two-tier membership been adopted. He rightly blames France for messing things up with the defeat of the Schuman Plan for a European Defence Community in the Assemblée Nationale in 1954.

Verhofstadt then sets out his view of where the EU has gone wrong and why it fails to deliver the right policies – in public security, in foreign affairs, in economic policy and so on. His analysis suffers from being selective. He describes the European Arrest Warrant as an achievement of the European Council (where he sat at the time), ignoring not only the fact that it was proposed by a Liberal Democrat MEP who chaired the European Parliament's justice and home affairs committee and strongly backed by Commissioner Vitorino, but also the near certainty that the Council would never have acted on the pressure from Parliament and Commission were it not for the 9/11 atrocities. He calls soft power 'cowardice', overlooking then-foreign-policy-chief Cathy Ashton's considerable achievements in Kosovo and Iran. He rightly lambasts the EU's policies on Iraq and Syria and describes its attitude to refugees as 'outrageous', perhaps conveniently forgetting the way Belgium deported refugees while he was prime minister.[1]

But among these reflections he publicises some good ideas which have worked, such as Sweden's issuance of entry permits to refugees who have already signed contracts with employers and the EU's industrial policies, which have spawned CERN and Airbus. He calls for completion of the single market in energy, telecoms and capital flows, an EU Directive on Worker Mobility and a European investment fund of €800 billion to match America's Investment and Recovery Act.

A fundamental argument of the book is that Europeans are at risk of being rapidly overtaken by others. Trapped between a protectionist America and an aggressive China, the EU is failing. Partly this is because of its inability to respond collectively and coherently to the 2008 financial crisis. The USA recovered by getting its banks to lend again; the EU, without a banking union, has been unable to. But mainly it is because we do not have a federal Europe, able to raise revenue directly. 'Economic integration in the absence of political integration has had tremendous negative consequences for us all', he writes. Bearing the burden of its citizen's aspirations but doubly weighed down by the failure of its member states to agree, the EU can be saved only by full political union.



This does not mean there is no longer a legitimate and important role for member states, Verhofstadt contends. The objective and strategic framework of monetary union would be determined at EU level, but member states would have exclusive responsibility in how to achieve this: 'whether the tax system would be progressive or not, whether the labour market would encourage precarious employment or part-time jobs, whether the pension system would be based on redistribution or capitalisation and whether private or public hospitals would provide health care.' The democratic deficit, however, arises because national leaders decide issues in the European Council cocooned from public scrutiny. Democracy must be re-established by ensuring democratic control of the Council at EU level. Citizens are frustrated, Verhofstadt argues, not because the EU has too much power but because it has too little.

Guy Verhofstadt dedicates a chapter each to the UK and Greece, current objects of particular EU concern. He prescribes for Greece remedies from which Belgium would have benefitted greatly had PM Verhofstadt applied them. But he lambasts the EU's failure to intervene earlier and more effectively and foresees similar problems in other countries unless safeguards (i.e. the creation of eurobonds) are applied. 'One Greek tragedy is enough', he observes.

Verhofstadt welcomes the UK's departure. Writing of the referendum, he says 'In a certain way, we should welcome the outcome and seize it with both hands by … writing the United Kingdom out of the treaty …'. After all, it was the UK which torpedoed his plan for a European Defence capability at the meeting dismissed as 'the chocolate summit' in 2003, by insisting on unanimity in decision-making. The UK has too often applied the brakes to progress towards a federal Europe, Verhofstadt laments, adding that 'Brexit provides a golden opportunity to put an end to the politics of horse trading'.

Ever an optimist, Guy believes the immediate danger (from the financial crisis) has passed. But Europe now faces a choice: nationalism or integration.

If this book is intended as a manifesto for another run at the post of president of the Commission, one might ask why he had it published in America rather than in Europe. But one might also hope that on this occasion his ideas are not perceived as being ahead of their time. For he is fundamentally right: the half-hearted attitude to European integration shown by socialists and the European People's Party has screwed things up. It's time to get back to basics.

Sir Graham Watson was leader of the European Parliament's Liberal Group from 2002 to 2009. Previously he had served as chairman of the Committee on Citizens Rights, Justice and Home Affairs (1999–2002) and subsequently he was president of the ALDE Party (2011–15). He has published twelve books on Liberal politics, the most widely read being Building a Liberal Europe*, published by John Harper in 2010.*

1 See errc.org, Deportation of Roma from Belgium, Second Letter to Belgian Prime Minister

The governance of Europe

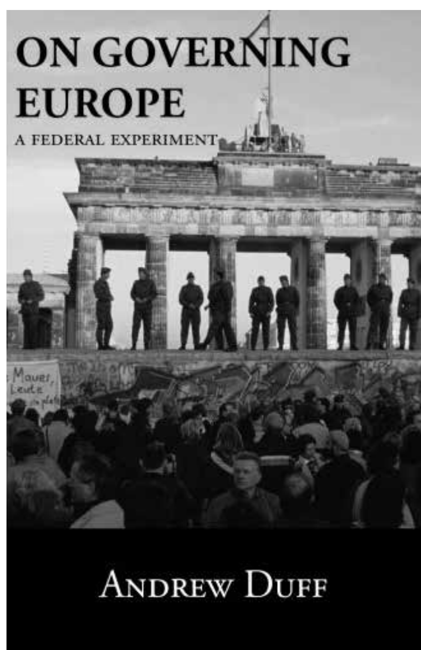
Andrew Duff, *On Governing Europe: A Federal Experiment* (Spinelli Group, 2018)

Review by **Tim Oliver**

The many crises to have confronted the EU in recent years make it easy to forget that the European Union has rarely had an easy time. Since European integration first emerged in the 1950s, the EU, like its predecessor organisations, has been in a constant state of flux, with never-ending negotiations over its direction and adjustment to the challenges it has faced. Whether it has been crises, the pull of political ideas, a process of spillover from one issue area to the next, or the alignment of national interests, the EU has been relentlessly driven forward, growing ever larger and more powerful. But that forward motion has never been smooth or in one direction. As Andrew Duff discusses, the competing pulls of a federal versus confederal (or supranational versus intergovernmental) Europe has long been one of the key tensions behind this unique experiment in national, European and international politics. Understanding how that tension has been managed casts a light on the EU's complexity and idiosyncrasies.

The difficulties born from the EU's complexity and the political tensions over how to improve it also help explain why, as Duff points out, it has now been a generation since the last attempted reform of the EU's constitutional setup. The Lisbon Treaty, signed in 2007 and which entered into force in 2009, was in large part the product of the Convention on the Future of Europe, which ran from 2001 to 2003. It is likely to be a few more years before any major new reforms take place, with Duff referring to 2025 as the date by which the Commission has hinted at having any new constitutional exercise concluded. Throughout the book Duff touches on how the EU is still coming to terms with the tumultuous changes enacted in the twenty years before this, spanning the Single European Act of 1987 to the Lisbon Treaty of 2007. It is a reminder of how slow and difficult European integration can be, something Duff acknowledges at the start of the book as something he has long appreciated. It is also a reminder of how a book such as this plays a part in a debate that stretches back to the distant days of the post-1945 world and which will be ongoing long after 2025.

Duff provides a logical and clearly written chronological analysis of the EU's constitutional setup. Beginning with the legacy of the Second World War, he works through each of the major treaties: Paris, Rome, Maastricht, Amsterdam, Nice, the European Constitution, and Lisbon. Duff uses the period between Rome and Maastricht (1957–1992), which also covers the Single European Act, to look more at the emergence of the European Council and the growth of the European Parliament. Along the way he offers a wealth of insights, which is hardly surprising given his longstanding and much respected work on this topic as former Director of the Federal Trust, a Liberal Democrat MEP for fifteen years, a member of the conventions that drew up the European Constitution and, before that, the Charter of Fundamental Rights, and now as president of the Spinelli Group. Those who know him, or have followed his work, will



know he has never wavered in his commitment to a more centralised, coherent and federal system to European integration. *On Governing Europe* puts forward his latest case for why a federal Europe remains the most viable way to create a durable, democratic union.

The book offers much for anyone interested in European integration. For readers of this journal, the British Liberal contribution, especially in the earlier stages of European integration, is given its credit. Duff reminds us of the leading role men such as Sir William Beveridge, or Philip Kerr, the Marquess of Lothian, played in these initial phases. The broader role of Britain in European integration is, of course, covered. As we are all more than familiar, Britain's attitude to European integration has often been two-faced: an awkward partner and a quiet European. With an eye on the constitutional setup, Duff tells of Britain's almost cyclical history of detachment and engagement, which in its latest incarnation – Brexit – has succeeded, as such isolationist behaviour has before, in uniting the other member states rather than dividing them. Finding a solution to this latest stage of Europe's British question will require, he argues, a new form of associate membership, 'either as a staging post to full membership or as a long-stay parking place.' As Duff points out, this is hardly a novel idea, being first suggested in 1953.

Much like the rest of the EU, Duff does not linger on Brexit, seeing it as one of a much larger set of issues and problems facing the EU that need to be addressed. But if there is one lesson he notes Brexit teaches the rest of the EU, it is the need for a common purpose to the Union. Seeking, as David Cameron did in the membership renegotiation that preceded the UK's referendum, to ignore or escape from such ideas as 'ever closer union' leads nowhere but out and out isolation. What that common purpose is to ultimately work towards, however, remains unclear, in large part because the need for a debate about the *finalité politique* of the Union is so often evaded. For Duff, part of the problem lies in the repeated political attempts to ensure the EU satisfies everyone's needs, not least when, as happened with the earlier phases of EMU, there are gentleman's agreements to make it work. The result, as set out so often throughout the book, has been a lack of attention to the question of governance and the constitutional machinery that make it possible for the EU to work. The result, not least with EMU, has often been to create the conditions for an inevitable political and economic mess that only weakens the EU in the longer-run.

The solution, for Duff, is the setting up of another convention to begin preparing a new set of urgently needed reforms. It is the Convention on the Future of Europe (2001–2003) that Duff especially points to and which he played a role in. Its parliamentary rather than diplomatic methods provided a more stable, transparent and democratic means for accommodating the many competing interests and demands of the then EU. While many will turn to the chapter 'What is to be done?', this would be to overlook how the whole book makes a case for such a convention. The EU, like any large political union, is not the product of a single decision maker. Nor is it simply the product of crises, a myth that so often pervades discussions of what makes European integration possible. Each chapter shows how further integration has been the product of long and hard work by various individuals, groups, institutions (especially the European Parliament, or large numbers of its members) drafting ideas, creating networks, developing reflexes to work together, setting precedents, and creating large package-deals that move forward the EU's institutional setup. It is on these foundations that much of integration is built.

Those suspicious of or opposed to such an approach to integration will seize on this as the book's weakness. A series of developments, that Duff also points to, might have helped put treaty reform back on the agenda: the election of Macron, Merkel's search for a legacy, Brexit removing the UK veto and helping to boost support for the EU within the remaining member states, the hostile behaviour of Trump and Putin. In addition to this, the creaking state of the EU's setup, not least within the Eurozone, cannot be sustained forever. Yet nationalism and the desire to assert the national interest remains powerful. The EU still faces the problem that public support for European integration has moved, especially since Maastricht, from a permissive consensus to a constraining dissensus. That might seem strange given that, as the chapters on events before Maastricht remind us, even in the era of a permissive consensus European integration was not without controversy and real difficulties in moving forward. Nevertheless, the danger of European and national elites finding themselves divorced from their populations remains a live danger and goes beyond the UK. Indeed, it reaches beyond Europe, a reflection of wider trends in Western and global politics. At the start of the chapter on Lisbon, Duff begins with a famous quote made by Jean-Claude Juncker in 2007: 'We all know what to do. We just don't know how to get re-elected after we've done it.' Critics of calling another convention will argue that ten years on from Junker's remark, the conundrum remains and will not be solved by more talking and constitutional change at the EU level. Duff, however, makes a case for why, without careful judgement and deliberation, the response of the EU and its member states could, as it has so often in the past, fall into the trap of seeking quick fixes that once again avoid the necessary federal solutions.

Dr Tim Oliver is a Jean Monnet Fellow at the European University Institute, Florence and an Associate of LSE IDEAS, the LSE's foreign policy think tank.

A Liberal Democrat History Group evening meeting

The 1918 coupon election and its consequences

In November 1918, just 24 hours after the Armistice had been signed with Germany, the Liberal Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, announced his decision to hold a general election.

Selected Coalition candidates received a signed letter of endorsement from Lloyd George and the Conservative leader, Bonar Law. The 1918 election thus became known as the 'coupon' election.

The election saw 133 Coalition Liberals returned to the House of Commons, but the independent Liberals, whom Lloyd George had abandoned, were reduced to a tiny minority, overtaken by the new Labour Party, while the Coalition Liberals increasingly became the prisoner of their Conservative Coalition partners.

One hundred years after the coupon election, this meeting will discuss Lloyd George's actions, the results of the general election and its implications for the Liberal Party and for British politics.

Speakers will include **Lord Kenneth Morgan** (author of numerous books on Lloyd George), and others to be announced. Chair: **Lord Wallace of Saltaire** .

6.30pm, Monday 2 July
Committee Room 4A, House of Lords, London SW1 (please allow at least 20 minutes to pass through security)

Liberal Parties in Europe
continued from page 51

6 During the coalition, there were some differences of opinion among Liberal Democrats about which were 'the like-minded' parties', with the party leadership meaning the right-wing German Free Democrats (FDP), the Dutch Liberal VVD and the Danish Venstre party while many on the International Relations Committee and elsewhere in the Liberal Democrats identified with the social liberal D66 of the Netherlands and Radikale Venstre of Denmark.
7 The name changed several times over the years with some parties reluctant to be called Liberals and while 'Democrats' worked for some, the somewhat different 'Reform/ists' was needed to placate others, albeit that those parties seeing themselves as Reformists were typically those that broke away again.
8 Watson 2010, p. 101.
9 At that time the Greens were not a force in European politics.
10 Parties that have campaigned as part of an EU-level party are normally expected to sit with the associated group if elected, but they can always leave. Equally, parties that had not campaigned on a transnational manifesto might subsequent decide they wish to join a particular group, whether associated with a transnational party or not.
11 The term coined by Karl-Heinz Reif after the first European Parliament elections remained apposite almost forty years later despite endeavours to create a European dimension in the elections.
12 See Watson, *Building a Liberal Europe*, p. 11.
13 It is frequently suggested that Labour adopted the regional list system to ensure that calls for PR in the UK would be diminished.
14 See Watson, *Building a Liberal Europe*, pp. 9–10 for a detailed discussion of this episode.
15 Source: European Parliament website, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/faq/6/political-parties-and-political-foundations-at-european-level, last accessed 16 April 2018.