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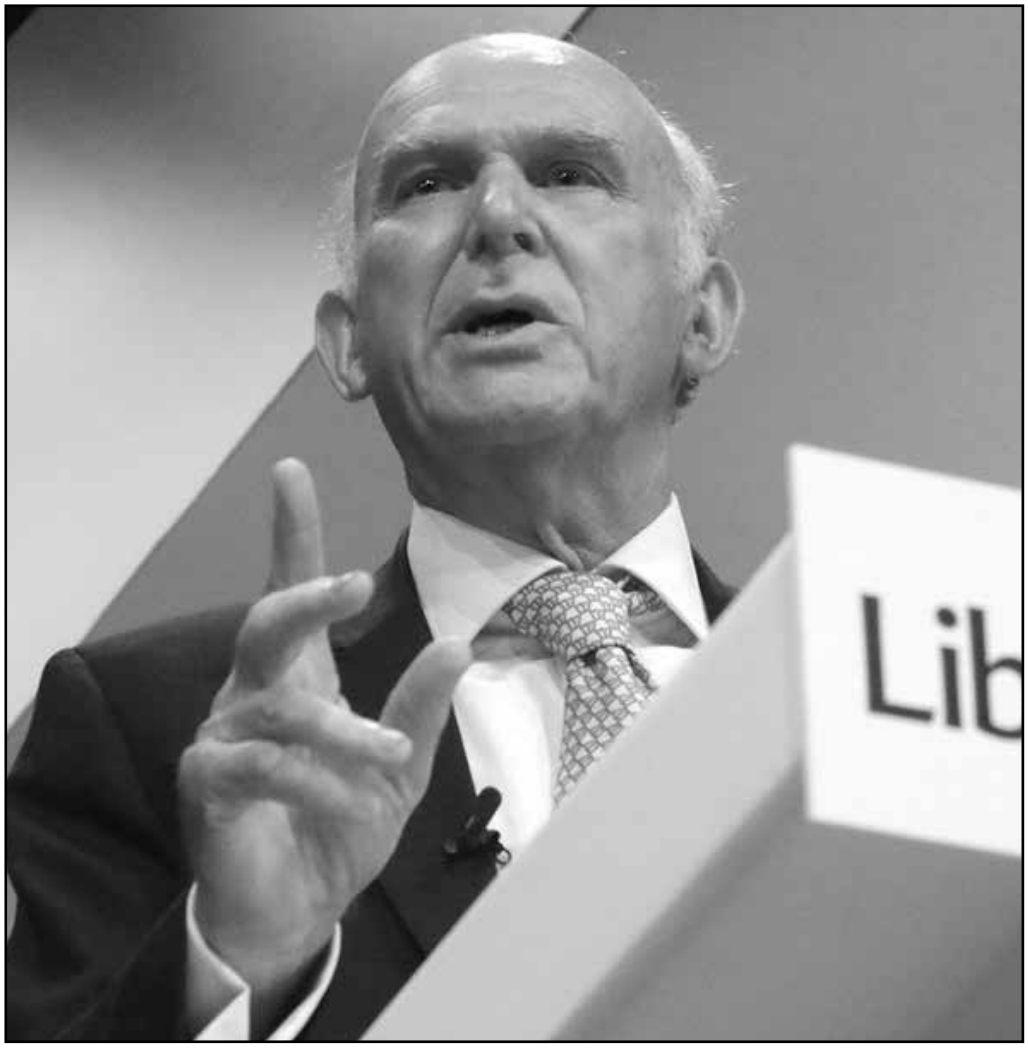
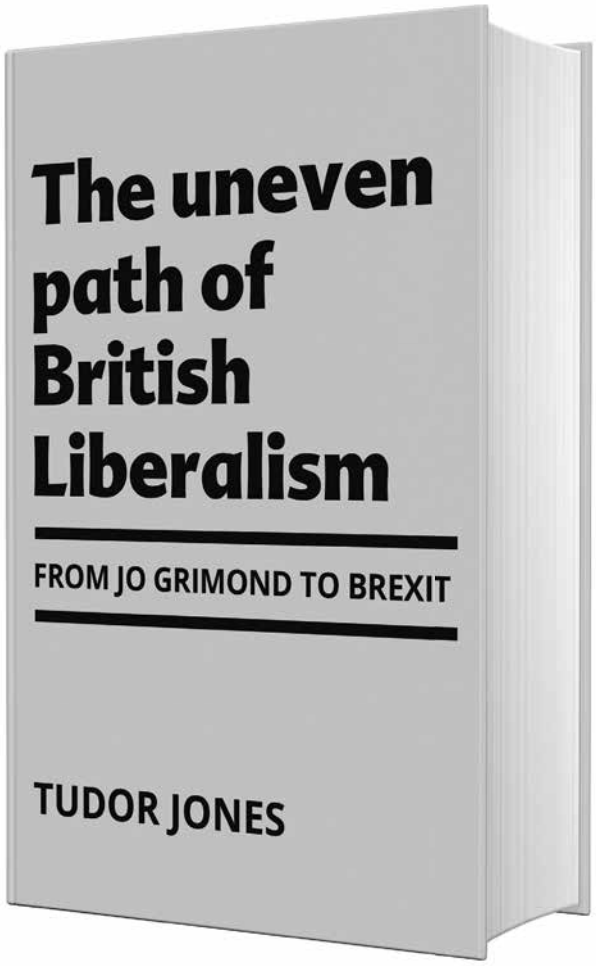


Cable as leader

Liberal Democrat History Group



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Journal of Liberal History

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Liberal Democrat History Group

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

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

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

Liberal History News
Autumn 2019

Marketing Liberalism in an age of populism
Conference: 15 November, Bournemouth

The Political Marketing Group of the Political Studies Association invites readers of the *Journal of Liberal History* to this year's marketing-related conference. After sessions on Corbyn and Labour and on Communication by Conservatives in previous years, in 2019 we are focusing on Liberals and Liberalism.

Papers will focus on topics such as

- The branding of the Lib Dems on social media
- Marketing approaches in the recent Lib Dem leadership contest
- Positioning the Lib Dems to challenge Labour
- Fiscal policy as political marketing
- Liberalism in an illiberal country – 2018 Hungarian Election
- Political leaders in Greece

The keynote speaker is Dr Mark Pack, associate director at Teneo and former head of innovations for the Liberal Democrats. Dr Pack is also co-author of *101 Ways to Win an Election* and co-editor, with Darren Lilleker, of *Political Marketing and the 2015 General Election*.

If there is a snap election either shortly before or due shortly after the conference, a session will be added in to look at the relevant marketing.

The conference will be free to attend but we do need to know if you are coming. Please email us at liberalmarketingconference@gmail.com to let us know.

More details of the day's programme and venue and the papers will be sent to those who plan to attend. Please note that we plan to start late morning to allow people to travel.

Paula Keaveney,
Convenor, PSA Political Marketing Group

Letters to the Editor

Richard Moore

Michael Meadowcroft's appreciation of Richard Moore (*Journal of Liberal History* 103, summer 2019) mentioned all too briefly Moore's late career as an administrator of the European Liberal Democrat group in the European Parliament. As the only British official so employed from 1979–95, Moore provided important liaison between the European Parliament and the UK Liberal Party (later the Liberal Democrats). He helped David Steel, Russell Johnston and Paddy Ashdown connect with fellow Liberals in the EU and was a valuable source of information to those of us who sought to steer the party's British MPs towards supporting the Treaty of Maastricht – support which in the end proved critical in seeing the Treaty ratified by the UK, against the odds.

Richard Moore was unfailingly hospitable and a source of encouragement to Liberals visiting Brussels and Strasbourg. He collaborated closely in the long and eventually successful campaign to attain proportional representation for elections to the European Parliament. I was always struck by how this tall, eloquent and rather old-fashioned English radical was respected across the European Parliament. A very political but ever courteous *fonctionnaire*, Moore forged warm relations with leading federalist MEPs, including Altiero Spinelli on the left and Archduke Otto von Habsburg on the right.

Andrew Duff

Think history

Can you spare some time to help the History Group?

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

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

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

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

A Joyce Arram Memorial Lecture, organised by the Lloyd George Society

David Lloyd George and the Treaty of Versailles

As soon as the ink was dry on the Treaty of Versailles, the controversy began. Was it the Carthaginian Peace that damaged Germany so much that it led to the rise of Hitler and persuaded the USA to stay outside the League of Nations? Or were the Economic Consequences of Mr Keynes greatly overstated?

This lecture, dedicated to the memory of the late Joyce Arram, one of the Lloyd George Society's longest standing members, will examine the role of Prime Minister David Lloyd George in Paris and his influence in the development of the peace treaties.

Join the Lloyd George Society to hear **Alistair Cooke OBE, Lord Lexden**, the historian of the Conservative Party and author of many works on political history, give his assessment of Lloyd George in Paris and the legacy of Treaty of Versailles. Chair: **Baroness Sarah Ludford**

7.00pm, Monday 25 November 2019
Lady Violet Room, National Liberal Club, Whitehall Place, SW1 (admission free)

On This Day . . .

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

September
23 September 1961: The Liberal Party Assembly meeting in Edinburgh votes overwhelmingly to apply to join the Common Market in a motion moved by Jeremy Thorpe MP. The vote prompts the resignation of Oliver Smedley, later chairman of the 'Keep Britain Out' campaign and one of the founders of the Thatcherite Institute of Economic Affairs.

October
2 October 1891: In a speech to the National Liberal Federation annual conference in Newcastle, William Ewart Gladstone supports the programme adopted by the Federation. The 'Newcastle Programme' retains support for Irish home rule as its central plank but also contains proposals on land reform, reform of the House of Lords, three-year parliaments, abolition of plural voting and Scottish and Welsh church disestablishment. The Liberal Governments of 1892–95 put some parts of the Newcastle Programme on to the statute book, including employers' liability, parish councils and graduated death duties.

November
5 November 1956: Jo Grimond succeeds Clement Davies as Liberal leader. Davies had announced his resignation at the party assembly held in Folkestone the previous month and at a dinner attended by all the Liberal MPs, Grimond is unanimously elected leader. At 43 Grimond is the youngest leader since the Marquess of Hartington in the 1870s.

22 November 1979: Roy Jenkins delivers his Dimbleby Lecture, 'Home Thoughts from Abroad', on the BBC. He criticises the false choices, see-saw politics and broken promises of the two-party system and calls for electoral reform and a strengthening of the 'radical centre'. The speech is widely regarded as a clarion call for a new political grouping in British politics; it led eventually to the founding of the Social Democratic Party.

Leadership

Interview with Vince Cable MP on his period as Leader of the Liberal Democrats

Vince Cabl

Rt Hon Sir Vince Cable, MP for Twickenham from 1997 to 2015, and again from 2017, served as Liberal Democrat Treasury spokesperson 2003–10 and Deputy Leader of the party 2006–10. He was Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills in the Liberal Democrat – Conservative coalition government of 2010–15. He was elected Leader of the Liberal Democrats in July 2017 – unopposed, after Tim Farron's sudden resignation after the disappointing outcome of the 2017 general election. In March 2019 he announced his decision to stand down as leader; he handed over to Jo Swinson after the leadership election two months later. In August, the *Journal of Liberal History* interviewed him about his political career and, especially, his period as leader.

JLH: Let's start with your political beliefs. You were a member of the Liberal Club at university?
VC: As soon as I went to university, in 1962, I joined the Liberal Club. That was the era of Jo Grimond, and I was motivated by his great speech on Europe at the party conference, when he made fun of Gaitskell's 'thousand years of history' speech; I was very charged up by that.[1] So I joined the Liberal Club, and I was quite active in it; I ran the Liberal Club magazine, which was called *Scaffold*. I think the first article I ever wrote was about newspaper magnates, which in view of what subsequently happened with Mr Murdoch and so on, was quite appropriate.

I became President of the Club in 1963. I followed Chris Mason,[2] who became active in Glasgow, and before that Alan Watson.[3] When I was President of the Club – you know, you get ideas above your station – I thought it was slightly odd that we were in roughly the same terrain as the social democrats in the Labour Party; there was then a group around Dick Taverne, Shirley Williams and one or two others, called the Campaign for Democratic Socialism. So I suggested that in lieu of any action at the national level, we should merge with this group, and I tried to organise it.

I didn't exactly carry the membership with me! The Liberal Club at that stage was dominated by a group of radical Liberals who followed someone called Manuela Sykes, who was the candidate in Ipswich, and was of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament-supporting brand of Liberalism.[4] The Club rejected it, the social democrats rejected it, and I was left in a kind of limbo. So I continued to the end of my term, but then dropped out, and in the general election campaign in 1964, I campaigned for [Labour leader] Harold Wilson, and in particular his candidate in York, who was a man called Alex Lyon, who subsequently became quite famous as a liberal Immigration Minister, and married Clare Short, who became Secretary of State for International Development under Tony Blair.

JLH: So you've been a member of the Liberal Party, then the Labour Party, then the SDP and then the Liberal Democrats. How would you say your political beliefs have changed over time?
VC: Not very much, actually, though people find that very difficult to believe. Although my labels have changed several times, both as a student and as an adult, my broad views haven't really changed very much. In fact, the first couple of editions I did of *Scaffold*, the university magazine, were all about liberalism, and the new emerging agenda of homosexual rights, abortion – the social-liberal agenda that was then unfashionable but was becoming less so. I was liberal in that sense, but also social democratic – I rather liked the idea of redistribution; I was influenced by Anthony Crosland's *The Future of Socialism*. So that combination of liberal and social democratic and internationalist – I was certainly engaged by the European issue at that time – that was the combination of beliefs I had then and I still have.

JLH: When you were the Liberal Democrats' Treasury spokesman, in the lead-up to the coalition, you adopted what were generally seen as fairly right-wing, or economic-liberal, views, in party terms. But in coalition you were often perceived to be to the left of Nick Clegg and the leadership, and perhaps more social democratic, and somewhat unhappy with the direction of the coalition, at least in terms of economic policy. So would you put yourself on the left or the right of the party?

Right: Vince Cable, February 2018 (Photo: Liberal Democrats)

e as leader

VC: I've always been somewhat on the left of the party. The reason why I acquired a kind of *Orange Book* persona wasn't out of enthusiasm for what you might call right-wing economics.[5] It was a reaction against what would now be called populism. There was a very strong view in the party [in the mid 2000s] that you basically tell people what they want to hear, that people can have more of everything. I reacted against that, in my brief as Treasury spokesman. I clashed with Matthew Taylor[6] because his technique – which was heavily influenced by Chris Rennard[7] – was to make a long list of things people might want, and promise them it. I thought this was completely bizarre and completely contrary to my economic background.

I'd always been brought up in liberal economics, genuine liberal economics – I taught economics in university in the building named after Adam Smith – mixed in with a social-democratic approach to taxation, though I was never into heavy regulation and control. The *Orange Book* was partly a reaction to the kind of populist strain in the party, combined with an element of the economic-liberal belief in free trade, and the recognition that the private sector had to have an important role in the economy. At the time it was called right-wing, but I never really recognised that language as describing my position.

What I did in the coalition – where I think I was probably on the left on almost every issue that we dealt with – was a more genuine reflection of what I believe.

JLH: What impact do you think the Orange Book had within the party?
VC: It annoyed a lot of people! I'm not quite sure how much influence it had. I was quite close to David Laws, who was the real intellectual driving force behind it.[8] He was part of my Treasury team and we were quite close, we were good friends and we often talked to each other, so he had quite a big influence on my way of thinking about taxation policy, for example. One of the big ironies around it was that we had two possible candidates for the one big idea that would grab a bit of attention when it was launched. We went for David's idea, of switching the NHS to a social insurance system, which got David a terrible reputation in the party. The other, which was mine, was that in order to demonstrate that we were genuinely in favour of a mixed economy rather than everything being publicly owned, we should adopt the policy of bringing private capital into the Royal Mail. Most people forgot about that, but when we got into government, it was my suggestion that happened.

JLH: Do you think you've had a lasting impact on the party's economic policy? Has it gone in the direction you wanted it to?
VC: I think so, yes, mainly because a lot of the things which I believed in did find expression in government. I was the original author of the idea of lifting the income tax threshold – there was a big debate at conference around it – though it eventually got out of control because you get to a point where it is extremely expensive and it's not very progressive. But I originated that, with David Laws' support. I think it was actually Malcolm Bruce who originally promoted the idea, but then I took it on.[9]

The idea of having a sensible – what I thought was a sensible – mixture of public and private ownership and not being ideologically hidebound was something I did in government. One or two things were privatised, notably the Royal Mail, and others were kept under public ownership, such as the Post Office. And we established two state banks, the Green Investment Bank and the British Business Bank. This was a very clear, non-ideological, pragmatic approach to ownership.

Third, the idea that government has a big role to play as a facilitator and planner was very much what I tried to do in government: the industrial strategy, support for manufacturing industry, the Catapult network; that was, I thought, very much central to our way of thinking. The big battle that I lost in government was that we should have been pursuing a more active public investment strategy. I had a big argument with [Chancellor of the Exchequer George] Osborne, but Danny [Alexander] and Nick [Clegg] didn't want to argue with the Treasury on that issue.[10] The idea that you have to have public sector discipline, but combine it with active commitment to public investment – that was the view I expressed in government, and I think that's pretty much where we still are as a party. So I think I have had a lasting influence, though whether this will survive the upheavals that we have at the moment I can't say.

JLH: And that takes us nicely on to coalition. What do you think the Liberal Democrats did wrong in coalition? What could the party have done differently?
VC: I would start with putting the question the other way round: there were quite a lot of things we did right, and things we never got credit for. But I think the simple answer is that we trusted the Conservatives, and we shouldn't have. If that's something to be guilty about, I was as much guilty as anyone else. In my own department, where we had two Lib Dem ministers and six Tories, we worked together as a team very well, so I suppose I bought into the idea that we could work with those guys. I don't think any of us anticipated that they would turn round so ruthlessly to destroy us at the end.

JLH: Do you think there were individual decisions that made a big difference? People usually point to things like tuition fees, NHS reform, the bedroom tax, maybe support for austerity.
VC: I'll take each of those four. I was intimately involved with the tuition fees issue. The way I've always rationalised it – and I rationalised it in my

What I did in the coalition – where I think I was probably on the left on almost every issue that we dealt with – was a more genuine reflection of what I believe.

mind at the time – was that it was terrible politics but very good policy. It was something we had to do, and I think this is now accepted – for example, there are press reports today on why the Augar report proposing cuts in tuition fees is a thoroughly bad idea for universities.[11] I think the basic logic behind what we did was totally right. An element that has been forgotten in historical terms was that [Labour minister Peter] Mandelson and [Conservative education spokesperson David] Willetts had reached an agreement before the 2010 election to set up the Browne review.[12] When I first came into office, the Browne report was near completion, and it recommended unlimited tuition fees – I think it was up to £15,000, it was a pure market-based system. But the basic principles of no upfront fees and a kind of graduate tax repayment system were in the report, and I felt that with modifications – a limit on fees, more emphasis on social mobility, strengthening of student maintenance grants – we could live with it on the basis that it was good policy.

I may be deluding myself, but I don't think it was the policy that destroyed our credibility on the issue, it was the fact that the pledge [to vote against any increase in tuition fees] had been made. A bitter argument took place a few days after the crucial Federal Policy Committee meeting when we adopted the principle of phasing out tuition fees, when Nick was approached by the National Union of Students and asked if he would publicly sign the pledge. He took the view, on the basis of Danny's advice, that he may have lost the argument in the FPC, but he could at least get the political credit for it, so he publicly signed the pledge. Now, I could see the potential for disaster and refused to sign it, and so did David Laws and I think also Stephen Williams, who was higher education spokesperson. This created a potentially major schism – the leader publicly signing it but the deputy leader refusing – a few weeks before the election. So eventually I was prevailed upon to sign it, much to the disgust of David Laws, who thought I'd sold out. I think it was the pledge which did for us.

On the bedroom tax I wasn't heavily involved. I believe it was part of a package where some quite good things were being introduced, thanks to Steve Webb, I think on the pension front.[13] I remember that it was quite bitterly argued in the group because some of our colleagues could see how disastrous it was going to be. There was a serious rationale behind it, with older people under-occupying council houses when there wasn't enough space for young families, but the fact that it wasn't applied in the owner-occupied sector meant that it was highly inequitable, and quite vicious. So we pushed for more money to make sure that disabled people, for example, weren't disadvantaged, and that was agreed.

I think the simple answer is that we trusted the Conservatives, and we shouldn't have.

On NHS reform, I don't think any of us quite appreciated how much political harm this was going to cause. Fairly early on in the coalition, all the leading departmental heads gave a presentation to the cabinet about what they wanted to do. When it came to [Health Secretary Andrew] Lansley, he spoke interminably and it was full of NHS gobbledygook that none of us could understand, and nobody quite knew what he was trying to do. Anyway, [Prime Minister David] Cameron concluded the discussion by saying, well, none of us really understand what all this is about, but Andrew seems to know what he's talking about, so we'll let him get on with it. I think at some point, Paul Burstow[14] on our side, and people outside the cabinet – Shirley Williams and others – started speaking up and saying that there was a lot more trouble here than we realised. But by then we were stuck with it, and we got quite a lot of grief – though I don't think that we as Lib Dems were particularly associated with it, it was the government as a whole. While tuition fees were seen very much as a Lib Dem problem, and the bedroom tax has been used to beat us up with, the NHS reforms have not been, I think, partly because the so-called privatisation has never really happened.

And then finally, austerity. Corbyn and his crowd continue to use this as a stick to beat us with, but at the time, I think what we were doing was quite justifiable. I produced a pamphlet just before the 2010 election – it wasn't massively popular with some of my colleagues – but it was trying to say that whatever happens, whatever government is in power, there's going to have to be some fiscal tightening. You're going to have to do this in a sensible way, and use monetary policy to make sure the economy doesn't crash, but it's unavoidable that there will have to be quite difficult cuts. So I did sign up for that, while at the same time arguing that we needed more public investment. And this argument went backwards and forwards during the coalition years. I remember at one stage over the first winter, when it looked as if things were going pear-shaped, suggesting in personal correspondence with Osborne that we should use 'helicopter money' as a way of keeping the economy going; I know that the Treasury were looking at it seriously, but it never quite got bad enough.[15] Quantitative easing was seen as a solution.

I think that any government would have done something similar – the Darling plan had seven years,[16] our first plan had five years, and then it was extended, so actually, the scale and timing of the fiscal adjustment wasn't greatly different from what a Labour government would have done. The key point was that all of this was caused by the financial crisis, whereas the Labour opposition always wanted to say that what was called 'austerity' was caused by the coalition – forget about the banking crisis, it never really happened, or it was something in America, nothing to do with us, so this choice of tough fiscal policy measures was a product of ideologically driven Tories, which we were complicit in. And that was complete

nonsense. I think we managed to defend a sensible economic position on austerity.

I don't think austerity did us enormous harm. I think in retrospect, clearly we needed more public investment, and there should have been a better mix of tax rises as well as spending cuts – that was a key point. There were certain areas of spending cuts, like local government, which were very damaging, partly because Tory ministers like [Communities Secretary Eric] Pickles took a kind of relish in what they were doing – punishing all those Labour authorities in the north of England who were spendthrift, and all the rest of it. But I think in areas where we had some control over the process, as in my department, public spending was approached in a sensible way.

Towards the end of the coalition, there was quite a bitter argument within the Lib Dems. By 2015, we were getting towards a reasonable budgetary position, and some of us were arguing that this was the time when we should be committing ourselves to big public investment in the railways and other things. But Danny took the view that we should sign up to the Osborne commitment to eliminate the deficit, which by then included public investment (it didn't at the beginning).

JLH: To many people it looked like Danny Alexander went native pretty quickly in the Treasury. [Clegg adviser] Richard Reeves is on record as saying we wanted to have a Lib Dem in the Treasury but we ended up getting a Treasury person in the Lib Dems. Do you think that's a fair critique?
VC: I think it's overstating it, though there is an element of truth in it. We all did to some extent, though he now exclusively carries the can for a lot of unpopular decisions – though there were plenty of times when he argued our corner very effectively. But although I was broadly on his side at the beginning of the coalition, I felt that towards the end of it, when we needed to be rethinking policy and shifting the balance, he did very much represent Treasury orthodoxy. The particular argument I had was over this rather technical, but politically very important, issue about what is the 'deficit'. If you look back at the coalition agreement, it covered the government's current budget; public investment was treated as separate. By the end, the Treasury was treating public investment like any other public spending.

JLH: Do you think decision-making would have been any different throughout the coalition if more decisions had been taken by the Coalition Committee, which was the original intention in the coalition agreement, rather than by the Quad [of Cameron, Osborne, Clegg and Alexander]?
VC: Yes, I think it probably would have been. I never hid the fact that I was rather unhappy about being left out of a lot of economic decisions, which is what happened with the Quad. You had only two on our side, who basically took the same position, and there was only one view of the economy, which was Danny's view, largely the Treasury's. I felt the balance was wrong. To an extent this happened by accident, and I think Chris Huhne's disappearance from the government probably was a key factor in that.[17]

Right:
Liberal Democrat autumn conference 2017
People's Vote march, October 2018
Euro election campaign, 2019
(Photos: Liberal Democrats)

JLH: On a number of occasions there were rumours of your unhappiness with the direction of the coalition. Did you ever consider challenging Nick Clegg for the leadership?
VC: No, I didn't. There was a period towards the end – the failed so-called colonel's coup – which I didn't initiate, when there were a lot of our backbenchers who were saying we've got to have a change, and some of them saw me as the person who could be the leader if there was one. But the organisation was very rudimentary, there wasn't a systematic attempt to change, just a hope somehow that change would happen. And then my friend Matthew [Oakeshott] got involved in a particular set of events, which I think was broadly well-intentioned but turned out quite badly.[18] And I got labelled, because I had been loosely associated with the rebels, that we were planning an assault on the leadership, which wasn't really accurate; it was a sort of half-truth. I suppose in retrospect I could have done, but the thing that held me back was that although the Lib Dems were getting a terrible hammering politically, we were respected for the fact that we had collectively made a difficult decision to join the coalition. Once we started fighting with each other, that respect would disappear. So although I was unhappy with certain things the leadership was doing I never took the view that there should be an orchestrated to attempt to replace Nick.

JLH: Let's move on to your leadership. Did you consider standing for the leadership when Charles Kennedy stood down in 2006 or when Menzies Campbell stood down in 2007?
VC: I certainly considered it on both occasions. But on the first, the circumstances in which Charles fell were quite difficult and unpleasant. There was a strong feeling that we should rally around a respected senior uncontroversial figure; and Menzies made it clear that he was available to fill the gap. So although I may have harboured private thoughts that I could do the job, that wasn't the mood of the shadow cabinet at the time. Indeed, we were all rather shocked when Chris Huhne broke cover [and stood for the leadership], because he had been very voluble in our group in saying that we should all get behind Menzies Campbell. But he clearly saw an opportunity and, as we know from the result, his judgment was rather better than we collectively thought.

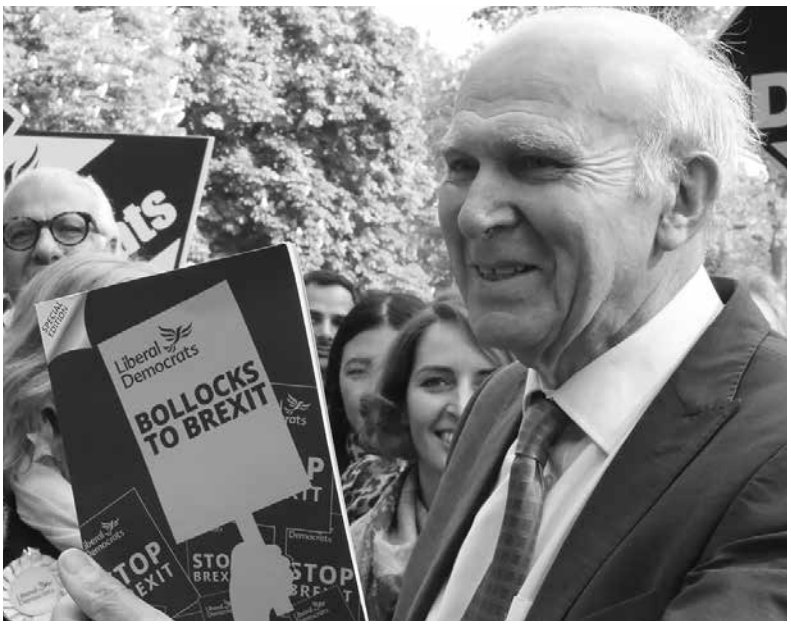
Now, on the second occasion, when Menzies was clearly on the way out, I had assumed I would stand, and I made soundings with various colleagues and good friends. But the reaction amongst all of them was, well, the old men

have had their time. I was then ten years younger than I am now! There was a very strong generational mood; I don't know who created it, it may have been the circumstances, but linked to that I quickly realised that Nick and Chris had spent much of the previous year organising their troops for when the leadership contest arose. I saw that there was no point in competing; I probably wouldn't have got enough nominations anyway. In the event it turned out well, because I was the acting leader [during the leadership campaign], and it turned out to be quite a productive phase; our support rose and I did a few good things. This was the beginning of the banking crisis, as I remember. So as acting leader, I was probably more effective than if I had contested the leadership.

JLH: So you become leader ten years later, in 2017. Did you want to take the party in any kind of different direction politically?
VC: No, I didn't. The fact is, at that point I had inherited a largely broken vehicle. We'd had two very bad general elections, we'd lost all of our MEPs bar one, there was hardly anybody left in Scotland, and above all, we'd seen the decimation of our local government community. We were in pretty bad way. People weren't taking us seriously. I thought that my role was primarily to stabilise a bad situation and try to rebuild, which would probably require a lot of patience and optimism. I thought it could be done, but I didn't think a fundamental change in political direction was required.

I suppose to the extent in which I did think in those terms, it was partly about rehabilitating the coalition. There was a bit of a feeling that this was a guilty secret that we were trying to cover up, and I thought that wasn't right. I didn't think there was any great value in endlessly going on about it, but I believed that we had to own coalition as something we'd done, and which on balance had been good for the country. So to the extent to which I was changing direction from [previous leader] Tim Farron, it was on that issue – though he'd done a good job in restoring morale at the grassroots and taking the direction he did on Europe, and it was my job to build on that.

JLH: Did anybody act as an inspiration to you in your leadership – was there any previous leader or any other individual you modelled yourself on?
VC: It was a unique situation which we'd never had in the past. Before, we were always coming from nowhere rather than recovering from defeat. But Paddy Ashdown's style always impressed me: it was very much building up from the grassroots combined with good messaging and energy and enthusiasm from the top. And it had worked – so I did indeed follow quite a lot of things he'd done. I suppose on a purely personal level, the previous leader I was most impressed by was Jo Grimond. I'd liked the man, I'd met him a few times as a



The good thing is that when I was the leader, we were in the right place on the biggest issue of the day. I don't claim sole credit for it; Tim Farron took a very strong lead on it, and my colleagues clearly wanted us to be there. So I wasn't battling against the tide to get there, but the fact that the Lib Dems have managed to lead that movement is something I'm proud of.

student and I liked the way in which he used his position in a small party to try to influence the national debate. So if there was anybody I looked back to, it was probably him in terms of my personal style, but I also emulated some of the methods which Paddy Ashdown used.

JLH: What are you most proud of achieving in your time as leader?
VC: Recovery. We're a long way still from becoming a major national force, as we were in 2010, certainly in parliamentary terms, but we are enormously further on from where we were two years ago, and I'm pleased that I helped make some of that happen. Also, there are a lot of quiet things behind the scenes – for example, I pushed very hard from the word go to improve our social media operations. They're still very modest, but during the European election campaign, we had the best social media campaigning of any party. So there were little things of that kind. Also, having spent a lot of the last two years going round doing party dinners, going out and talking to a few activists, to see two years later that these guys are now really energised and are winning back councils – I get a big kick out of that.

JLH: And what was most challenging during your leadership?
VC: The most challenging thing was the disdain the commentators had for the party and the arrogant, slightly contemptuous view that we didn't count any more, we were a bit of an embarrassment, not really serious. It was a problem in parliament because it was very difficult to get called – we're smaller than the Scottish Nationalists, I was only getting a parliamentary question once every four weeks; even getting called in debates was a major struggle. But I think it was much more the media perception that we weren't really a force any more. It was trying to overcome that disdain which was the most difficult.

JLH: Did you play a particular role in persuading Chuka Umunna to join the party?
VC: Yes, I think so. Right at the beginning when I was first leader, I was trying to develop relationships with some of the Labour social democrats who I felt a certain affinity with. It was obvious they were unhappy. I'd sparred with some of them when I was in government, and we'd finished up with good relationships. One of the things I did as a cabinet minister was to hold regular surgeries every week for MPs – mostly Labour, but some Tories – and sometimes I was able to do helpful things which had some benefit for their constituencies. Chuka was quite keen to talk because he was most explicit about the need to break up the Labour Party, to change the leadership. So we started meeting for odd cups of coffee, and developed a good relationship.

He was very clear from the beginning that he bought into this narrative – which was encouraged by quite a lot of Blairites – that we'd suffered too much damage to be able to lead any new force. I tried to persuade him that we at least had an infrastructure, we knew how to do things, we knew politics and we would come back again. I was surprised and disappointed when he went off with Change UK; they weren't really ready, but it was precipitated by the Luciana Berger problem with anti-Semitism. And when he was in Change UK, it wasn't clear what his role was. So I kept up a relationship with him, and I was pleasantly surprised when he quickly drew the obvious conclusion that Change UK was a cul-de-sac and came to join us. So yes, I played a part in it, and having had a relationship and mutual respect, and a lot of discussion of political ideas, made it easier.

JLH: Do you think that there are other Labour or former Labour MPs who will do the same?
VC: Yes, but I don't think they will do it in dribs and drabs. There's a large group of Labour MPs who are desperate to escape from the Corbyn coterie. I think most of them still harbour hopes that they can achieve something within the Labour Party, but I can see a point, maybe just the other side of a failed general election, where they finally cut the Gordian knot and work with us in some form. And I have discussed that with some of them; they say, yes, we consider ourselves to be liberal and European and we like you, but we have this tribal Labour connection. I think it will happen; I think that they will snap at some point, but this will present a challenge to us as a party. When it's the odd individual like Chuka, you can assimilate them, but if it's a group of fifty, then who is assimilating who?

JLH: When did you decide to resign the leadership?
VC: Just before the spring conference. Throughout the whole period of my leadership, including at the very beginning, I'd seen my role as transitional. I wasn't sure how that would work out, but by the beginning of this year I knew that I had to decide whether I was going to be around to lead us into the next election, which would then mean a commitment to another five years – and I'd be in Gladstone territory, I'd be eighty-two, eighty-three – or to pass on to someone else. If I was going to pass on somebody else, it needed to be done in a planned way, in an orderly way. So I made the statement that I did at the spring conference.

JLH: Thinking about Liberal Democrat leadership, what characteristics do you think leaders need to be able to lead this party?
VC: I think the first thing you need is a very thick skin, because you get this combination of the disdain of the commentariat who don't think you're real, combined with people in our own party who want instant success. You have to have a fairly thick skin to deal with that constant barrage of

negativity. Secondly, you need a lot of stamina. I spent most of my last two years going around the country on trains; spending a weekend somewhere to speak to thirty people isn't everybody's idea of a perfect life! But leaders need the willingness to go around and do that. Third, to have a clear sense about where you going politically, what you're trying to achieve strategically.

JLH: Do you think it's necessary or useful to have a clear vision and a clear plan, or is it more about just reacting to events?
VC: There is a lot of reacting. It is important, I think, to have a sense of direction about where you're going and to give your troops a sense of direction as to where you're going. But the fact is, we're not masters of events and we're very much driven by circumstances. We have to be willing just to adapt and respond.

JLH: And how would you describe your vision for the party?
VC: It's changing, and it's changed under different leaders. It was just about plausible at various stages – indeed, Tim Farron articulated it – to say that we could replace the Labour Party as the alternative party of the left, but the Labour Party has proved to be a lot more durable than we gave them credit for. I think Nick had a very clear view of us as a kind of centrist Dutch-style liberal party; he somehow assumed that the voting system would change and of course it didn't.

What I envisage, which partly reflects current circumstances, is that we've got to set out our stall in terms of basic values – liberal, social democratic, internationalist – to provide a kind of beacon for people to come to. I think it's important to put it that way round rather than thinking in terms of how we position ourselves against other parties, because we can't do anything about them. If the Labour Party splits, the Tory Party splits, well and good, and that helps us to move forward, but we can't make that happen. Much of my frustration over the last year came from people constantly coming to me and saying: why don't you create this new centre movement? Why haven't you managed to split the Tories, or the Labour Party, and get them to join you? The world isn't like that.

JLH: How would you like your time as leader to be remembered?
VC: I think as leader during a positive, optimistic period in which we went from weakness to genuine recovery and a real sense of optimism about the future. But this has to be put in the context that this is a period of massive crisis for the country. And the good thing is that when I was the leader, we were in the right place on the biggest issue of the day. I don't claim sole credit for it; Tim Farron took a very strong lead on it, and my colleagues clearly wanted us to be there. So I wasn't battling against the tide to get there, but the fact that the Lib Dems have managed to lead that movement is something I'm proud of.

JLH: Are you going to remain active in politics?
VC: Yes, though I'm not quite sure how. I've made it clear that I'm happy to continue as MP for Twickenham to the end of the Parliament, but none of us know how long that will be; it could be a few months, it could be two and half years. Then subsequently, I want to do more writing – mainly books, but also newspapers and magazines. I want to come along to conferences and try to influence debate without feeling that I'm having to defend the party line on every occasion. I will support my local party; I've been active in it for thirty years or thereabouts: it's a strong, healthy party, it's well organised and has good membership. I suppose I've contributed to that, and I don't want to let that legacy go.

JLH: Thank you very much.

1 Jo Grimond (leader of the Liberal Party 1956–67), attacked Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell's defence of his party's opposition to UK membership of the European Community in 1962.
2 Chris Mason: Chair of the Scottish Liberal Party 1987–88.
3 Alan Watson: President of the Liberal Party 1984–85; Liberal and then Alliance candidate for Richmond, 1974, 1979, 1983, 1987; entered House of Lords 1999.
4 Manuela Sykes (1925–2017): fought five elections, including in Ipswich, between 1955 and 1966, as a Liberal, and then two elections, in 1972 and 1974, as Labour. Later diagnosed with dementia, she campaigned for the rights of people diagnosed with dementia, and won her right to be allowed to live in her own home in 2014.
5 Paul Marshall and David Laws (eds.), *The Orange Book: Reclaiming Liberalism* (Profile Books, 2004). Vince Cable contributed the chapter on 'Liberal economics and social justice'.
6 Matthew Taylor: MP for Truro and St Austell, 1987–2010, manifesto coordinator for the 2005 election; entered House of Lords 2010.
7 Chris Rennard: Director of Campaigns & Elections 1989–2003, Chief Executive 2003–09. Entered House of Lords 1999.
8 David Laws: MP for Yeovil, 2001–15; co-editor of *The Orange Book*; Chief Secretary to the Treasury 2010, Minister of State for Schools / Cabinet Office, 2012–15.
9 Malcolm Bruce: MP for Gordon 1983–2010; Treasury spokesperson 1994–99; entered House of Lords 2010.
10 Danny Alexander: MP for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey 2005–15; Secretary of State for Scotland 2010, Chief Secretary to the Treasury 2010–15. Nick Clegg: MP for Sheffield Hallam 2005–17, Leader of the Liberal Democrats 2007–15, Deputy Prime Minister 2010–15.
11 A report into post-18 education and funding, written by a commission headed by Philip Augar, was published in May 2019. On 8 August (the day of this interview), the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee criticised the report for its likely impact on the funding of universities.
12 The Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance, written by a commission chaired by Lord Browne of Madingley, was launched on 9 November 2009 and published its findings on 12 October 2010.
13 Steve Webb: MP for Thornbury & Yate 1997–2015, Minister of State for Pensions 2010–15.
14 Paul Burstow: MP for Sutton & Cheam 1997–2015, Minister of State for Care Services 2010–12.
15 'Helicopter money' is an expansionary fiscal policy financed by an increase in money supply. It could be an increase in spending or a tax cut, but it involves printing large sums of money and distributing it to the public in order to stimulate the economy.
16 Alistair Darling, Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer 2007–10. Labour fought the 2010 election on a promise to reduce the government deficit by more than two-thirds over five years.
17 Chris Huhne: MP for Eastleigh 2005–13, Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, 2010–12; resigned from the government in 2012 when charged with conspiracy to pervert the course of justice (to avoid a speeding penalty).
18 In April 2014 Liberal Democrat peer Matthew Oakeshott privately commissioned a poll in four key Liberal Democrat seats which showed that the party was at danger of losing all of them, but would pick up votes if another figure replaced Clegg as party leader. After the poll was leaked to the press the following month, Oakeshott resigned from the party; he now sits as a non-affiliated peer in the House of Lords.

Liberal Democrat lea

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

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

We are continuing to update this table, and therefore present here the comparative statistics for the six leaders of the Liberal Democrats up to the end of Vince Cable's leadership in July 2019.

Leadership performance				
	Ashdown (1988–99)		*Kennedy (1999–2006)*	
Personal ratings (net score satisfied minus dissatisfied (per cent) and date)[a]				
When elected	–4	Aug 1988	+11	Aug 1999
Highest during leadership	+58	May 1997	+42	June 2001
Lowest during leadership	–24	July 1989	+8	June 2004
When stood down	+39	July 1999	+20	Aug 2005
Range (highest – lowest)	82		34	
Party poll ratings (per cent and date)[b]				
When elected	8	July 1988	17	Aug 1999
Highest during leadership	28	July 1993	26	Dec 2004, May 2005
Lowest during leadership	4	June – Aug, Nov 1989	11	Oct 99, July 00, Jan, May 01
When stood down	17	Aug 1999	15	Jan 2006
Westminster election performance: Liberal Democrat MPs and vote (%)				
MPs when elected	19		46	
MPs when stood down	46		62	
Highest election vote (%, date)	17.8	1992	22.0	2005
Lowest election vote (%, date)	16.8	1997	18.3	2001
European election performance: Liberal Democrat MEPs and vote (%)				
MEPs when elected	0		10	
MEPs when stood down	10		12	
Highest election vote (%, date)	16.7	1994	14.9	2004
Lowest election vote (%, date)	6.4	1989	n/a	
Local election performance: councillors and vote[d, e]				
Councillors when elected	3,640		4,485	
Councillors when stood down	4,485		4,743	
Highest election vote (%, date)	27	1994	27	2003, 2004
Lowest election vote (%, date)	17	1990	25	2002
Party membership[f, g]				
Membership when elected	80,104		82,827	
Membership when stood down	82,827		~72,000	
Change (per cent)	+3		–13	

Notes and sources

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

b Ipsos-MORI series on 'voting intention trends'.

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

d Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher,

dership performance

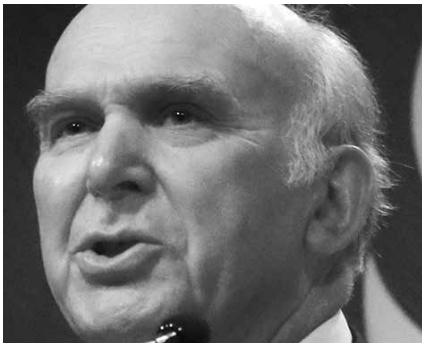
Campbell (2006–07)		*Clegg (2007–15)*		*Farron (2015–17)*		*Cable (2017–19)*	
+5	Mar 2006	–3	Jan 2008	–7	Sept 2015	–1	Sept 2017
+6	May 2006	+53	Oct 2010	–1	Dec 2016	–1	Sept 2017
–13	May 2007	–45	Oct 2012, Sept 2014	–19	May 2017	–19	Oct 2018
–11	Sept 2007	–21	April 2015	–19	May 2017	–7	June 2019
19		98		18		18	
19	Mar 2006	14	Dec 2007	10	Sept 2015	9	July 2017
25	Apr 2006	32	Apr 2010	14	Dec 2016	22	June 2019
11	Oct 2007	6	Feb 2015	6	Feb, Apr, Sept 2016	6	Mar 2018
11	Oct 2007	8	May 2015	7	June 2017	20	July 2019
63[c]		63		8		12	
63		8		12		12	
n/a		23.0	2010	7.4	2017	n/a	
n/a		7.9	2015	n/a		n/a	
12		12		1		1	
12		1		1		16	
n/a		13.7	2009	n/a		19.6	2019
n/a		6.6	2014	n/a		n/a	
4,743		4,420		1,810		1,803	
4,420		1,810		1,803		2,536	
25	2006	25	2009	18	2017	17	2019
24	2007	11	2014	15	2016	14	2018
72,064		64,728		60,215		104,925	
~64,000		44,568		104,925		110,960	
–11		–31		+74		+6	

Elections Centre, Plymouth University. For voting figures, years in which local elections coincided with general elections are excluded.

e The total number of councillors has been falling since the mid 1990s, as unitary authorities have replaced district councils in some areas; from 1994 to 2013, for example, the total number of councillors fell by about 15 per cent.

f Before 2015: Mark Pack. 'Liberal Democrat membership figures', https://www.markpack.org.uk/143767/liberal-democrat-membership-figures/; 2015 on: Liberal Democrat HQ.

g Ashdown, Farron and Cable announced their intention to resign in advance, and stood down on the election of their successor; the membership figures for the end of their period in office and the start of their successor's are therefore identical. Kennedy, Campbell and Clegg all resigned with immediate effect; the exact membership figures are not available at the point of Kennedy's and Campbell's resignations, so figures given here are approximate. While we know that membership increased sharply after Clegg's resignation, in the run-up to the 2015 leadership election, it is not known whether this happened after Kennedy's resignation in 2006 or Campbell's in 2007.



Biography

David Dutton reviews the political and intellectual career of E. D. Simon, 1st Baron Simon of Wythenshawe

E. D. Simon: intell

Ernest Emil Darwin Simon, 1st Baron Simon of Wythenshawe (1879–1960).
Photo: Lafayette, 26 November 1926 (© National Portrait Gallery, London)

lectual in politics

'I have looked back at history', declared Tony Blair towards the end of one of his many semi-clandestine meetings with Paddy Ashdown prior to the general election of 1997, as the two leaders discussed 'the Project', the possibility of long-term cooperation between their two parties. 'The great mistake', Blair continued, 'was that Labour and the Liberals fought because they misunderstood each other in the early part of [the twentieth] century.'[1] The essence of Blair's historical understanding was that the early Labour Party and the Edwardian Liberals were fundamentally components of the same movement, that the breakdown of the so-called Progressive Alliance had been unnecessary and that this fracture had had the effect of turning the twentieth century into an era of Conservative domination. 'It was such nonsense', he insisted on another occasion, 'that Keynes and Bevan and Beveridge were all in different parties.'[2] Such sweeping judgements come more easily to politicians than to cautious historians, but Blair's analysis is not without support among the latter. Most notably, Peter Clarke, musing on the potential triumph of 'progressivism', has argued that enough common ground existed between Edwardian Liberalism and the preponderant social democracy of the early Labour Party to produce eventual fusion – but for the intrusion of the First World War.[3] Historians remain divided as to whether the war marked the definitive end of the Progressive Alliance or merely a regrettable interruption. If, however, the 1920s had indeed witnessed its reinstatement, as many Liberals at least fervently hoped, it seems likely that E. D. Simon would have been in the vanguard of the movement.

Ernest Darwin Simon was born on 9 October 1879 in Manchester, a city with which he would be closely associated throughout his long life, the son of successful German immigrants. His father's engineering companies offered Ernest the financial security upon which to pursue a political career, even during a period of palpable decline in the fortunes of the Liberal Party. The eldest of seven children, he took control of the family business at the age of just 20, when his father died in 1899. At the time, he was an engineering student at Pembroke College, Cambridge, having previously attended Rugby School.

But Simon's early years were marred by an intense shyness. 'I was till recently abnormally and extraordinarily nervous … I probably worked more, and never learnt to talk or tell a story. I never had the courage to LAUGH till I was 28!!'[4] Though he later gained in self-confidence, Simon remained socially awkward, lacking both a sense of humour and the capacity for 'small talk', and was always something of a difficult companion. It was said that, when entertaining guests, any feelings of hospitality could be overwhelmed soon after 9.30 p.m. by the conviction that it was now time for bed.[5] His financial success went hand in hand with a strong social conscience and he felt serious scruples about the relative luxury of Moorlands, his house in Didsbury in Manchester. In the 1920s, such feelings induced him to buy the historic, half-timbered Wythenshawe Hall together with 250 acres of surrounding parkland on the outskirts of the city and to present it, without conditions, to the city corporation. With a simplicity that sat somewhat uneasily alongside his considerable intellect, Simon 'wanted to "do good", he expected others to want to do good, and he was surprised when they did not'.[6]

Simon was elected unopposed to Manchester City Council in 1911 as Liberal representative for Withington, but he accepted from the outset of his political career that he felt much in common with the newly established Labour Party. The Fabians, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, proved a strong influence, especially as a result of their Minority Report for the Royal Commission on the Poor Law. As he explained to his mother in 1910, Sidney Webb

> … is the only man of real ability I know who treats such [social, political and educational] matters in a purely scientific spirit, his one object being impartially to find out the actual truth – he seems to me to have exactly my type of mind. And to find that a man who thinks in my way has been able to achieve so much is very cheering.[7]

With a simplicity that sat somewhat uneasily alongside his considerable intellect, Simon 'wanted to "do good", he expected others to want to do good, and he was surprised when they did not'.

He was early associated with questions of social improvement. An interest in smoke abatement began in 1910 and culminated twelve years later in the publication of his first book.[8] Work on the Manchester Sanitary (later Public Health) Committee initiated a life-long commitment to the improvement of the nation's housing stock.

It was in collaboration with the Webbs that, in 1913, Simon helped to set up the *New Statesman*. The Webbs saw the new publication primarily in terms of giving a boost to the Labour and socialist movement, but Simon, who provided financial support of £1,000 to help get the project off the ground, admired the way in which the Fabians applied factual measurement and scientific analysis to political and social problems, even if he did not agree with everything that appeared in the *New Statesman*'s pages. At this stage at least his Liberalism remained intact. In August 1914, in common with the majority of his fellow Liberals, he reluctantly accepted that Germany's aggression left Britain little alternative but to resist her by force. He attested for military service under the Derby Scheme at the beginning of 1916, but always assumed that he would never be called up because of the important work being carried out by his engineering company. Yet all three of his brothers fought and died in the course of the conflict. As with many others, the experience of war, albeit away from the trenches, encouraged Simon to broaden his political ambitions. By April 1918, he had become chairman of the Withington Divisional Association and a member of the Executive of the Manchester Liberal Federation. He proposed to persuade the latter

> … to produce a post-war party programme, so as to have something to put against the excellent programme prepared by Webb for Labour, and to know where we start. Have quite decided that for the present the Liberal Party is the right place for me notwithstanding the attractiveness of the Labour programme.[9]

The coming of peace and the decision to hold an immediate general election forced Simon to decide between the alternative leaders of a now divided Liberal Party. Five days after the armistice and almost accidently, he found himself joining a delegation of Manchester Liberals led by C. P. Scott of the *Manchester Guardian* as they called upon Lloyd George to avoid a damaging split with Asquith. The prime minister insisted that he remained a Liberal, but that an on-going coalition was the prerequisite of successful post-war reconstruction and that he would fight any Liberal who did not support the coalition.[10] For Simon the choice involved 'a great mental struggle, whether to support the Coalition and be elected, or to refuse to compromise'. Not surprisingly, he sought the advice of the Webbs. They opposed cooperation with Lloyd George, and Simon was 'as usual persuaded by them'. With Simon's backing the Withington Liberals adopted an independent Liberal candidate, George Burditt.[11]

Simon threw himself enthusiastically into the campaign. 'I am thoroughly enjoying it. My only regret is that I am helping Burditt, instead of standing myself!'[12] Before long, however, he was complaining of the lack of relevant content in his party's campaign:

> The utter lack on the part of the Liberal Party and the [Manchester] candidates in particular of any knowledge of or interest in industrial problems, and the great question of equality between the two nations of England, is most striking.[13]

As a local newspaper pointed out, only Labour stood out as the party with an 'entirely independent standpoint and a vision for the future'.[14]

By polling day, Simon knew that independent Liberalism would be heavily defeated. The prevailing atmosphere of the campaign depressed him. In Withington,

> … Carter, the Unionist and Coalition candidate is ignorant, vulgar and brutal, and has got in by screaming angrily 'Support the man who won the war, hang the Kaiser, and make Germany pay'. The whole business is revolting and depressing in the extreme.

His feelings against Lloyd George were particularly strong. The prime minister had neglected the key questions of the League of Nations abroad and reconstruction at home and, by following 'the lust for blood of the yellow press', had reduced the contest to 'the lowest level of demagoguery'. By playing to the 'lowest passions of the ignorant man of the new electorate', Lloyd George had won a landslide victory and a mandate for 'a policy of Prussianism and revenge'.[15]

Nationally, the Asquithian rump of the once dominant Liberal Party was reduced to just twenty-eight MPs. Undaunted, Simon re-entered the sphere of local politics and was re-elected to the City Council in November 1919. His thinking was still focused on the possibilities of Liberal–Labour cooperation. In the city 'extraordinary Labour wins' had overthrown a thirty-year-old Conservative domination and replaced it with a 'working progressive majority'. This, he wrote, 'opens up vistas of useful and even thrilling work which I can hardly yet grasp'.[16] The problem, of which Simon seems to have been less conscious, was whether the game of parliamentary cooperation and electoral pacts was one that Labour was willing to play. Though it continued to welcome defections from the ranks of Liberalism, Labour was far less inclined on strategic grounds than before 1914 to contemplate party realignment. Ramsay MacDonald, in particular, understanding the realities of two-party politics in a first-past-the-post electoral system, saw that Labour's

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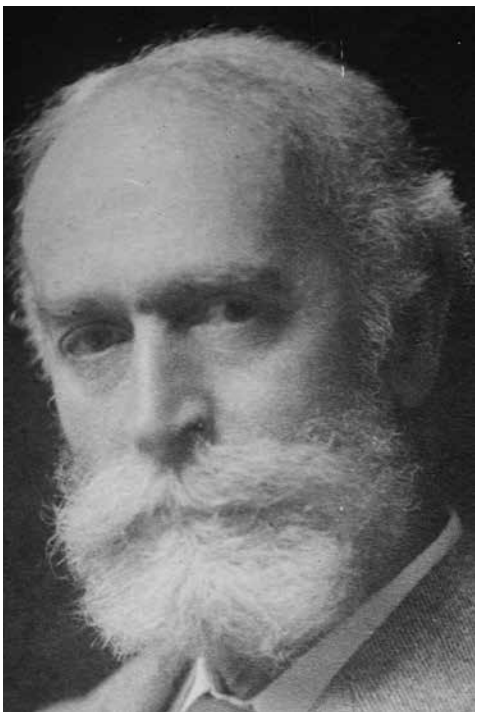

C P Scott in 1919

Beatrice and Sidney Webb, c 1895

long-term interests lay in driving Liberals to the political periphery and establishing his own party as the only viable alternative to Conservative government. Tellingly, Peter Clarke has noted that, by the 1920s, any ideological convergence between Liberals and social democrats was counter-balanced by a tactical divergence, 'much to the frustration of those [like Simon] of a progressive outlook'.[17]

Yet, at a time when Liberalism generally struggled – largely unsuccessfully – to re-establish its pre-war ascendancy, the party did enjoy something of an intellectual renaissance, a process in which Simon played a significant role. Convinced of the need for new policies to suit a new age, in the winter of 1918–19 Simon began to organise meetings of local businessmen at his Manchester home to discuss industrial questions. Ramsay Muir, then Professor of Modern History at the University of Manchester, was also invited and, after a few meetings, produced a short book, *Liberalism and Industry* (1920). Its publication, Simon later recalled, 'marked the beginning of a long campaign to persuade the leaders of the Party to adopt a forward industrial policy' which culminated, nearly a decade later, in the adoption of the famous 'Yellow Book'.[18] From the beginning, Simon's aim was to reshape the party's thinking in such a way as to recognise the changes occasioned by the war and to offer a programme that could at least compete with Labour in terms of its appeal to the working-class electorate. This raised again the possibility of a change of political allegiance:

> A modified radical party would suit me best, or a new combination of radical Labour if only that could be brought about … But about four fifths of the people whose political views I admire are in the Labour Party! Of course if I do go for Parliament it would be rather nice to stand for Withington; and if I made up my mind and worked for it I could probably be Liberal (or for that matter Labour!) candidate next time.[19]

Yet bringing the Liberal Party to the position where Simon's dilemma would be resolved was no easy task. Looking back in 1925, he wrote:

> It is the penalty of belonging to a party with a great past, that some of one's colleagues who are natural conservatives will live in their past, and regard it as the whole duty of a Liberal to cheer lustily when [W. E.] Gladstone, or Free Trade, or Home Rule are mentioned. These Liberals are probably all over 60 years of age … and the only way they can serve the cause of Liberalism is by silence.[20]

Many within the party leadership shared Henry Gladstone's conviction that the platitudes of the nineteenth century retained their relevance: 'Peace, Retrenchment and Reform, the fine old watchwords are again the necessity of the moment!'[21] As Michael Bentley has concluded, 'All too plainly, liberalism was out of date'.[22]

At a meeting at Simon's Herefordshire farm[23] in the spring of 1920, at which the guests included Muir, Edward Scott, the son of the editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, and the author Philip Guedalla, the notion of the Liberal Summer School was devised. The idea was to establish a forum for individuals of Liberal inclination, though not necessarily formal party affiliation, to explore a range of social and economic issues. The first such gathering in Grasmere in September 1921 would bring together the existing Manchester group and such Cambridge intellectuals

Wythenshawe Hall in 2005; a 16th-century medieval timber-framed historic house and former manor house, Simon bought it and donated it to Manchester Corporation in 1926; in 1930 it was opened to the public as a museum.

as J. M. Keynes, Walter Layton and Hubert Henderson. According to J. A. Hobson, it was 'much the best thing of the kind he had been at', with all the discussions being conducted 'in a truly Liberal spirit', a fine tribute, 'coming from so distinguished a member of the Labour party'. 'I am really hopeful', recorded Simon, 'that it will be the beginning of a genuine awakening of thought and study in Liberal circles.'[24]

By the summer of 1920 Simon had become more optimistic about his existing party. 'The Manchester movement finally begins to have possibilities', he noted. A resolution demanding an industrial policy, sent by the group to the Leamington meeting of the National Liberal Federation, did not meet with the anticipated rejection. 'We were received with open arms, given seats on the platform and our resolution accepted by the official gang.'[25] Against this background Simon was adopted as prospective Liberal parliamentary candidate for the Withington division in March 1921. His prospects were thought to be good. Six months later, however, he was invited to become Manchester's Lord Mayor, an appointment which traditionally precluded party political activity. A serious attack of pneumonia at the start of February 1922 added to his difficulties. The Lloyd George coalition fell from power following the celebrated meeting of Tory MPs at the Carlton Club on 19 October. With polling fixed for 15 November and Simon's mayoralty not ending until 9 November, his active campaign was necessarily brief. He focused on the key issues of housing and unemployment. The whole community, he urged, should accept responsibility for ensuring that every willing worker should receive either work or appropriate maintenance, while 'a larger policy was needed in respect of housing'.[26] The Conservative candidate, Dr T. Watts, stressed the more mundane needs of the electorate, campaigning for cheap beer! Despite a swing of almost 18 per cent to the Liberals, Watts narrowly emerged victorious.[27]

Prime Minister Baldwin's wish to introduce a policy of tariff reform necessitated a further reference to the electorate and a second election was called after little more than a year. Despite underlying indications of continuing decline, the Liberal Party, united (superficially at least) for the first time since 1916, experienced an electoral revival, albeit one that still left it stubbornly in third place in the national poll. In Withington, emphasising his commitment to a bold housing policy, Simon was comfortably elected to parliament.[28] But a private diary note, drawn up around this time, reveals his on-going doubts about the party he would now represent in the House of Commons. The party leadership was a source of particular concern:

> Saw something of Sir Donald Maclean [who had effectively led the parliamentary party pending Asquith's return to the Commons following his by-election victory at Paisley in February 1920] and Lord Gladstone [then Director of Party Headquarters] at Cambridge. Asquith and [John] Simon [widely regarded as heir apparent to the leadership of the Asquithian party] in comparison are angels of light. Maclean an amiable goodlooking stupid country solicitor – Gladstone runs the Liberal organisation as a happy family, all on Christian name terms. He drops in on Geoffrey Howard [who had responsibility for extra-parliamentary organisation] for a cup of tea twice a week. Knows literally nothing about the NLF; no touch with MPs … The absolute limit of amiable helplessness.

Simon's often-quoted conclusion pointed to the party's one hope – as he at least saw it. 'What a party! No leaders. No organisation. No policy! Only a Summer School! But it is still worth an effort.'[29]

Simon lost no time in delivering his maiden speech in January 1924. Having served as chairman of the Housing Committee on Manchester City Council from 1919 to 1923, it was no surprise that he chose to speak on the same subject. But Simon's speech had more than the symbolic significance that usually attaches to such occasions. On the basis of his experience of Liberal–Labour cooperation over housing in Manchester, he used it to justify Liberal support for the formation of a Labour government:

> We believe, and I think in this we are in almost complete agreement with our friends on the Labour benches, that it is the duty of the Government to use all their powers and resources to build houses until we have cleared off the overcrowding which is such a disgrace to our civilisation and cleared off the slums which are an even greater disgrace.[30]

At the end of the debate, and granted that the general election had failed to give any party an

overall Commons majority, Baldwin's Tory government was voted down and a minority Labour administration headed by Ramsay MacDonald duly took its place. The new prime minister privately expressed his admiration for Simon's contribution, while the latter had done much to establish himself as his party's expert on the whole question of housing.[31] Over the months that followed he made frequent interventions in debates on this subject, sometimes less supportive of Labour's position than his maiden speech had implied. Simon's detailed knowledge and understanding often exposed the shortcomings of the Labour minister, John Wheatley. Simon also succeeded in piloting a private member's measure, the Prevention of Eviction Bill, on to the statute book.

Overall, however, Simon's first taste of parliamentary life proved a disappointing experience. His hopes that a continuing Liberal–Labour majority would open the way for constructive cooperation in the fields of foreign affairs, unemployment and education, as well as housing, proved largely unfounded. 'No Labour leader ever thanked a Liberal for support or help' and it became increasingly apparent that Labour's ambition was to kill off the Liberal Party rather than sustain it. MacDonald himself was 'vain and self-righteous' with an 'unfortunate habit' of telling lies in the House of Commons.[32] Just as seriously, Simon saw little reason for optimism in his own party. In the conflict of loyalty that had confronted every Liberal since 1916, his inclination hitherto had always been to side with Asquith and against Lloyd George. But there was a problem here. Since the fall of the coalition, Lloyd George had increasingly positioned himself as the potential leader of the Left of the party, but Asquith 'who is really a Whig is accepted as a better Liberal than he'.[33] It took time for figures such as Simon to accept that Asquith would remain content to reiterate traditional, but dated, Liberal principles and that it was Lloyd George who offered the only hope of an updated and relevant party programme. The brief months of Labour government did much to clarify Simon's thinking:

> Throughout the session, except for a few big points, [Asquith] took no trouble to understand the problems, his only action was inaction; a policy of masterly inactivity carried to extreme lengths. Anything further removed from 'leadership' in any true sense of the word it is difficult to conceive. His brain is excellent, probably as good as ever if he would only apply it. It is the interest that is lacking. He is now prepared tacitly to accept the position which he refused in 1916 when L-G offered to let him remain PM so long as he did not interfere with the direction and the management of the war by L-G and the War Cabinet. If he acted during the war with the same utter lack of decision and energy as during this session, then it was absolutely necessary to turn him out.[34]

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Granted its minority status, the first Labour administration was always more likely to be a short, practical experience in the mechanics of government than an extended period of legislative achievement. It fell from power in the autumn of 1924 and the country faced its third general election in the space of two years. Strapped for cash and fielding only 340 candidates, the Liberal Party faced predictable disaster, entering the contest with the appearance of a 'disorganised rabble'.[35] The progress made in 1923 at the expense of the Tories was now emphatically reversed. Three-quarters of the parliamentary party went down to defeat, including Simon at Withington.[36] It was inevitably time for a further exercise of reflection and self-analysis.

Simon saw four possible courses of action for himself: to do all he could to revive the Liberal Party, working hard in the Manchester Liberal Federation and the Summer Schools, and speaking whenever asked; to do the same, but half-heartedly, giving only limited time to politics; to withdraw altogether from national politics for the time being; or to join the Labour Party. His political philosophy remained unchanged and seemed to point towards the last of these options:

> My political aim is to give the best chance to every child, and to remove the excessive inequalities of today. That is practically the aim of Labour … All the enthusiasm and driving force is in the Labour Party, except for a few fanatics on land, or temperance or Free Trade. Liberals as a party have little in common except hatreds – hatred of protection and hatred of socialism. The great question is whether a sombre constructive Summer School policy can ever be made to appeal to – or even be understood by – the mass of voters. I don't think any democracy has ever been interested in such a policy of reason and hard thinking. They believe that Labour stands for the working man and Conservatism for the rich, and that Liberalism is some half-way house, full of compromise, no ideas except Free Trade.

At the same time two factors stood in the way of Simon's abandoning Liberalism and joining Labour. The first was Labour's commitment to the nationalisation of the means of production. Interestingly, Simon's position on this issue was more nuanced than that of many fellow Liberals:

> As an assertion of principle that the country would prosper under complete socialism this is a piece of unparalleled intellectual arrogance; as a statement of the direction in which we should aim to progress experimentally by encouraging every kind of experiment in cooperation, guilds, municipal development etc., I entirely agree with it.

Lloyd George, freed from the Conservative embrace of his coalition days, was determined to imbue Liberalism with a radical, progressive sense of purpose that had been absent for many years. This meant elevating the Summer School movement from the periphery to the forefront of the party's activity. For a brief interlude the party would display at its heart an intellectual liveliness that belied its parlous electoral standing.

The second impediment was more clear-cut. The Labour Party, he argued, was largely controlled by the trade unions, in the interests of a class rather than of the nation as a whole.

Simon's conclusion revealed a mind unresolved, yet veering towards the Labour option:

> … the Labour Party is a very powerful party and will almost certainly remain so. If people like the Summer School hold aloof, its two faults will be accentuated. If we join we can work from inside to reduce them.

As it was, the division of the progressive forces at the 1924 general election had given the Conservatives a parliamentary majority that would keep them in government for five years. The presence of just one progressive party was the logical goal. Indeed, a reasonably strong Liberal Party, itself probably dependent on the introduction of electoral reform, would have the effect of strengthening the Tories by splitting the progressive vote. Should not Liberals of Simon's mould 'become a wing of Labour and try to guide them on wise lines'?

> The time has come to consider this very seriously: the hopeless state of Liberal leadership is one of the main factors – if we had a Gladstone who cared for the condition of the people, the fight would be worthwhile. But it is a bleak prospect to spend the next four years struggling to teach an apathetic rank and file something they won't trouble to learn.[37]

Sadly for Simon, Gladstone was not available (and W. E.'s sons Herbert and Henry, both still active in the party's ranks, were not what Simon had in mind!). But there was Lloyd George, and it was his enthusiasm for what Simon was trying to do that persuaded Simon, for the time being at least, to remain within the Liberal fold. Party leader in succession to Asquith from October 1926, and in practice its driving force for several months before that, Lloyd George, freed from the Conservative embrace of his coalition days, was determined to imbue Liberalism with a radical, progressive sense of purpose that had been absent for many years. This meant elevating the Summer School movement from the periphery to the forefront of the party's activity. For a brief interlude the party would display at its heart an intellectual liveliness that belied its parlous electoral standing. With a subvention of £10,000 from his notorious political fund, Lloyd George invited the leading lights of the Summer School to carry out an in-depth inquiry into industrial policy. No conditions were attached. Lloyd George 'had solemnly undertaken that he would use no veto, nor interfere in any way with the findings of the committee, so that the Summer School could feel that its independence was not jeopardised; but he asked to be allowed to take part in its deliberations'.[38] He showed his personal commitment by inviting members of the Liberal Industrial Inquiry for working weekends at his Surrey home in Churt. 'He was a perfect host', recalled Simon. 'He gave us the benefit of his vast experience; he never made the least attempt to use his position to influence our report, except by contributing to the discussion on an equality with all other members.'[39]

Lloyd George's financial support facilitated more elaborate research than would otherwise have been the case. Qualified individuals were invited to hearings irrespective of their political views, while investigating teams reported from foreign experience and researchers submitted a mass of detailed memoranda. The inquiry brought together an impressive array of politicians and economists, including Walter Layton, Maynard Keynes, Herbert Samuel and Ramsay Muir. Simon was vice-chairman and chairman of the Labour and Trade Unions sub-committee. Much of the initial draft of the resulting 'Yellow Book', formally published in February 1928 under the title *Britain's Industrial Future,* was written by Simon himself. It was, he later suggested with a forgivable absence of modesty, 'the best survey of British industry published in the inter-war period'.[40] Certainly, 'the Summer School had reached the peak of its influence within the Liberal party'.[41] The 'Yellow Book' argued that, in the post-war world, the traditional antipathy of individualism and socialism had become unreal and put forward far-reaching proposals for government planning of and intervention in the economy. It aimed to show how poverty and unemployment could be reduced and equal economic opportunity be offered to all. A key feature of the 'Yellow Book' was the Keynesian idea of deficit financing – unbalancing the budget in order to pump-prime the economy. This involved extensive schemes of public works, with an emphasis on road building. Among the report's more innovative features were a call for national minimum wages for each industry, provision for compulsory profit-sharing schemes and the introduction of workers' councils to share management responsibilities.

It was hard to deny that Liberalism was enjoying an intellectual renaissance. Simon reflected on what the Summer School movement had achieved:

> A great success – I knew exactly what I wanted. I learnt from Webb and [R. H.] Tawney the necessity of an industrial policy – the Liberal leaders ignored it. Through the Summer School we both [Simon and Muir] worked out the policy and in just under 10 years effectively imposed it on the party. Biggest achievement the Yellow Book … I think it is a model of what political parties ought to do in an ideal democracy![42]

Many Liberals entered the general election campaign, called by Baldwin for 30 May 1929,

sincerely believing that their party had a realistic prospect of regaining power. Those on the party's right wing retained profound doubts about the direction in which Lloyd George was travelling, but most succeeded in presenting an appearance of unity for the benefit of the electorate. But doubts of a different kind existed on the part of the Summer School's principals. 'Whether [the 'Yellow Book'] is of any use to the Liberal party politically', pondered Simon, 'is another and less important matter.'[43] Muir was more explicit:

> [Liberalism] had to be given a 'constructive programme' not as a bait to catch the electorate, but as a means of keeping its soul alive. That has been an immense piece of work … Of course, we know that very few people will read [*Britain's Industrial Future*]. It won't reach the electorate … [T]he electors don't vote on policies: we are governed by a wavering illiterate mass which is incapable of understanding policies.[44]

Privately, Muir predicted that the Liberal Party might only manage to raise its tally of MPs to around eighty. The result was even worse. The victim of the first-past-the-post electoral system, Liberals secured nearly a quarter of the popular vote, but just fifty-nine MPs. In the context of another hung parliament, the Liberals again held the balance of power, but with as yet no concerted policy on the attitude to be adopted towards the resulting minority Labour government. Narrowly regaining the Withington constituency he had lost in 1924,[45] Simon still pinned his hopes on Liberal–Labour cooperation, 'looking forward to legislation on the fruitful field which is common to both parties'. But he was disappointed by the tone of Lloyd George's speech at the first post-election party meeting, which he found 'threatening'.[46]

Au fond, Lloyd George and Simon probably agreed on the basic aim of keeping Labour in power. Indeed, by the middle of 1931 the party leader seems to have been engaged in clandestine talks with the government about the creation of a formal coalition which might have seen him emerge as Foreign Secretary or Chancellor. But, wary of recreating the impression of subservience which had come to characterise the Liberal position during the first Labour government, Lloyd George was neither clear nor consistent in articulating his overall strategy to his own party. Simon, in fact, discerned three distinct changes in his position over the first year of Labour government: 'a first one of peace, followed by one of war; then again a peaceful period. Now, judging by the last meeting, Mr Lloyd George intends another period of war.'[47] Simon had little time for such tergiversations. For him, policies were what mattered, not narrow party considerations. His diary for the period offers a revealing commentary on his growing disillusionment with his leader and the Liberal Party as a whole. Not only did the hard-won unity of the late 1920s collapse; in addition, Simon found himself at odds even with some who had hitherto been his closest allies. His personal history mirrored that of his party. By the first months of 1931 Liberalism was visibly collapsing as a coherent political force.

Simon's first impressions of the Labour government were entirely favourable. When he praised the 1924 Housing Act, the Commons were reminded of his closeness to Labour. Wheatley, Labour's former Housing Minister, responded in kind:

> All of us who have taken an interest in the housing problem rejoice to have him with us again … I could not wish for a finer eulogy of the Act for which I was responsible than the one to which we have listened this afternoon, and I should be very cold indeed if I did not feel thrilled with satisfaction when the hon. Member described … the effect that I made during my period of office.[48]

The raising of the school leaving age and the continuation of the Wheatley housing subsidies were, Simon argued, 'two really important things' which showed that Labour would pursue social reform in a totally different spirit from the previous Conservative government. 'In these two cases they have done exactly what a good Liberal Government would also have done.' It was therefore self-evidently in the national interest to keep Labour in power and for Liberals to do all they could to help the government to carry out 'an effective progressive policy'. Simon recognised a political downside. If Labour performed well, they rather than the Liberals would get all the credit. On the other hand, if Labour was turned out prematurely, the electorate would think they had not been given a fair chance and would then punish the Liberal Party at the ballot box. So 'the right course, *even from a narrow party point of view*, is to give them steady support, at least until the Speaker's Conference [on electoral reform] has reported'. At this stage, Simon was hopeful that the majority of the Liberal parliamentary party was of the same mind. But he sensed also a minority group who hoped that Labour 'would go too far and that we could then attack them'. The trouble with such people, he tellingly added, 'is, I am afraid, fundamental – they don't want economic equality'.[49]

By the end of the year such concerns were increasing. The tendency, noted Simon, was for individual MPs to consider the effect of every parliamentary vote on their own constituencies. Among the 'rather [more] broad-minded' the tendency was to consider the fate of the Liberal Party at the next election and the strategic question of 'when and how we should cooperate with or oppose the Labour Party'. But 'the number of people who take my view of being interested almost solely in the measures themselves,

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and disregarding both tactics and strategy, seems to me infinitesimal'.[50] He became increasingly unhappy with the performance of Lloyd George, interpreting the leader's stance over the government's Coal Mines Bill in the winter of 1929–30 as an attempt to bring it down. In fact, Lloyd George was probably trying to force the government to acknowledge its need of Liberal support.[51] But he seemed strangely reluctant to share his thinking with the parliamentary party. 'The trouble is', concluded Simon, 'that he always comes on important matters with his mind made up, and that however much discussion there may be, it is a certainty that the Party decision will be exactly what Lloyd George wants. The real conditions of discussion and agreement do not exist.'[52]

By the summer of 1930 Simon seemed ready to break ranks, setting out his thinking in a long letter to the chief whip, Sir Robert Hutchison:

> The fundamental question for the Liberal Party, which has never been properly discussed at a Party meeting, is whether, broadly, in the present circumstances, we prefer a Labour Government, with ourselves holding the balance, or whether, on the other hand, we should prefer to force a General Election, which would almost inevitably result in a Conservative Government with a large majority over both the other Parties combined.

From a national point of view, Simon was clear that the first option was much to be preferred. The Labour government's foreign policy, attitude towards India and opposition to tariffs all pointed in the same direction. 'Generally speaking, we have at present, in effect, a Moderate Liberal Government.' His hope was that, if a general election could be delayed for another year, an improvement in world trade might lead to a substantial reduction in unemployment, making it possible to avoid an overall Conservative majority in the new parliament. Certainly, an immediate election would leave the Liberals weaker than they then were. The right policy for the party to follow was 'one of peace with the Government', providing them with a dependable parliamentary majority, while 'influencing them as far as possible to act on Liberal lines'.

Simon moved inexorably to his conclusion:

> I am, therefore, *not* prepared to vote against the Government on any issue which would cause their resignation, unless and until the situation is changed to such an extent that it seems in the interests of the nation, and of the Liberal Party, that a General Election should take place. Further, if the Liberal Party should decide to make further attempts to defeat the Government … before such change in the situation arises, I should consider it my plain duty to vote with the Government.[53]

In the event, Simon's letter was never sent. Hutchison resigned as chief whip in the autumn after a display of extreme parliamentary gymnastics – defying a whip which he himself had sent out.

But, if Simon appeared ready to go his own way, so too did many other members of the parliamentary party. Three-way splits in the Commons – votes in support of the government, against it and abstentions – had become commonplace. Harry Nathan, MP for Bethnal Green North-East, judged that the party was 'done for'. Its organisation was falling to pieces and disunity in parliament was communicating itself to the party outside Westminster. He 'did not see how we could fight the next election as a party'.[54] Simon was of the same mind. 'The Party is not in any way organised. There is no consultation or consideration of policy … The Party exists for each man to carry out his own job and otherwise to register and support the personal conclusions of the Leader.'[55]

Simon added to the party's divisions at the 1930 Summer School, when he suggested that, by buying British motorcars rather than American ones, the individual purchaser could have a beneficial effect on domestic employment. The particular significance of his remark lay in the fact that the car industry was one of only a small number that benefited from the protection of the wartime McKenna Duties. Simon's long-term colleague, Walter Layton, disagreed, while Ramsay Muir complained of the effect of his pronouncement on efforts to maintain party unity, but Keynes and Hobson endorsed Simon's iconoclastic departure. Simon went on to argue that the existence of an apparently 'permanent surplus of unemployed labour' rendered free trade irrelevant and that a temporary revenue tariff of 10 per cent should be imposed.[56]

At one level Simon's departure was unsurprising. 'Throughout 1930 the ranks of the free traders were thinned by the desertion of economists, industrialists, bankers and trade unionists.'[57] The onset of the world economic crisis following the Wall Street Crash of October 1929 compelled all but the most obtuse of Liberals to re-examine their fundamental beliefs. But the apostasy of a leading spokesman of the Manchester School, so long synonymous with the doctrine of free trade, was striking nonetheless and precipitated 'a considerable fluttering in the Liberal dovecot'.[58] Habitués of the Summer School were used to conducting their debates away from the glare of publicity. But Simon's remarks figured prominently in the press and contributed to the growing perception of a party in the process of disintegration.[59]

The appointment of Archibald Sinclair to succeed Hutchison as chief whip gave Simon cause for renewed hope, but any improvement in the Liberal performance in the Commons was short-lived. Indeed, the issue of land taxes, badly

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mishandled by Lloyd George, gave Hutchison, (the unrelated) John Simon and Leslie Hore-Belisha the excuse they had been looking for formally to resign the Liberal whip on 26 June 1931. Ernest Simon gave vent to his disgust:

> The whole question brings out very vividly the two main troubles with the Liberal Party at the present time: first of all the incredible ineptitude of Mr Lloyd George as a leader, and secondly the fact that many, and indeed most, of the members are interested mainly in their chance of being re-elected next time rather than considering broad questions of national welfare. Those who have seceded are all men who could not have been re-elected if the Tories opposed them.[60]

By this time, however, crisis within the Labour cabinet was beginning to overshadow the more parochial dissensions of the Liberal Party. Simon was on a family holiday in Switzerland as matters came to a head with the Labour government resigning, to be replaced by an all-party National administration, still under the premiership of Ramsay MacDonald. To his surprise, Simon received an invitation from Herbert Samuel, now acting leader of the Liberals owing to Lloyd George's illness, to accept office as parliamentary secretary at the Ministry of Health, the government department then in charge of housing. Simon himself was incapacitated by a carbuncle which necessitated surgery once he returned to London. But the post was kept open for him and, having received assurances that the government, formed to effect wide-ranging cuts in public expenditure, would not seek to reduce housing subsidies, he accepted the appointment.

It proved to be one of the shortest ministerial careers in modern history. 'I had about a fortnight at the Ministry of Health', he recorded:

> I had ten questions to answer on my first day. They gave one the opportunity of seeing the head of the department concerned, and in each case I found no difficulty in getting out the necessary facts as a result of a few minutes' conversation. Nor did I have any difficulties in dealing with any supplementaries that were asked. The civil servants are all able and quite first-class at this sort of thing.

But Simon was less impressed by the preparedness of his Ministry to tackle the housing question:

> The department seems to have no curiosity and no real desire to understand the housing problem, and has just not bothered its head seriously about the high rents in Manchester, although the head of the department makes the excuse that he has never had a Minister ready to stand up to Manchester and has therefore not been able to do anything.[61]

Such concerns were rendered irrelevant when the Tory-dominated government, against Liberal objections, called a general election for 27 October, to seek a 'doctor's mandate' to continue its economic policies. Simon had decided not to stand again in Withington but, having accepted appointment as a government minister, he felt obliged to contest the election and was invited to carry the National Government's colours in the constituency of Penryn and Falmouth in Cornwall. Here, despite a letter of endorsement from the prime minister, he was defeated by a Conservative, one of many victims of the lack of fraternal comradeship shown by supposed colleagues in the National Government.[62]

Simon's career in party politics was effectively over. He had never become a House of Commons man in the sense of one who revelled in the traditions and rituals of the Palace of Westminster, or who felt comfortably at home in its bars and dining rooms. The 1931 general election left the Conservative Party in such a dominant position that it was unlikely to be unseated for at least a decade and, in any case, Simon now had more than enough evidence to write off the Liberal Party as a viable vehicle for his ambitions. At the same time, Labour's shift to the left in the early 1930s would not have made a change of political allegiance an attractive proposition. Though he would be persuaded to contest, unsuccessfully, the English Universities seat as an Independent[63] in 1946, following the death of Eleanor Rathbone, Simon, knighted in 1932, largely abandoned further political ambitions. Yet, as the National Government began its long tenure of power, he was still, in political terms, a relatively young man and it was never likely that his fertile mind would now wind down. Rather it was a time for new departures and initiatives.

Perhaps the most interesting was the Association for Education in Citizenship founded in 1934 in association with Mrs Eva Hubback, who had collaborated with Simon since before the First World War and who had been responsible for introducing him to his future wife, Shena Potter. Both had an input into the pamphlet *Education for Citizenship in Secondary Schools* which, anticipating the place later occupied by 'civics' in the school curriculum, argued that men and women had to be trained for the special task of being citizens and offered case studies of how the teaching of good citizenship could be integrated into academic subject matter. This task was judged to be central to 'the building of a just and efficient social order'.[64] A visit to the Soviet Union in 1936 (showing the continuing influence of the Webbs who had been there in 1932) had the specific purpose of studying Moscow's city government. It reinforced Simon's commitment to public ownership of the land as an essential prerequisite to successful town planning. More than half of *Moscow in the Making*, published in 1937, was Simon's work.

Symbolic of this new stage in Simon's life and career was a renewed focus upon Manchester. For one thing, his business interests had suffered badly with the onset of the world economic crisis and demanded more of his attention than hitherto. Both Henry Simon Ltd. and Simon Carves Ltd. had lost heavily in 1931 as a result of bad debts. More pleasingly, he was able to watch with satisfaction as the City Council, with his wife Shena playing a leading role, completed its scheme to create a garden suburb to the south of the River Mersey, with Wythenshawe Hall and its park, gifted by the Simons a few years earlier, at its heart.

The late 1930s saw a progressive worsening of the international scene which inevitably attracted the attention and concern of Simon's Liberal and socialist contemporaries. Though he recognised the potential threat to his hopes of a better social order, Simon was not tempted to re-enter the political fray. As his biographer puts it, 'the events which were driving Europe to disaster seemed to impinge on his consciousness like "noises off" '.[65] When the Second World War did break out, Simon readily offered his services, becoming Regional Information Officer for the North-Western Area at the Ministry of Information. In 1940 he was appointed Area Officer for the Ministry of Aircraft Production in the North-Western Region and, the following year, became deputy chairman of the Building Trade Council in the Ministry of Works. As the conflict progressed, his mind turned naturally to the problems of post-war reconstruction and he was inevitably attracted by the ideas coming out of the Labour Party. Under the imprint of Victor Gollancz, Simon's *Rebuilding Britain – a Twenty Year Plan* was published by the Left Book Club in the spring of 1945. He had lost none of his youthful vision or ambition:

> … we can in twenty years rebuild Britain, so as to enable every inhabitant, child or adult, to live in a healthy home, in a neighbourhood so planned as to allow easy access for all members of the family to their places of work and recreation.[66]

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By the war's end there was nothing to stop him joining Labour, as his wife had done in 1935, though this would be as a simple statement of creed rather than a gesture of continuing personal ambition. The general election of 1945 reduced the Liberal Party to a state of near irrelevance and Labour's nationalisation plans appeared to be based on pragmatic necessity rather than doctrinaire socialism. He announced his decision in 1946 after a period of reflection in the Lake District,[67] and the following year accepted the offer of a peerage from a Labour government that was looking to strengthen its position in the upper chamber. But Simon was determined to use his new status to advocate the causes in which he believed rather than to become a party hack. He took the title of Lord Simon of Wythenshawe, notwithstanding the objections of John Simon (by now Viscount Simon of Stackpole Elidor). In the context of the contemporary debate over nationalisation, he was already taking an interest in the BBC as a body which worked effectively without competition or the need to make a profit. Soon after his ennoblement, Simon was invited to become the corporation's chairman where he joined an old Manchester friend, William Haley, who was already in post as director-general. During Simon's five years in this job he was, based on his experience of American television, an implacable opponent of the introduction of commercial broadcasting. In 1950 the television play, *Party Manners*, caused considerable controversy with its reference to Labour ministers endangering national security by releasing secrets of the atomic bomb. Simon used his powers to prevent a repeat showing of the programme, on the grounds that it could undermine respect for parliamentary democracy, but it was a decision he soon came to regret.[68] His memoir of his time at the BBC, *The BBC from Within* (1953) again anticipated later debates with its criticism of the constitutional relationship between the chairman and governors on the one hand and the director-general on the other.

When awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Manchester in 1944, Simon was described by the Public Orator as 'the embodiment of perpetual youth, inexhaustible vigour and insatiable appetite for experiment and adventure'.[69] If his final years witnessed some understandable signs of waning physical powers, his mind seemed as alert and productive as ever. 'Late' interests included the marked rise in global population, leading to his close involvement in the International Planned Parenthood Federation. A £15,000 bequest allowed for the establishment, at Simon's death, of the Simon Population Trust. He also became convinced that 'the nuclear problem was incomparably more serious than my favourite population problem or anything else' and he joined the executive committee of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, while remaining uneasy about the tactics of civil disobedience.[70] At the same time, his continuing excitement about the future was evident in his energetic efforts to raise funds for the Jodrell Bank telescope project under the direction of Sir Bernard Lovell.

Much of Simon's energy was devoted to the University of Manchester, of whose council he had become chairman in 1941, and higher education in general. The Simon Fund set up in 1944 financed fellowships for mature students to pursue research in the social sciences. He also put much effort into the expansion of teaching and research in science and engineering, where Britain was beginning to fall behind competitor countries. A particular concern was to see Colleges of Technology integrated more fully, as in Manchester, into the university sector. Finally, on 11 May

1960, Simon, speaking in the House of Lords, urged the government to set up a committee 'to enquire and report on the extent and nature of the provisions of full-time education for those over the age of eighteen, whether in universities or in other educational institutions'.[71] At the end of a lengthy debate, the government expressed 'sympathy' for Simon's motion. Perhaps surprisingly, this was not the end of the matter. Seven months later, Prime Minister Macmillan announced the appointment of a committee under Lord Robbins to consider the long-term development of higher education in Britain. This would prove the starting point of the massive expansion of the next two decades. Sadly, Simon did not live to witness this denouement. He suffered a stroke at his cottage in the Lake District and died on 3 October 1960. He left an estate valued at almost £400,000, many millions in today's values.

How then should we assess the career of Ernest Simon and, in particular, his contribution to British Liberalism? Self-evidently, his stature does not depend upon his activities as a parliamentarian. Simon was an MP for a total of less than three years and a junior minister for a matter of weeks. He was primarily an ideas man, who strained tirelessly to give the Liberal Party an intellectual content relevant to the twentieth century and one that would leave it capable of competing against, or perhaps collaborating with, the advancing Labour movement. But what did those ideas represent? Does Simon's career illustrate the lost opportunities of the Progressive Alliance, opportunities which if taken would have transformed the political complexion of the entire twentieth century in the way that Blair and Ashdown later imagined? Perhaps. But many Liberals would always have found much of Simon's political philosophy hard to swallow. His form of municipal socialism stood at one extreme of the party's spectrum. They wanted in the 1920s to build their politics around the concept of resistance to socialism, as the large number of Conservative–Liberal pacts in local government testifies. Furthermore, Simon's vision took little account of the (essentially hostile) attitude of his would-be Labour partners. One historian has attributed the Liberal decision to install Labour in office in 1924 to 'a "progressive" delusion'.[72] So even a politician with far more charm and guile than Simon possessed would have struggled to bring his goal to fruition. Alternatively, then, Simon stands as a graphic illustration of the hopeless diversity which Liberals struggled to contain within a single political party.

At all events, Simon's impact upon his party's fortunes was real, but limited and temporary. He operated, of course, in an era of decline, a process that he attempted to arrest. For a few brief years, the draining away of young progressives from the Liberal to the Labour Party may have been slowed down. There is some evidence of increasing interest in Liberalism in the universities in the late 1920s. But such trends did not survive the political crisis of 1929–31. The fate of the Summer Schools is instructive. The leading lights of the 1920s went their separate ways. Though meetings continued throughout the 1930s and indeed beyond, attendance dropped markedly and contemporaries noted a change in the composition of those who did take part. In 1934, Thomas Tweed, formerly general secretary of the Summer School movement, witnessed mostly elderly people with an anti-Labour bias.[73] In so far as the Summer Schools became, in Ramsay Muir's words, 'a sort of university for politicians', those politicians were largely Labour and Conservative rather than Liberal.[74] The movement's ideas were ruthlessly plundered, especially by post-Second World War Labour and Conservative governments. Indeed, it is an eloquent commentary on Simon's own ambiguous party political stance that he once declared that, 'if the Liberal Summer School does nothing else, it will at least provide ideas for the Labour Party'.[75]

Indeed, it is an eloquent commentary on Simon's own ambiguous party political stance that he once declared that, 'if the Liberal Summer School does nothing else, it will at least provide ideas for the Labour Party'.

In his retirement from the academic world, David Dutton continues to investigate the recent political history of South-West Scotland.

1 P. Ashdown, *The Ashdown Diaries 1988–1997* (London, 2000), p. 508.
2 Ibid., p. 456.
3 P. F. Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1971), p. 406.
4 M. Stocks, *Ernest Simon of Manchester* (Manchester, 1963), p. 8. This biography, based on Simon's papers at Manchester Central Library, offers a serviceable narrative of his life. It is, however, now somewhat dated and lacks much in the way of context within the important debates of Liberal Party historiography, insofar as these were apparent at the time of its publication. The papers in Manchester, in particular Simon's diaries, are an important source for the history of the party in the 1920s, though the diaries lack the spontaneity and personal indiscretions often associated with this genre.
5 Stocks, *Simon*, p. 10.
6 Ibid., p. 3.
7 Ibid., p. 24.
8 E. D. Simon and M. Fitzgerald, *The Smokeless City* (London, 1922).
9 Manchester Central Library, Simon MSS, M 11/11/5 addnl (495), diary 27 Apr. 1918. Extracts from Simon's papers appear by kind permission of Manchester Libraries, Information and Archives, Manchester City Council.
10 Ibid., diary 16 Nov. 1918.
11 Ibid., diary 26 Nov. 1918.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid., diary 15 Dec. 1918.
14 *Manchester City News*, 14 Dec. 1918.
15 Simon MSS, M 11/11/5 addnl (495), diary 15 Dec. 1918.
16 Stocks, *Simon*, p. 60.
17 Clarke in V. Bogdanor (ed.), *Liberal Party Politics* (Oxford, 1983), p. 36.

Notes continue on page 37

Election analysis

John Curtice analyses the Liberal Democrat vote in the European elections in May 2019

The Liberal Democrat performan

Despite being Britain's most pro-European party, hitherto European elections have rarely been a happy hunting ground for the Liberal Democrats. In the eight elections held between 1979 and 2014, the party never even won as much as a fifth of the vote and twice slumped to well below a tenth. Not even the introduction in 1999 of proportional representation made much difference to the party's prospects. At 12 per cent, its share of the vote on average between then and 2014 was in fact a little less than it had been in those elections held under first-past-the-post (14 per cent).

But in this year's election – organised late in the day in the wake of the UK's failure to leave the European Union as scheduled on 29 March – the party flourished. It won 20 per cent of the vote, enough to secure second place in a nationwide ballot for the first time since Labour displaced the former Liberal Party as the principal opposition to the Conservatives after the First World War. Above all, perhaps, it represented the party's best performance at any nationwide election since it entered into coalition with the Conservatives in 2010 – and thus it seemingly held out the promise that perhaps the party had finally put the adverse electoral consequences of its participation in government behind it.

But is that judgement correct? After all, it has long been noted that European Parliament elections tend to be regarded by voters as second-order affairs in which, inter alia, they are more inclined to vote for smaller parties, including not least those that take a strong stance on the future of the European Union.[1] Perhaps the success of the Liberal Democrats – together with the

ce in the 2019 European election

even more spectacular performance of the Brexit Party, which came first with 31 per cent of the vote – was simply a protest vote delivered by an electorate that was disenchanted with the ability of the Commons to resolve Brexit but which would not repeat such behaviour in a general election. After all, UKIP came first in the 2014 European Parliament election, only to find itself with just one MP to its name in the general election twelve months later. Perhaps, too, the distinctive stances on Brexit taken by the Brexit Party and the Liberal Democrats – in the case of the Liberal Democrats to hold a second referendum in the hope that it would result in a reversal of the Brexit decision, while the Brexit Party was campaigning to leave without a deal – had more resonance for voters in an election about Europe than they would in a general election.

However, in the UK at least this European election was like no other. It was taking place in the wake of intense four-year debate about both whether the UK should be part of the EU and the terms on which it should leave. Many voters had come to identify strongly as either a 'Remainer' or a 'Leaver', an identity that they might well want to express at any kind of election.[2] Moreover, voters had come to seem polarised in their views about Brexit between the two divergent alternatives of either holding a second referendum or else leaving without a deal, with the result that there was little enthusiasm for the kind of compromise deal that had been negotiated by the UK government or indeed an alternative, softer approach to Brexit that was being proposed by the Labour Party.[3] While such considerations might be of particular importance in a European election, they hardly seemed likely to be erased from voters' minds in future electoral contests, at least for so long as the Brexit debate continues to rage.

This article endeavours to assess which of these two perspectives on the Liberal Democrat performance in the European election appears to be the more appropriate interpretation. It assesses the extent to which the party's success was a reflection of the distinctive stance that the party took on Brexit, and, in so far as it did, the implications that this had for the character of the party's support as compared with what it has enjoyed at previous elections. This, in turn, informs an assessment of the extent to which the party's performance in the European election might have provided a foundation for an electoral recovery that might mean the party reverses the severe electoral damage that it has suffered since entering into coalition with the Conservatives in 2010.

The impact of Brexit

As at previous Euro-elections, the votes were counted at local authority level, as, indeed, was the EU referendum in June 2016. Table 1 takes advantage of these decisions to compare the Liberal Democrats' performance in those local authority areas in England and Wales which voted most strongly for Remain with what the party achieved in those areas where Leave performed best.

It is immediately apparent that the party performed much better in those places in England and Wales which voted heavily to Remain in the

Table 1: Liberal Democrat performance, England and Wales, by EU referendum vote 2016

% Remain vote in 2016	*Mean % vote 2019*	*Mean change in % vote*	
		since 2014	*since 2009*
55% or more	31.7	+21.0	+14.9
50–55%	25.7	+16.8	+10.0
45–50%	22.3	+14.6	+7.6
Less than 45%	15.2	+10.3	+3.7

Left: Vince Cable welcomes Guy Verhofstadt, leader of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe in the European Parliament, to London during the 2019 Euro elections. Catherine Bearder, the sole Liberal Democrat MEP from the 2014 election, is next to Verhofstadt.

EU than it did in those areas where Leave were strongest. The party's share of the vote in areas where more than 55 per cent voted Remain in 2016 was more than twice what it was in those places where less than 45 per cent backed remaining in the EU. Equally, as compared with the previous election in 2014, the party's vote increased by more than twice as much in the most pro-Remain places as it did in the most pro-Leave ones. Although the party's Euro-election performance had always been a little stronger in what in 2016 proved to be the most pro-Remain places in England and Wales, the party's performance now differed much more substantially between pro- and anti-Brexit parts of the UK.

The extent to which the party's performance rested on the support of those who had voted Remain is even more apparent when we examine the results of polling of individual voters. According to a poll conducted by Lord Ashcroft immediately after the European election, as many as 36 per cent of Remain voters backed the Liberal Democrats, compared with just 4 per cent of those who had voted Leave. These figures can be compared with the results of a similar post-election exercise that Lord Ashcroft undertook immediately after the 2017 general election, which found that on that occasion the party won 14 per cent of the vote among those who had voted Remain, and, again, just 4 per cent among those who supported Leave. This suggests that more or less all of the increase in support for the party registered in the European ballot boxes as compared with the 2017 election came from those who voted Remain. Moreover, when asked why they had voted the way that they did, no less than 58 per cent of those who voted Liberal Democrat gave as their first reason that the party had the best policy on Brexit. Far from representing some general protest vote, the Liberal Democrat performance in the European election was rooted entirely in the party's ability to persuade Remain voters of the merits of its stance on Brexit. As a result, the party acquired an electorate that was much more pro-European in its orientation than previously.

This pattern also meant that the party was now challenging the position that Labour had previously enjoyed as the party with most support among those who had voted Remain. No less than 51 per cent of Remain voters (according to Lord Ashcroft) had voted for Jeremy Corbyn's party in the 2017 election. However, as noted above, in contrast to the Liberal Democrats, Labour's first preference was a soft Brexit rather another referendum, which was simply regarded as a possible fall-back mechanism, and support for Labour among Remain voters fell to just 19 per cent in the European election. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the Liberal Democrats were more successful in winning over those who had previously voted Labour than it had been those who had voted Conservative. Over one in five (22 per cent) of those who had voted Labour in 2017 switched to the Liberal Democrats, compared with just one in eight of those who voted Conservative. Even so, once we bear in mind that in 2017 only half as many Remain voters backed the Conservatives as supported Labour, these figures imply that the Liberal Democrats were probably at least as successful in winning over the support of Remain-inclined Conservative supporters (whose party was backing the Brexit deal the government had negotiated) as it was their Labour-voting counterparts.

Scotland

That said, there was one clear limit to the party's ability to win the backing of Remain voters. Some of the highest levels of support for Remain in the EU referendum were registered in Scotland. However, at 13.9 per cent of the vote the party's performance north of the border was no better than that in the most pro-Leave parts of the UK. The SNP, in contrast, recorded their highest ever level of support in a European election, with nearly 38 per cent of the vote. According to a poll of Scottish voters conducted by Panelbase shortly before the European election, much of that nationalist vote came from those who had backed Remain, 49 per cent of who said they intended to vote for the SNP, compared with just 20 per cent of Leave voters. North of the border, Brexit had breathed new life into the debate about Scottish independence, while the SNP were also advocating a second EU referendum. This appears to have constrained the Liberal Democrats' ability to corral support from Remain-inclined voters in Scotland.

Social profile

The party's relative success among Remain voters in England and Wales had consequences for the social profile of the party's support. Those who have had a university education are far more likely than those with few if any educational qualifications to have voted to Remain in the EU.[4] Thus, as one might anticipate, support for the party was both markedly higher and increased most in local council areas with most graduates. On average, the party secured 29.5 per cent of the vote in those places where more than 32 per cent were identified by the 2011 census as graduates, representing an increase of 20 points on its performance in 2014. In contrast, it won just 11.9 per cent of the vote, an increase of 8.1 points, in places where less than 22 per cent have a degree. Meanwhile, Lord Ashcroft's polling data shows that the party was much more popular – and its support increased more – among voters in 'AB' middle-class occupations typically occupied by graduates (27 per cent, up 14 points on 2017) than it was among those in the most working-class and least well-off 'DE' social group (11 per cent, up 5 points).

The extent to which the party's performance rested on the support of those who had voted Remain is even more apparent when we examine the results of polling of individual voters. According to a poll conducted by Lord Ashcroft immediately after the European election, as many as 36 per cent of Remain voters backed the Liberal Democrats, compared with just 4 per cent of those who had voted Leave.

Meeting of Liberal Democrat MPs and MEPs, June 2019

Top, from left: Alistair Carmichael MP, Dinesh Dhamija MEP, Caroline Voaden MEP, Martin Horwood MEP, Barbara Gibson MEP, Judith Bunting MEP, Jamie Stone MP, Tim Farron MP

Middle: Bill Newton Dunn MEP, Layla Moran MP, Tom Brake MP, Jo Swinson MP, Wera Hobhouse MP, Ed Davey MP, Sheila Ritchie MEP, Norman Lamb MP

Bottom: Shaffaq Mohammed MEP, Vince Cable MP, Jane Brophy MEP, Lucy Netsingha MEP, Christine Jardine MP, Luisa Porritt MEP, Irina von Wiese MEP

(Not present: Catherine Bearder MEP, Phil Bennion MEP, Chris Davies MEP, Anthony Hook MEP)

However, one feature that was surprisingly missing from the profile of the party's support, given its heavily pro-Remain character, was any evidence of it being more popular among younger voters. Such voters had been much more likely to have voted Remain. Yet Lord Ashcroft reports that, at 21 per cent, support for the party among those aged under 35 was no higher than it was among those aged 65 or over (also 21 per cent). In contrast, not only Labour but also the Greens performed much better among the under-35s (26 per cent and 19 per cent respectively) than among those aged 65 or more (8 per cent and 7 per cent). Equally, there is no consistent evidence of the party performing better in local council areas with a relatively young demographic profile. The implication would appear to be that the party was more successful at winning over older voters who voted Remain than it was younger voters, for many of whom Labour continued to be relatively attractive, just as it had been in 2017.[5]

Implications

The fact that the Liberal Democrats' performance in the European elections was so heavily rooted in support from had those who voted Remain, thereby giving the party's support a somewhat different character, raises two important questions. The first is whether such support is likely to be replicated in a general election. Does it potentially represent a foundation for a long-term revival in the party's fortunes and a reversal of the decline that the party has suffered in the wake of its participation in government between 2010 and 2015? After all, the character of the party's performance in the European election was very different from what the Liberal Democrats achieved in local elections held just three weeks before the European contest. In those local elections the party's performance represented just a three-point improvement on what it had achieved in local elections twelve months previously, while the increase in support it registered over the longer term (that is, as compared with when the seats up for grabs had last been fought on the same day as the 2015 general election) was on average only four points higher in the most pro-Remain areas than it had been in those places that had voted most strongly to Leave – far less of a difference than we have seen was evident in the European election. Perhaps this is an indication that many of the Remain voters who turned to the Liberal Democrats in the Euro-election will not necessarily turn to the party when matters European are less central to the issues at stake.

Yet it seems that the party's performance in the European election was more than a one-day wonder lacking in implications for the party's future prospects. For, in contrast, to what happened around the local elections, the rise in the party's support in the European election has been accompanied by a marked increase in its standing in polls of Westminster vote intentions. In the month leading up to the local elections at the beginning of May, the party's average level of support for Westminster stood at just 9 per cent,

After forty years of relative failure and disappointment in European elections, the 2019 contest – a ballot that was never meant to happen – witnessed the Liberal Democrats' best ever performance in a European election. This achievement is attributable to a stance the party took in opposition to Brexit that enabled it to win the support of many a Remain voter who two years previously had voted Labour or Conservative.

only marginally better than the 7.6 per cent that the party won in the 2017 general election. There was still little sign of the party emerging from the electoral black hole into which it had fallen during the coalition years. But by the time the European election was over, that figure had doubled to 18 per cent, only a little below the share the party secured in the European election itself. Moreover, as in that election, the increase in expressed support for Westminster occurred entirely among those who voted Remain. Meanwhile, at the time of writing some three months after the European election, that 18 per cent figure has held firm, putting the party in its strongest position in the polls since the 2010 election.

But if the party's performance in the European election has had what has proven to be more than a temporary impact on its prospects for Westminster, what are the potential implications of the fact that its support is so heavily embedded in Remain voters – and thus in places that predominantly voted Remain. In particular, might it have resulted in a change in a change in the geography of the party's support that might affect where it might be able to win seats under first-past-the-post? For although the level of support for Leave was on average somewhat lower in seats where the Liberal Democrats had performed most strongly in 2010, it was still the case that Leave voters outnumbered Remain voters in twenty-seven of the fifty-seven seats that the party won in 2010, including all of those the party won to the west of Bristol. Might securing such a predominantly pro-Remain vote make it more difficult for the party to recapture some of the seats the party has held previously?

It is certainly clear that simply replicating the party's performance in the European election is unlikely to be sufficient for it to secure a major advance in the size of its parliamentary representation. According to estimates of the outcome of the European election in each parliamentary constituency constructed by Professor Chris Hanretty, on average the party won just 25 per cent of the vote in those Westminster seats that the party won in 2010, little more than half the 46 per cent that the party won on average in those seats in 2010. In truth, this is not the first time that the party has been unable to replicate in a European election the local strength that it enjoys in some constituencies in a Westminster contest.[6] Even so, these figures are a reminder that in a general election the party will have to do more than appeal to Remain voters. It will also have to rekindle the local strength that it had in many a constituency that once had a Liberal Democrat MP, be that as a result of being seen as the party of the Celtic fringe, through developing a reputation for representing constituency interests, or securing a tactical squeeze on the third party locally (most often Labour). That task is, though, likely to be harder in those 2010 Liberal Democrat seats where a majority of voters backed Leave. At twenty-three points, the difference between the party's share of the vote in the European election and what it achieved in 2010 is rather greater in seats where Leave were ahead in 2016 than the eighteen-point gap observable in constituencies in which Remain were ahead.

Conclusion

After forty years of relative failure and disappointment in European elections, the 2019 contest – a ballot that was never meant to happen – witnessed the Liberal Democrats' best ever performance in a European election. This achievement is attributable to a stance the party took in opposition to Brexit that enabled it to win the support of many a Remain voter who two years previously had voted Labour or Conservative – though in Scotland it was less successful at winning over voters from the equally pro-Remain SNP. In short, the party was the unintended beneficiary of the UK's failure to leave the EU as scheduled at the end of March, an outcome that ensured that the debate about Brexit was the key concern for many voters.

Yet if the circumstances in which the European election was held were especially fortuitous for the Liberal Democrats, the party's success has had wider electoral implications. It appears the support that it garnered from many Remain voters during the European campaign has triggered a revival in its prospects for a Westminster election – for the first time since the party entered into coalition with the Conservatives in 2010. This, perhaps, should not be surprising. After all, while Brexit may be about Britain's relationship with the EU, it has also become the dominant political issue in British politics and thus one where people's attitudes could be expected to be reflected in how they might vote in Westminster elections. Meanwhile, in the case of the Liberal Democrats, the Brexit debate may have also afforded the party an opportunity to reconnect with many a university-educated voter who became disenchanted with the party as a result of its about turn in government on tuition fees.

That said, the party will need to meet the challenge of turning votes into seats under Westminster's first-past-the-post system. Winning over Remain voters alone may well be insufficient for it to meet that challenge. The party also needs to create and recreate areas of local strength in the way that it did up to and including 2010 – often in places that are a long way away from the metropolitan-minded world of many a Remain voter. Brexit has given the party a lifeline, but it remains to be seen how successfully it is seized.

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58 *The Nation*, cited Stocks, *Simon*, p. 93.
59 See, for example, *Manchester Guardian* 4, 13, 15 and 22 Aug. 1930.
60 Simon MSS, M 11/11/5 (496), diary 3 July 1931.
61 Stocks, *Simon*, p. 91.
62 Full result: M. Petherick (Con) 16,388; E. D. Simon (Lib) 14,006; A. L. Rowse (Lab) 10,098.
63 It was an entirely appropriate designation. Since 1931 Simon had regarded himself as divorced from party politics.
64 D. Rundle, 'Ernest Simon 1879–1960' in D. Brack and E. Randall (eds.), *Dictionary of Liberal Thought* (London, 2007), p. 371.
65 Stocks, *Simon,* p. 110.
66 Ibid., p. 122.
67 Some will always wonder why Simon delayed his transfer of party allegiance for as long as he did. Many of his contemporaries, not obviously more sympathetic to Labour, made the transition as early as the 1920s. Reflective passages in Simon's diary provide some answers. To these we may speculatively add the influence of his mother, who was already active in Liberal politics before her son joined the Manchester City Council, and possibly a residual sense of loyalty to the party that had done much in the nineteenth century to secure the emancipation of British Jewry – though Simon, like his father before him, was a lifelong agnostic.
68 A. Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*, vol. iv (Oxford, 1979), p. 454.
69 Stocks, *Simon*, p. 139.
70 Ibid., p. 146.
71 Ibid., p. 170.
72 M. Hart, 'The Liberals, the War and the Franchise', *English Historical Review*, 97 (1982), p. 821.
73 Memorandum by A. J. Sylvester 6 Aug. 1934, cited Cregier, *Chiefs*, p. 251.
74 R. Muir, 'The Liberal Summer School and the Problems of Industry', *Contemporary Review* (1927), p. 286, cited Cregier, *Chiefs*, p. 161.
75 E. D. Simon, 'The Liberal Summer School', *Contemporary Review* (1926), p. 303, cited Cregier, *Chiefs*, p. 163.

Liberals and Greens

Mitya Pearson examines the early contacts between the Liberal Party and the emerging Green Party in the 1970s.

Tentative feelers: The Liberal Party's response to the emergence of the Green Party

This article examines the Liberal Party's attempts to respond to the rise of the modern environmental movement in the 1960s and 1970s and particularly one aspect of this: the creation of the Green Party. This includes Jeremy Thorpe's attempt to join the latter during the 1979 general election campaign and the early dialogue between the two parties about electoral arrangements. It argues that it was impossible for the Liberal Party to fully embrace the ideas put forward by radical environmentalists and the Green Party, and that discussions about pacts were largely doomed from the start. The article is based on original historical research examining documents in public and private archives relating to both parties from the 1970s and early 1980s as well as interviews carried out by the author with relevant individuals.

The Green Party

The UK currently has three green parties, as the Scottish Greens and the Green Party in Northern Ireland are separate from the Green Party of England and Wales. The greens in the UK began life as PEOPLE, in 1973, formed out of almost nothing in Coventry by two solicitors, Tony and Lesley Whittaker, and two estate agents, Michael Benfield and Freda Sanders.[1] This was Europe's first green party, though in the coming years many others emerged so that during the 1980s they became a standard feature of Western European party systems. PEOPLE stood candidates in the 1974 elections but struggled to get off the ground and in 1975 it changed its name to the Ecology Party.

Nonetheless a party committed to fundamental reorganisation of society and the economy based on the prioritisation of environmental concerns was a feature of British politics from this time onwards. At the 1979 general election, the Ecology Party stretched itself in order to break the fifty-candidate threshold, drawn from a membership of hundreds, to quality for an election broadcast.[2] This was not exactly a springboard to electoral success (it would still be two decades before a stand-alone green candidate was voted in to any office higher than local councillor) but it was the first step out of obscurity and towards national relevance.

The Liberal Party and the environment

The creation of PEOPLE was part of a wider awakening of environmental concern both internationally and domestically during the 1960s and 1970s. This period saw unprecedented growth in the size and number of environmental pressure groups in the UK.[3] The established political parties were not immune to this development and environmental groups were set up in Labour, the Conservatives and the Liberals during the 1970s.

In the 1970s the Liberal Party certainly made attempts to accommodate the new political environmentalism. They debated environmental issues at their assembly as early as 1971 and passed a symbolic resolution at their 1974 assembly placing economic growth in the context of ecological constraints.[4] The 1979 booklet *Your Future with the Liberals* included assembly resolutions on the environment, transport and energy from the late 1970s, and in 1979 the assembly passed a resolution declaring that 'economic growth, as measured by GDP, is neither desirable nor achievable'.[5]

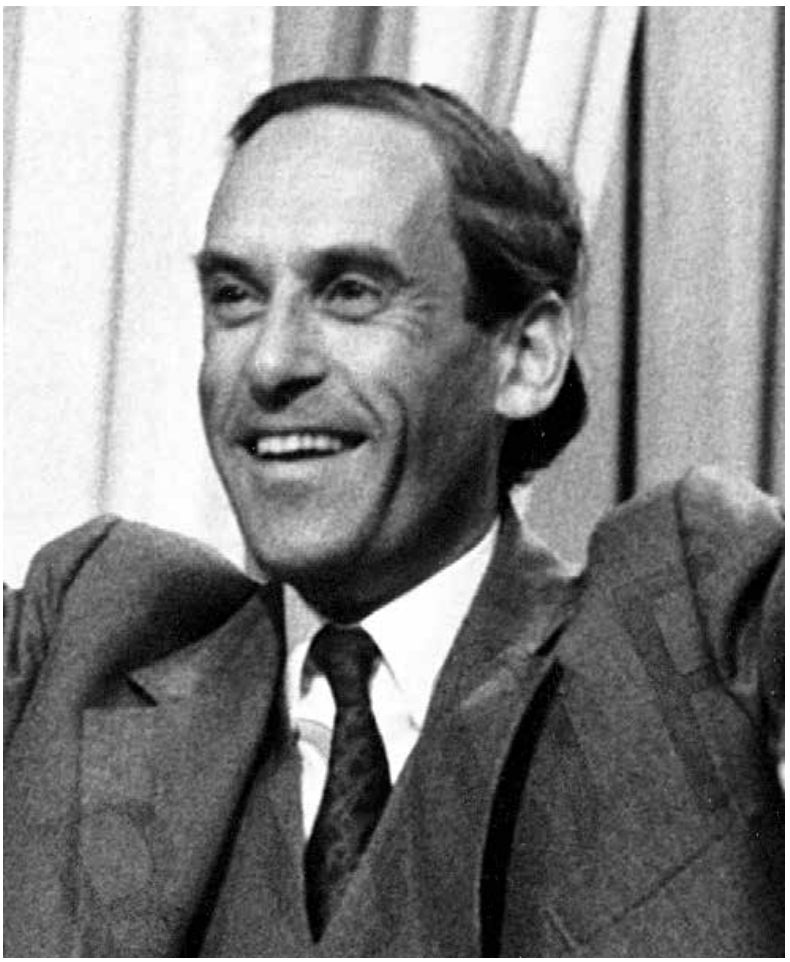
The 1970 election manifesto contained almost nothing on the environment barring a brief reference to 'the dangers of pollution and the damage we have done to the environment.' The party's February 1974 manifesto contained sections on quality of life, the energy crisis, 'the environment' and transport, though these were omitted in October.[6] A comparison of British parties' manifestos from 1959 onwards showed that at the 1979 general election the Liberal Party devoted considerably more attention to environmental issues, as a percentage of the overall document, than any of the three main parties had ever done.[7] The Liberal Ecology Group (LEG) was also formed in 1977.[8]

Some senior party figures were involved in environmental campaigning during this period, for example Lord Beaumont (later to defect to the

Green Party) was a key early figure in the Green Alliance environmental pressure group. David Steel is quoted in a LEG manifesto as arguing in 1979 that:

> We need to get our economy more into balance and take a more sensible, long-term view of energy and resources. Our grandchildren will not forgive us easily if we leave them a cold and silent world, because we were too short-sighted to look ahead.[9]

There were limits to this early greening of the Liberal Party however and some of the environmental resolutions and statements created significant opposition within the party. The PEOPLE National Executive Committee (NEC) observed that the Liberal assembly motion in 1974 had been in favour of 'controlled economic growth' and attempts to make this about zero growth had failed.[10] Steel was challenged by the Ecology Party's first councillor on a radio phone-in show in 1976 over whether he supported continued economic growth. At first, he struggled to understand the question but finally came down in favour of 'the right kind of economic growth'.[11] Ultimately, the Liberal leadership campaigned mainly on issues other than the environment during the 1970s, and in 1985 a LEG manifesto conceded that 'the extent to which the Party's policy is based on ecological principles is still limited'.[12]



Jeremy Thorpe, MP for North Devon 1959–79, Leader of the Liberal Party 1967–76

The Liberal Party and the Green Party

The Liberal Party's engagement with environmental politics was of considerable interest to early members of what became the Green Party. Internal PEOPLE/Ecology Party documents from the 1970s, such as their newsletters, feature numerous discussions of Liberal Party activity on the environment, including occasional eyewitness accounts of Liberal meetings such as the 1978 LEG AGM.[13] These deliberations generally focused on how seriously the Liberal Party could be taken on the environment. PEOPLE/Ecology Party activists also pushed Liberals to go further on the environment, writing letters to figures such as Lord Avebury and John Pardoe, seeking to attract the Young Liberals and even picketing the 1978 Liberal Party assembly.[14]

Throughout the 1970s there were lots of examples of ad hoc conversations between different people involved with the two parties. An early member of PEOPLE's NEC reported a long but inconclusive discussion in his local area (Leeds) with a Young Liberal who was a 'no-growther' in 1974.[15] In 1977 there was a joint Liberal and Ecology Party local election candidate in Leeds.[16] A meeting was held in July 1977 between representatives of the ecological groups within the three main parties and the Ecology Party – what may well have been the first dedicated all-party meeting on the environment ever in the UK. This was reported in the environmental magazine *Good Earth* to have highlighted 'the gulf' that seemed to separate the Ecology Party from the others. For the Ecology Party 'all other considerations were subordinate' to the environment.[17] The aforementioned Lord Beaumont is listed as an attendee at the Ecology Party's conference in 1978.[18] Paddy Ashdown attended an Ecology Party meeting in the South West prior to standing in Yeovil in the 1979 general election and was noted by an Ecology Party activist as having 'continually uttered sentiments that made one wonder why he was a member of the Liberal Party at all'.[19]

Perhaps the most intriguing of these flirtations between the parties is Jeremy Thorpe's application to join the Ecology Party. Following his resignation as leader and while awaiting trial Thorpe was selected by the North Devon Liberal Party as their candidate to fight the 1979 general election.[20] During this campaign he approached Tony Whittaker, PEOPLE co-founder and the local Ecology Party candidate, to ask if he could join them. Whittaker later stated 'you can imagine the surprise with which I … received his application form and cheque'.[21] The attempt to join the Ecology Party was reported in the press at the time and Thorpe's election agent Lilian Prowse dismissed it as 'all a bit of a joke'.[22] However, Thorpe's letter, which states that 'I am delighted to join the Ecology Party as a standard member', seems entirely earnest.[23]

The initial contact had been between the two candidates, but Tony Whittaker passed the enquiry on to the main central organisers in the Ecology Party. They were said to be concerned that Thorpe was 'bad news'.[24] A reply was sent out from the party chairman stating that, although dual membership of the Ecology Party and another party was permitted, this did not extend to candidates of other parties and so they rejected the application.[25] Thorpe's somewhat sour reply, ending with 'my form was valid but more so your loss', again suggests he genuinely wanted to join the party.[26] He was also quoted in the press insisting that, despite the Ecology Party's public and private rejection of his application, 'as far as I am concerned, I have joined.' *The Guardian* observed at the time that 'the more cynical voters of North Devon may conclude that the whole thing was a gambit to stop Liberal votes going to the Ecology Party's sole and official candidate.'[27]

There was also contact between the leading national figures within both parties about more organised collaboration in the lead up to the 1979 general election. The Ecology Party Chairman's Report for 1977–78 noted that the Liberals' had 'put out tentative feelers' about local electoral arrangements with the Ecology Party.[28] The minutes of the Ecology Party's September 1978 NEC note that 'several members of the NEC reported on talks and letters with official Liberals – including the President of the Liberal Party'.[29] Michael Steed, president of the Liberal Party from 1978 to 1979 and a psephologist, confirmed this in interview, as he had noticed the respectable number of votes the two PEOPLE candidates in Coventry had achieved in February 1974 in seats without a Liberal candidate.[30] The discussions led to little in the way of concrete action but the Liberal Party shared a list of where 'green Liberals' were standing in 1979 and the Ecology Party updated them on where they were fielding candidates. There were at least two constituencies selected by the Ecology Party to deliberately avoid a clash with a Liberal candidate. During the 1979 general election campaign the Ecology Party chairman expressed his hope that the two parties could continue to work together on tactics in the future and dialogue continued between them into the early 1980s.[31]

During the 1979 general election campaign the Ecology Party chairman expressed his hope that the two parties could continue to work together on tactics in the future and dialogue continued between them into the early 1980s.

Discussion

During a PEOPLE meeting in 1974, activists discussed the idea of simply disbanding PEOPLE and joining the Liberals. This was rejected, partly on the grounds that, while the Young Liberals were demonstrating sufficient radicalism on the environment, the wider party was not and they would need Jeremy Thorpe (then leader) to depart in order for this to happen.[32] This raises the question of whether the Liberals could have prevented the emergence of a green party in Britain simply by going further on environmental matters at an earlier stage. After all, some radical environmentalists felt their interests were best served in the Liberals. A Liberal councillor wrote to *The Ecologist* magazine in 1976 to explain that he was going to remain in the party because he believed it could be 'converted to a coherent no-growth philosophy'.[33]

There are some parallels here with an earlier and far more significant event in the Liberal Party's history: the creation of the Labour Party. It has been noted that the Liberal Party was slow to support working-class candidates in the late nineteenth century and that many of the early leading figures in the Labour Party had been denied Liberal Party nominations.[34] In this case, though, there are two reasons why it would not have been possible for the Liberals to prevent the development of a green party in Britain. Firstly, as a party with its own, pre-existing ideological approach, the Liberals could certainly embrace and incorporate environmental concerns, but they were always going to struggle to give the same degree of emphasis to them compared with a party created specifically to respond to a perceived ecological crisis. Secondly, for similar reasons there were limitations to how radical the Liberal Party offering on the environment could be, particularly while it wished to maintain widespread electoral appeal. As one Ecology Party activist explained in 1976, he had joined the Ecology Party because the other parties would simply not be able to 'to adopt such a radically different philosophical basis'.[35] The most obvious dividing line here is the issue of economic growth. Overt and total opposition to economic growth was a philosophical cornerstone of PEOPLE/the Ecology Party, but it is not conceivable for the Liberal Party to have unequivocally matched this position.

The early dialogue between the two parties also raises the question of whether deeper and more long-term electoral arrangements could have developed between the two parties. Occasional, ad hoc agreements have been reached in subsequent years – at the 2017 general election the attempt to create a 'progressive alliance' saw greens stand aside in thirteen seats to help Liberal Democrat candidates and the Liberal Democrats reciprocated in two seats – but this has been very limited in scope.[36] There are clues as to why deeper and more lasting collaboration never emerged in the early exchanges between the two parties. In an amicable letter to Liberal Party figures about attempts to avoid direct competition in seats sent in March 1979, the Ecology Party chairman references the blockages created by the 'deep suspicion' of his members and the need to respect local parties' autonomy.[37] In considering the idea of a meeting with the Ecology Party in 1980, Steed suggests in an internal note that the Liberals need to be careful 'since we have far more credibility to rub off on them than vice versa' and that the main motivation for meeting greens is to convince their members to join the

Liberals.[38] Ultimately therefore the difficulties of overcoming partisan divides and finding a genuinely mutually beneficial arrangement between the two competing parties were evidenced from the beginning.

Conclusion

Since the Green Party was formed, the Liberal Party (and the Liberal Democrats) have arguably been the party most consistently close to them on environmental issues. The two parties have also had something of a symbiotic relationship – it was partly the turmoil of the Liberal and SDP merger that allowed the greens to capitalise on rising environmental concern and achieve their breakthrough result of 15 per cent of the national vote share in the 1989 European election.[39] Despite their early discussions, it would have been very difficult for the Liberals to have either prevented the emergence of a green party in the UK or developed comprehensive electoral arrangements. The environmentalism which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s was not easy for the established parties, including the Liberals, to embrace totally, as it broke from mere nature conservation and amounted to something much more holistic and radical. The general issues which tend to make pacts between all political parties difficult – including overcoming partisan divides, coordinating local parties' actions and finding lasting arrangements which will benefit both sides – have also hampered cooperation between liberals and greens.

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1 Sara Parkin, *Green Parties: An International Guide* (Heretic, 1989).
2 Derek Wall, *Weaving a Bower Against an Endless Night* (Aberystwyth Green Party, 1994).
3 Philip Lowe and Jane Goyder, *Environmental Groups in Politics* (Harper Collins, 1983) p. 15.
4 Mike Robinson, *The Greening of British Party Politics* (Manchester University Press, 1992), p. 152.
5 Tony Beamish, 'The Greening of the Liberals?', *The Journal of Liberal History*, 21 (Winter 1992), p. 17.
6 Ibid., p. 17.
7 Neil Carter, 'Party Politicization of The Environment in Britain', *Party Politics*, 12/6 (2006), pp. 747–67.
8 Beamish, 'Greening of the Liberals'.
9 'Liberal Ecology Group Manifesto', https://greenlibdems.org.uk/en/article/2018/1256940/liberal-ecology-group-manifesto-1978#105767; accessed 16 Mar. 2019.
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11 BBC Written Archives, *It's Your Line*, 22 Dec. 1976 (tape transcript).
12 LEG Manifesto 1985, cited in Robinson, *Greening of British Party Politics*, p. 152.
13 David Fleming Personal Archive, The Ecology Party NEC Meeting Minutes, April 1978.
14 Peter Frings Personal Archive, The Ecology Party Newsletter, October 1978; Lesley Whittaker Personal Archive, PEOPLE NEC Minutes July 1974, October 1974 and March 1975.
15 Lesley Whittaker Personal Archive, PEOPLE NEC Minutes, September 1974.
16 Peter Frings Personal Archive, The Ecology Party Newsletter, February 1977.
17 *Good Earth Magazine*, 19 (1977).
18 Michael Benfield Personal Archive, The Ecology Party Conference 1978 Attendance List.
19 Peter Frings Personal Archive, The Ecology Party Newsletter, January 1979.
20 Michael Bloch, *Jeremy Thorpe* (Little, Brown 2014).
21 Sara Parkin Personal Archive, Whittaker Correspondence 26 January 1988.
22 'Ecology Party Snubs Thorpe', *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 30 Apr. 1979.
23 Lesley Whittaker Personal Archive, Thorpe Letter to Anthony Whittaker, 23 Apr. 1979.
24 Sara Parkin Personal Archive, Tony Whittaker Correspondence, 26 Jan. 1988.
25 David Fleming Personal Archive, Jonathan Tyler Letter to Thorpe, 27 Apr. 1979.
26 Lesley Whittaker Personal Archive, Thorpe letter to Jonathan Tyler, 28 Apr. 1979.
27 'Thorpe Plays the Ecology Game', *The Guardian*, 30 Apr. 1979.
28 Peter Frings Personal Archive, The Ecology Party Chairman's Report of 1977–8.
29 Peter Frings Personal Archive, The Ecology Party Newsletter, October 1978.
30 Their campaigning in these seats included an explicit pitch to voters who normally supported the Liberals; Michael Steed, interview with author.
31 People's History Museum Archive, Tyler to Letter to Doreen Elton, 6 Mar. 1979.
32 Michael Benfield Personal Archive, Minutes of PEOPLE Area Organisers Meeting, 9 Nov. 1974.
33 'Party Politics?', *The Ecologist*, March 1976.
34 Alan Sykes, *The Rise and Fall of British Liberalism* (Routledge, 1997), pp. 146–7.
35 'Political Alternatives', *The Ecologist*, June 1976.
36 'Alliances', http://www.progressivealliance.org.uk/alliances; accessed 16 Mar. 2019.
37 People's History Museum Archive, Tyler to Letter to Doreen Elton, 6 Mar. 1979.
38 People's History Museum Archive, Steed Letter to Peter Knowlson, 7 Mar. 1980.
39 Wolfgang Rüdig, Mark Franklin and Lynn Bennie, 'Up and down with the Greens: Ecology and party politics in Britain, 1989–1992', *Electoral Studies*, 15/1 (February 1996).

In an amicable letter to Liberal Party figures about attempts to avoid direct competition in seats sent in March 1979, the Ecology Party chairman references the blockages created by the 'deep suspicion' of his members and the need to respect local parties' autonomy.

Biography

The life of Lord Tordoff (11 October 1928 – 22 June 2019), recalled by Michael Meadowcroft

Geoff Tordoff: an appreciation

Geoff Tordoff was a political 'fixer' par excellence. He practised this vital craft formally as the chief whip of the Liberal peers and later as chief whip of the Liberal Democrat peers, but his influence on the direction of the Liberal Party and on difficult key political issues was evident from the mid-1970s. He was highly regarded as a party officer because he was always seen as 'one of us' and was never remote. He was invariably good-humoured, convivial and often very whimsical, but with a great political awareness of what had to be done and how to achieve it. He was perceived as possessing good judgement[1] and this usually enabled him to persuade party rebels that a different course of action better suited their and the party's best interests.

Geoff was a self-confessed 'Grimond Liberal', having been attracted to the party as a consequence of Liberal leader Jo Grimond's stand against the Suez war. The influence of Grimond on the revival of the Liberal Party was remarkable and there are still a number of colleagues who, like Geoff, would date their affiliation to the party to Grimond's charismatic leadership, despite the fact that his period as leader ended fifty-two years ago.[2] Grimond's attraction for instinctive Liberals such as Geoff was his innate anti-Conservatism coupled with a determination to take a firm Liberal line on controversial issues – such as Suez – and a rejection of state socialism. Instead he promoted a progressive alternative to both other parties which chimed with many politically minded individuals at the time, including Geoff Tordoff. Grimond wrote a number of books and managed to attract a number of distinguished academics, not all of whom were card-carrying Liberal members, who headed policy committees which produced a series of attractive booklets. Despite the tiny parliamentary party Grimond, by force of personality and intellectual stature, gained more media coverage than the party's numbers warranted. The Liberal Party lived off the Grimond legacy for decades, not least because many candidates and officers of the calibre of Geoff Tordoff stayed with the party.

I met Geoff at the Warrington by-election in April 1961, at which the agent was Ken Forbes, a larger-than-life cigar-smoking former Labour agent, who introduced Geoff as the only Liberal in the constituency.[3] This was not entirely true but although he had been involved with the party beforehand he had not formally joined. I was happy to sign him up. Ever after he blamed me for the lifetime commitment that ensued! He contested Northwich in 1964 and Knutsford in 1966 and 1970. Thereafter he dedicated himself to party organisation. He had already been one of the handful of party officials, including Gruffydd Evans, Pratap Chitnis, Tim Beaumont and myself, who had been involved in a vain attempt to prevent Jeremy Thorpe becoming leader in January 1967, being aware of his superficiality and elitism. At the time he was active in the party's North West Federation and the North West Candidates Association, which he helped to found. The Manchester region was one of the most active regions for young Liberals, who initiated the 'New Orbits' series of policy booklets. The more senior Liberals, including Geoff, were based at the Manchester Reform Club until its demise as a political club in 1967.

By the time of the late 1960s and early 1970s the Young Liberals were spearheading a radical youth movement, the 'Red Guard', which embraced direct action, such as the Stop the Seventies Tour which dug up a number of cricket pitches in order to prevent a tour by the South African apartheid regime's cricket team. Jeremy Thorpe, most Liberal MPs and the party establishment were deeply opposed to the 'antics' of the party's youth wing but Geoff and some other party officers, including Gruffydd Evans, believed that the aim should be for the Young Liberals' energy to be drawn into mainstream party activity rather than to be stifled. The 'dual approach' motion at the 1970 party assembly, linking community involvement with mainstream politics. was one spin-off.

Geoff's national offices began with the Chairmanship of the Assembly Committee (1974–76), which enabled him to use his awareness of the strands of opinion within the party and his knowledge of its many groups to channel debate through the formal structures. In 1976, soon after David Steel's election as leader, he began three years as party chair, working constructively with Steel despite having been a John Pardoe supporter in the leadership election. It was a key post at a very difficult time: the final months of the Jeremy Thorpe affair and the eighteen months of the often fraught Lib-Lab Pact which sustained the minority Labour government, rather than allow Margaret Thatcher to succeed in a vote of no confidence – which she did after the end of the Pact.

The Thorpe affair did considerable damage to the party. Liberal MPs had been aware for some years of allegations of a homosexual affair but remarkably it had been kept within the parliamentary party and it only became public knowledge when Thorpe's accuser, Norman Scott, mentioned him in a minor court

case. Thereafter it dragged on for some time with ever more curious and damaging revelations. In party terms it came to a head when Thorpe was finally persuaded to resign and David Steel was elected in his place. Then, when about to go on trial for conspiracy to murder Scott (a charge on which he was subsequently acquitted) Thorpe promised Steel that he would not attend the party conference in September 1978. Inevitably he broke his promise and effectively hijacked the conference.

The parliamentary party and, latterly, party officers had kept the whole long matter within their own ranks and party members were unaware of all the earlier problems. A Liberal candidate, Dr James Walsh, in all good faith moved a motion censuring the party officers for their treatment of the former leader. Geoff as chair, Gruffydd Evans as party president and myself as chair of the assembly committee met and decided that it was time that members knew the full facts and that, if the motion were carried, we would all resign on the spot. The motion was taken in closed session and delegates were amazed at what was revealed – the treatment of party staff, the existence of private funds and Thorpe's preference for attending elitist functions rather than giving attention to party campaigns, etc. With some lobbying of delegates by Tony Greaves and John Smithson, the motion was forthwith withdrawn without a vote.

Geoff was party chair when in March 1977 David Steel negotiated the Lib-Lab Pact[4] in order to prevent James Callaghan's Labour government falling to a vote of no confidence after it had lost its parliamentary majority. There was inevitably significant party disquiet over the deal but Geoff's effective communications within the party did a great deal to ensure that the party leadership was able to maintain the Pact without being undermined. He ensured that the membership's views were communicated to Steel and that Steel's views were made clear to the membership. This enabled the renewal of the Pact after three months and facilitated the calling of a special party assembly in February 1978 which overwhelmingly passed a compromise motion that Geoff had played a major part in drafting. This made it clear that the party expected the Pact to end within five months but gave Steel a mandate to determine the date himself. In his book on the Pact,[5] Steel makes it clear that Geoff played a key role in providing him with sound reports on the party's feelings on the Pact. As part of that advice his first report advised Steel to stand firm, that the party was ready to fight an election and that Labour had either 'to bend or be broken'. His second report stressed that the party needed concessions from Labour and in particular a guarantee on proportional representation. None was forthcoming. Following the end of the Pact, Margaret Thatcher succeeded in a vote of no confidence by one vote in the House of Commons.

Following his three years as party chair Geoff took on the chairmanship of the Campaigns and Elections Committee (1980–82) before becoming party president in 1983–84. He was deeply committed to making a success of the alliance with the SDP and he built up effective working relationships with many of the SDP's leading figures. Inevitably it fell to Geoff to play a key role in the seat allocation negotiations, particularly in managing the inevitable difficulties on the Liberal side.[6] Later, in a key debate on defence policy at the 1989 Liberal assembly, Geoff again took soundings on behalf of the leadership and reported back to defence spokesman, Menzies Campbell, that they could lose the vote to retain Trident. Paddy Ashdown as leader wanted to speak in the debate but Campbell believed that to do so, given his previous record on defence policy, would be counter-productive. Menzies spoke, Paddy didn't and the leadership won the vote.[7]

Geoff was given a life peerage in 1981, taking the title Lord Tordoff of Knutsford. His career at Shell Chemicals had progressed but, with some internal antagonism towards his politics, not as far as might have been expected. He resigned from Shell in order to devote himself full-time to the Lords. He served as Chief Whip for five years (1983–88) and, later, following the merger of the Liberal Party with the SDP, he served as Chief Whip of the Liberal Democrat peers for a further six years (1988–94).

In the Lords he eventually resigned his party commitments to take on the important non-party role as Principal Deputy Chairman of Committees. In 2004 he was appointed as a Lord in Waiting to the Queen.

Geoff's wife, Pat, was a keen Liberal in her own right but her increasing ill-health meant that Geoff had to take on the role of her principal carer. She died in 2013. He himself also suffered from increasing ill-health and retired from the Lords in 2016.

Geoff Tordoff was not a writer and he left no books or even booklets on policy. His strength was in personal relationships and his long friendship with Gruffydd Evans and their long partnership in key party roles ensured the sound management of the party and a greater measure of party solidarity than is the norm for Liberals. Hugh Jones, the secretary-general of the party from 1977 to 1983, made a shrewd comment on Geoff's role as party chair: 'I had the impression that he relied more on patience than preparation'.[8]

The Liberal Party has not always possessed competent and dedicated officers who, over a period of time, have underpinned the more prominent names in the parliamentary party or in the media, but when the party has had such party servants it has survived and even thrived. In the late 1920s and 1930s the prominence of Maynard Keynes and the profligacy of Ramsay Muir's writings were anchored by the steady hand of W. R. Davies at party headquarters and of Lord Meston as party chair. The same can said of Geoff Tordoff's key role in the party's management from the mid-1970s.

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I have one personal postscript. At Liberal assembly glee clubs on the final evening, Geoff and I regularly performed our party piece: the 'Bold Gendarmes' duet from one of Offenbach's lesser known operas. Earlier this year, when Geoff was living in a retirement village in Ilkley, where there was a regular musical event, he asked the organiser whether I would come and reprise this piece. I of course went and we duly did one last performance! It was great to see Geoff and to chat to him again.

Michael Meadowcroft was a Leeds city councillor for fifteen years, a West Yorkshire metropolitan county councillor for six and the Liberal MP for West Leeds 1983–87. He is a regular lecturer on political and local history.

1 The classic expression of the political need for judgement is the speech of Edmund Burke to his Bristol electors, 3 November 1774, but a more modern exposition of that need is J. Enoch Powell, *Medicine and Politics: 1975 and After* (Pitman Medical, 1976), pp. 1–7.

2 Apart from two months as acting leader in May 1976 when Jeremy Thorpe finally resigned.

3 Forbes grossly overspent his allotted by-election budget and on the initial count the Liberal candidate, Frank Tetlow, had just lost his deposit which, as the equivalent of £3,250 today, would have been additionally embarrassing. Forbes demanded a recount which enabled Tetlow to scrape above the 12.5 per cent threshold!

4 See Michael Meadowcroft's review of Jonathan Kirkup, *The Lib-Lab Pact, A Parliamentary Agreement, 1977–78* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) in *Journal of Liberal History* 94, Spring 2017.

5 David Steel, *A House Divided – The Lib-Lab Pact and the Future of British Politics* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1980); see also David Steel, *Against Goliath – David Steel's Story* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989).

6 Eventually only three seats had both Liberal and SDP candidates: Hackney South & Shoreditch, Hammersmith and Liverpool Broadgreen.

7 Menzies Campbell, *My Autobiography* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2008), p. 116.

8 Sir Hugh Jones, *Campaigning Face to Face* (Books Guild, 2007), p. 79.

Reports

Liberalism in the north

Spring conference fringe meeting, 15 March 2019, with William Wallace, and Michael Meadowcroft. Chair: Baroness Kath Pinnock

Report by **Matt Cole**

It was fitting that in York – the city in which party leader Vince Cable was raised and where he fought a parliamentary contest for the Alliance – the Liberal Democrat History Group chose, as the focus for its spring conference fringe meeting, the distinctive character and contribution of northern Liberalism over the last century.

Chaired by Baroness Kath Pinnock, former leader of Kirklees Council, the discussion on 15 March was led by Michael Meadowcroft, MP for Leeds West 1983–7, and Lord Wallace of Saltaire, both experienced as researchers and campaigners for Liberalism across Lancashire and Yorkshire over decades. Their remarks and later contributions from the floor identified three key factors in the survival and success of northern Liberalism – personalities, supporting institutions and political context – and explored different perceptions of the persistence of, and prospects for, Liberalism in the north. They also highlighted the vital importance of the party's achievements in the north to its fate nationally.

Michael Meadowcroft first emphasised the value – 'more significant than you'd think' – of staunch Liberal-minded newspapers in the north, including the *Northern Echo*, *Huddersfield Examiner* (edited by Elliott Dodds from 1924 to 1959), *Oldham Chronicle*, *Leeds Mercury*, *Bradford Telegraph and Argus*, *York Evening News*, *Dewsbury Reporter* (the editor of which was required to be a Liberal Party member) and, before its departure to London in 1959, the *Manchester Guardian*. Until 1947 the *Guardian*'s editor was an ex officio member of the Manchester Liberal Federation executive.

Another source of support strong in the north was Liberal clubs. Meadowcroft pointed out that the Liberal Yearbook showed that in 1911 there were 136 in Lancashire & Cheshire and 108 in Yorkshire. The headquarters of the National Union of Liberal Clubs was in Devon Mount, Leeds. On a tour of these clubs for the Yorkshire Federation in 1968, Meadowcroft found 'a really terrific welcome' and argued at the meeting that 'the party has neglected Liberal clubs all its life', even though some, such as West Hunslet, could still attract meetings of 800 for election campaigns in the 1960s; 'It was vital to have this asset.' He acknowledged, however, that 'You might say that Liberal clubs aren't full of Liberals, … the fact of them signing to say that they were liberal in politics when they joined didn't mean they were Liberals; but it had some influence on them.'

Meadowcroft also highlighted the role of key activists and organisers in keeping the party going through its darkest years, figures characterised later in the meeting by Lord Wallace as 'dominant people, awkward people, people with money.' Notable examples included Ernest Simon in Manchester and Ramsay Muir in Rochdale; Elliott Dodds in Huddersfield and Edward Rushworth in Bradford. Yorkshire agent Albert Ingham was an organiser and fundraiser for the Liberals from 1918 until after his retirement in 1967. Some Liberals fought a string of often-forlorn electoral battles; others, like Mirfield textile manufacturer Sir Ronald Walker (owner of the *Dewsbury Reporter*), kept the party afloat financially. Walker joked to Meadowcroft after rising from his sick bed that one of his later contributions would be his last ever cheque, and called his son John away from research with Keynes at Cambridge to return to continue working and campaigning in Yorkshire.

MPs Graham White and Richard Wainwright (both also party chairmen), and some members of the Mallalieu family in Huddersfield, were also generous supporters of the cause. Some campaigned on particular issues such as Thomas Edmund Harvey's defence of conscientious objectors in the First World War and Horsforth Councillor Harry Willcock's fight against identity cards after 1945. 'I don't think we have that kind of person these days' said Meadowcroft; 'it's very sad.'

Meadowcroft also pointed to the importance of continued representation in local government in the north, and Lord Wallace agreed that Liberalism survived 'partly because we had proper local government then. Until 1974, you had local councils, local business and local characters.' This sometimes relied upon the rights of aldermen (the only two Liberals on Manchester City Council in 1962 had this status) or on pacts with other parties, which preserved Liberal groups in Halifax, Huddersfield, Bacup and Rochdale. Commissioned to break up these pacts in the 1960s, Meadowcroft found resistance from those who felt they had kept Liberal representation alive whilst it had died out in other parts of the country.

Lord Wallace argued that these pacts were matters of necessity rather than ideology and were usually made with the other party most under electoral threat – often the Conservatives (as with the deals which brought Liberal MPs for Huddersfield and Bolton); but there were places where Labour gave Liberals a free run, as in Southport council elections, or for the parliamentary elections in North Cumberland, where Liberal MP Wilfrid Roberts also owned the *Carlisle Journal*, and for George Wadsworth at Buckrose (later Bridlington) in 1945.

Meadowcroft saw the key strength of northern Liberalism as ideological conviction and optimism illustrated in everything from the writings of Ramsay Muir and Elliot Dodds to the slogan of a local activist in the 1950s that 'we hate Tories and we don't trust the state' or barrister Gilbert Gray's joke that 'we Liberals don't just believe in miracles – we rely on them!' 'The lesson for today', in Meadowcroft's view, 'is that you need to understand what Liberalism is about, and that's where we go wrong. We haven't got these people around. The north held onto most of these people. It was they who kept the party going and we should honour their memory.' He added that 'Liberals should write more.'

Lord Wallace said the Liberal Party in the north 'survived because there were islands of activity with a bit of national input.' Like Meadowcroft, he applauded the continuity of service of a small number of Liberals – especially women – in constituencies where he'd campaigned and which he'd studied. This was reflected when an alderman he was introduced to in Huddersfield in 1968 immediately made reference to an explosion which had taken place in the district in which Wallace was staying over half a century earlier. Activists like Maggie Furniss in Colne Valley had kept the area's Women's Liberal Federation going strong for over fifty years from before the First World War to Richard Wainwright's victory in 1966.

'A new generation came in the 1960s who found people who had been keeping the faith; but I'm not sure I'm quite as enthusiastic as Michael about *how* they were keeping it going.' Wallace remembered: 'In Wakefield there were people who'd been keeping the party going but didn't want to do much about reviving the party after that. There were a lot of local Liberals who didn't like the Yellow Book at all and who still stood for free trade and cutting state spending. The culture clash was quite considerable.'

An area of strong agreement between the speakers and many of the audience when they gave their opinion was the importance of faith. A string of contributors 'confessed' to their Nonconformist background and asserted its importance in bringing them into the Liberal cause. Several reported that preachers in chapels had been key organisers and recruiters at elections such as for David Austick in Richmond in 1974, or the opportunities they had had to address congregations. Others pointed to the effectiveness of Sunday schools in giving young believers confidence in speaking and writing opinions, including in letters to MPs. Meadowcroft pointed to the high proportion of Liberal lord mayors of Leeds who had come from Mill Hill Unitarian Chapel.

Wallace described a sermon he heard in Shipley which '*almost* told you to go and vote Liberal'; he argued that – based on his campaigning experience and figures he had analysed at Nuffield College with David Butler – this relationship continued a generation after the faith itself had lapsed, so that the children of Methodists and Congregationalists were as likely to be Liberals as their parents even if they no longer attended chapel. This link was especially effective in the heavily Nonconformist constituencies of the north including the Pennine districts but also Southport and Berwick-upon Tweed as well.

Religious persecution drew in other faith groups, too: the Liberal revival in Southport was prompted by allegations of anti-Semitism in the local Conservatives against a local GP who aspired to be the party's parliamentary candidate. A contributor from the floor reported that a quarter of Liverpool Liberal councillors following the party's success in the city were from the Jewish community partly because of hostility experienced in other parties. Reflecting the resonance between the political and religious attitudes involved, Wallace said that his father-in-law Edward Rushworth was 'never happier than when he was dissenting.' Philanthropist J. B. Morrell, twice lord mayor of York, wrote to the Yorkshire Liberal Federation in 1952 remembering a song from childhood: 'I'm a Methodist born and a Methodist bred and when I'm gone there's a Methodist dead.' 'Perhaps', Morrell added, 'you will substitute the word 'Liberal' for my wife and myself.'

A contributor from the floor, remembering post-war Liberal campaigning in Southport being run from the Temperance Institute, ended saying 'of course, all that's gone now.' Undeniably the support of local newspapers, chapels and mill owners does not have the leverage it used to. There was a balanced mood in the room between this hard-headed historical recognition and Michael Meadowcroft's persistent belief in the northern spirit he hears expressed on buses in Leeds as much as in the writing of Alan Bennett. The Liberalism of the north was stubborn, hard working and hard-headed in its strategy and tactics. The meeting found that it might have to discover itself in different forms and places from those of a century ago, but that it showed ample impassioned support here.

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Reviews

Women MPs, 1918–1996

Iain Dale and Jacqui Smith (eds.), *The Honourable Ladies, Volume 1: Profiles of Women MPs 1918–1996* (Biteback Publishing, 2018)
Review by **Caron Lindsay**

The first thing that strikes you about the first volume of essays on every female MP before 1997 is its size. That essays on every woman who sat in the Mother of Parliaments between 1918 and 1996 can fit into a 650-page book is galling. The dearth of female Liberal MPs is startling, with a thirty-five year gap between Megan Lloyd George's resignation and Elizabeth Shields' election.

Iain Dale and Jacqui Smith have assembled a cast of politicians, academics and journalists to write the 168 essays in this volume. The biographical facts are dispensed with at the start of every chapter, leaving the essays themselves to be generally thoughtful appreciations of the subjects. Some of the essays are very short, as the subjects' parliamentary tenure was just a few months; others are much longer as befits more extended ministerial careers.

The second thing that strikes you is how the first Liberal women – generally ahead of their time – fought for exactly the same sorts of issues that occupy Liberal women today. Margaret Wintringham, for example, worked on issues like making child support and child custody more equitable, equality in employment for women, and ending child slavery. Liz Barker's essay on Lady Vera Terrington paints a picture of an affluent woman who boasted of attending parliament in fur coat and pearls but who worked to improve housing and who was an early advocate of animal welfare.

Care has been taken to match up MPs with people who have an affinity with them. Julia Goldsworthy, who formerly represented a Cornish seat, writes about Hilda Runciman who briefly held the seat of St Ives. She used her short term to campaign for better housing. Runciman was also the first MP to serve in parliament at the same time as her husband. Unfortunately, she had only stood in the by-election to pave the way for him to represent it at the next general election. It's unthinkable that that would happen today.

Kirsty Williams notes the solidarity that exists between women across political parties: the same for Megan Lloyd George as it was for herself decades later. Perhaps that made it easier for Megan to join and succeed within Labour when she felt that the Liberal Party lost its radicalism and moved rightwards. However, a recurring theme of the book is the bonds between women across parties in a male-dominated environment, and the sexism the women encountered that drew them together. We discover that even Margaret Thatcher was not immune to this. And it brings with it a prodigious workload that men simply don't have.

Some Liberal Democrats chose to write about women who had previously represented their seats from different parties. Lynne Featherstone, for example, found a feminist affinity between herself and her Labour predecessor, Joyce Butler, who represented Wood Green, even if they had different views on Europe.

The voters of East Dunbartonshire have form for electing young talented women. Twenty-three years before Jo Swinson won the seat at the age of 25, Margaret Ewing (then Bain) was elected at 29 in October 1974. Jo's generous tribute finds much common ground between them particularly on issues of gender equality.

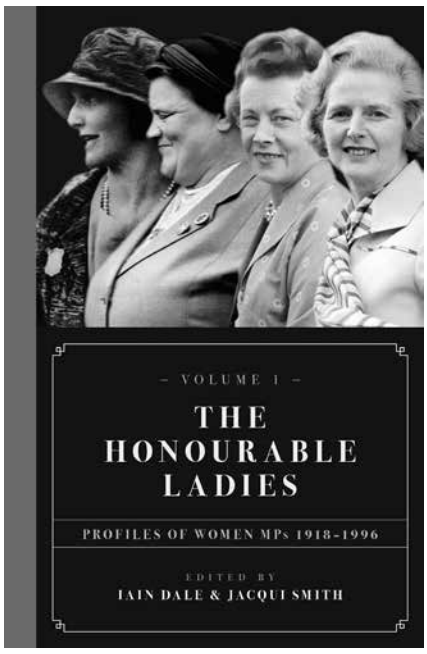
Shirley Williams has such a long and distinguished career that it took two writers, Jacqui Smith and Elizabeth Vallance, to cover it. Unfortunately only a page and a half is devoted to her time as a Liberal Democrat; but we do learn that Smith met her when she was advising the Labour government on nuclear proliferation.

In the eleven years between 1986 and 1997, we see more female Liberal MPs than ever before. Alison Suttie recalls Ray Michie's passion for Scottish devolution, which echoes Megan Lloyd George's early support for a Welsh assembly. Emma Nicholson is described as someone out of step with the '90s Conservative Party who was never really at home in the Liberal Democrats she joined. We all tend to remember Rosie Barnes as the MP who cradled a rabbit during a Party Political Broadcast; Miranda Green paints a picture of a passionate campaigner on health and social issues whose greatest achievements came outside parliament. Caroline Pidgeon describes how Liz Lynne fought against Cyril Smith's establishment in Rochdale and how her she combined living her political ideals through voluntary work with her acting career. Diana Maddock's grounding for local government and her last minute decision to go for the Christchurch by-election is an example of why you need to get out there and ask people from under-represented groups to stand.

While I've concentrated on the Liberal and Liberal Democrat MPs, one can read about all those key figures that one grew up with. From Betty Boothroyd to Virginia Bottomley to Joan Ruddock, you can see how each woman shaped public policy.

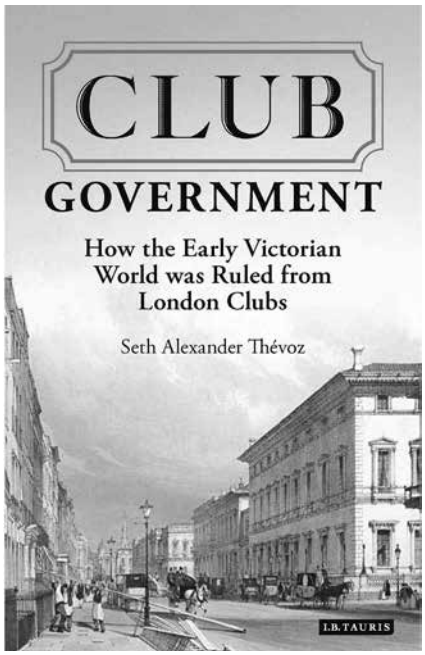
It's a book that you can devour at one sitting or dip in and out of. You can see the difference women make in parliament, even though there were never enough of them at any one time to change the culture of the institution. That came in 1997; and the second volume, covering the 323 female MPs elected since then, is published this autumn. I'll be first in the queue for that.

Caron Lindsay is editor of Liberal Democrat Voice and a member of the Federal Board. She joined the SDP on her 16th birthday in 1983.



Runing the world from clubs

Seth Alexander Thévoz, *Club Government: How the Early Victorian World was Ruled from London Clubs* (IB Taurus, 2018)
Review by **Tony Little**



Any reader of Victorian political novels, particularly those of Trollope or Disraeli, will be familiar with the importance of the London political club culture to Victorian members of parliament and of the gentlemanly ethos which, ideally, guided their actions and judgements. There have been plenty of books giving the history of individual clubs and even more anecdotal reminiscences of conversations and behaviour within their precincts. What there has not been, until now, is a serious analysis of the role played by these clubs, who played it, and the differences between the various institutions.

Seth Thévoz takes us from the origins of these establishments in the eighteenth century through to the Second Reform Act of 1867, though with references to both earlier and later periods. His focus is on the overtly political clubs though, inevitably, some consideration is given to the non-political clubs such as Boodles or the Athenaeum because many politicians were members of such clubs. What he does not do is consider the provincial political clubs whose importance developed during the period and particularly after the 1867 and 1884 Reform Acts, which required more organisation in the constituencies to win over the enlarged electorate – scope for Thévoz or another intrepid author, willing to venture into even more uncharted territory.

The early London clubs were founded by plucky entrepreneurs and, behind a respectable façade of chocolate or coffee drinking, the main activities were gambling and drinking alcohol, both hobbies widely embraced in fashionable aristocratic circles. Inevitably, given the upper-class membership and the location in St James', with its proximity to Westminster, some of these clubs took on a political hue. Though not exclusively so, Whites had Pittite associations and Brooks's Whig. Following the Great Reform Act more overtly political clubs were established, by politically motivated groups rather than private entrepreneurs, of which the Carlton and Reform were the most significant and successful but not the only examples covered by Thévoz.

The book had its origins in a doctoral thesis, and while this comes with a few disadvantages to the general reader, who may want to skip lightly over the introductory historiography, the compensation is that the author's academic credentials allowed him unprecedented access to the archives of surviving clubs and in particular to the membership records. This has facilitated a quantitative analysis showing the very high proportion of MPs who joined one or several clubs, demonstrates the linkages implied by common club membership and deflates the myth of blackballing. It confirms the political status of some clubs but tends to undermine it for at least one. It corroborates the central importance of the Carlton to the Tories while suggesting a division of Liberals between the Reform and Brooks's. The analysis is complicated by the author's utilisation of MPs' slightly slippery self-categorisation when filling in questionnaires for Dod's *Parliamentary Companion*, calling themselves Whig, Tory, Radicals, Repealers, Reformers or Liberal-Conservatives (free trade Conservatives/Peelites), as well as the more straightforward Conservative and Liberal, compounded by labelling changes over the period as parties and factions split or refashioned themselves. Parties at this period were not fully organised and nobody was a card-carrying member, but even so readers would have benefitted from some introductory definitions.

Why did MPs and the parties need the clubs and why in particular after the Great Reform Act? Reform did not immediately end the aristocratic dominance of politics, but there was a gradual tendency for MPs to be drawn from a wider social background. This increased the number of MPs without a London home and without the entrée to those grand aristocratic houses which had formed factional salons in previous periods. A further factor suggested by Thévoz was the destruction of parliament in the fire of 1834.[1] For most of the period, parliament was a building site. MPs needed somewhere to stay in London, somewhere to dine, somewhere to work and somewhere to socialise away from the public gaze at a time when they did not get expense allowances and there were few respectable hotels or pubs and taverns. Clubs also provided vital resources through their libraries and subscriptions to newspapers and journals. They kept pace with the latest technological developments such as the telegraph, producing the equivalent of a curated twitter feed. The parties needed varied spaces, small enough for committees or lobbying and large enough to bring together the whole party for critical meetings. While the clubs were tied to party, by and large they were a neutral space between internal factions, unlike the aristocratic salons, and while access was controlled it did not depend on the whims of the hostess issuing the invitation. The clubs were designed and adapted for these purposes and the book has some useful floor plans and drawings which illustrate the importance of the varying room sizes.

Twentieth-century cartoons of clubs create a misleading image of silent, crusty older gentlemen seated in over large armchairs and hidden behind broadsheet newspapers, forbidding any noise or disturbance. But my suspicion is that the most significant role of the club was as a gossip factory. Alcohol and gossip have been and remain pervasive factors in politics, forming building blocks for party cohesion and group morale. The corollary is that the clubs provided the space for groups of MPs to plot, lobby and campaign, though by their nature the existence of such activities needs to be deduced from the limited number of controversial cases which provoked complaints to the club's ruling committee. Club catering facilities could allow carefully orchestrated public

insight into the clubs when dinners with celebratory speakers were laid on as part of a campaign or to bolster support for some threatened party leader. On these occasions the press could be invited to publish the guest lists and the text of the speeches.

For the party hierarchy, the most important role for the clubs was the way in which they facilitated the operations of the whips and Thévoz devotes two chapters of the book to their operations. In the eighteenth century, a government majority could usually be ensured by a mixture of patronage, jobbery and electoral influence. The Treasury controlled enough constituencies to make the difference and enough funds earmarked for the management of the governing party. These weapons were denied to oppositions who were forced to rely on the ideological fire of their members and voluntary management methods. By the 1830s the government's advantages were waning and both sides were more reliant on their own efforts. The whips had to become more professional. The activities of the whips within parliament still await the attention of an enterprising author but Thévoz has uncovered much of what they did outside.

All the chief whips or their deputies, of both sides, were members of the appropriate clubs, and in some cases, particularly among Conservatives, acted as the gatekeepers facilitating MPs joining. The Reform and Carlton each provided a basement office from which the whips could operate and by the middle of the century division bells had been installed. The presence of significant numbers of MPs corralled inside the clubs of an evening, within reach of the House, undoubtedly made it easier for the whips to produce numbers for a division and, though Thévoz does not mention this, no doubt occasionally to plan an ambush. The clubs provided ideal spaces for intelligence-gathering by whips at a time when whipping was less strict and party cohesion weaker than in the twentieth century. On the Conservative side, which, in this period, was more usually in opposition, MPs paid subscriptions for the circulation of a printed whip and hence provided the surplus for an election fund. Liberal evidence is less secure but something similar probably prevailed.

The role of the whips and the clubs in elections were among the most controversial at the time, as each side played up the nefarious activities of the other with little concrete evidence. None of the clubs had the funds for widespread campaigning on the scale required for a general election, particularly when it is considered that fighting a constituency could cost more than it does today, without adjusting for inflation – treating and corruption were a regular feature. Thévoz provides examples of intervention in constituencies on a modest scale. He concludes that the provision of encouragement, coordination and basic expertise in registration and campaigning together with pairing willing candidates with vacant constituencies were the clubs' major contribution. Even so, the clubs provided what passed for national headquarters in a period when elections still retained a strong local component.

The final chapter attempts to justify the book's title and, while it does provide a very useful concluding analysis, to my mind it fails to prove that Victorian Britain, still less the early Victorian world was ruled from the London clubs. The phrase 'club government' originated with Edward Ellice, the Whig whip, but was seized on by Norman Gash for a chapter in his 1950s analysis of electoral politics between 1830 and 1850.[2] Gash outlines the development and functioning of the clubs but does not define what he meant by club government and neither does Thévoz. Some of the clubs had a clear ideological basis, such as the free trade and the ultra-protestant establishments, with clear agendas which they pushed forward, but the big clubs such as Brooks's, the Carlton and the Reform were broad based. Of course, they separated the Tory sheep from the Whig/Liberal goats, but their objectives were primarily utilitarian and social rather than the attainment of specific ideological utopias. The British Victorian world was governed from imposing, but modestly staffed, offices in Whitehall and accountable to the Palace of Westminster by men who happened to belong to clubs rather than because they joined. Neither Peel nor Palmerston chose ministers on the basis that they were good club men, though they probably were. Clubs may have provided the expertise that help elect MPs and provided comforting diversions on days when debates were less than enthralling but is that 'club government'?

This quibble with the title should not deter anyone from reading the book. Seth Thévoz has undertaken the most comprehensive and rational analysis of the part clubs played and how they were enabled to do so. He has demystified some of the aura that Trollope and Disraeli tried to create around clubland.

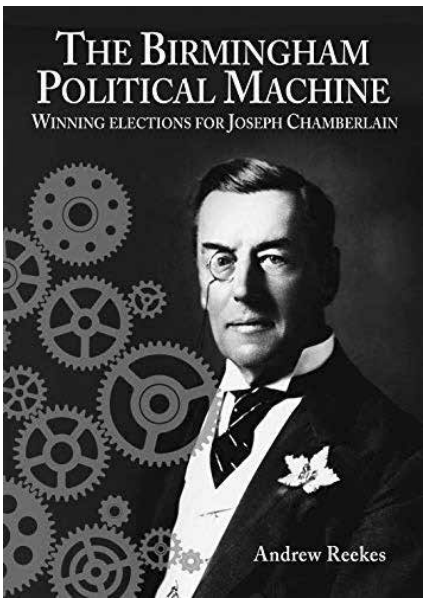
Tony Little is chair of the Liberal Democrat History Group. He was joint editor of British Liberal Leaders *and* Great Liberal Speeches. *He contributed to* Mothers of Liberty and Peace Reform and Liberation.

1 See Caroline Shenton, *The Day Parliament Burned Down* (Oxford University Press, 2012).
2 Norman Gash, *Politics in the Age of Peel* (Longmans Green & Co, 1953), ch. 15.

Chamberlain's machine

Andrew Reekes, *The Birmingham Political Machine: Winning Elections for Joseph Chamberlain* (West Midlands History Limited, 2018)
Review by **James Brennan**

The political career of Joseph Chamberlain continues to excite historians, and *The Birmingham Political Machine* is one of the latest to join the historiography. However, rather than offering a straightforward biography, Andrew Reekes charts the development of a highly efficient political organisation. This was a group of influential politicians whose electoral tactics dominated municipal politics in Birmingham, and were applied nationally through issues such as tariff reform. Reekes focuses on these instrumental figures, with Joseph Chamberlain as the key leader, who designed and operated this 'Machine' to great electoral success. Their methods have left an enduring legacy. In one of her first speeches as prime minister, Theresa May referred to Chamberlain as a key influence, and this was acknowledged in subsequent media coverage. The prime minister was referring to the political beliefs of



Chamberlain, his Liberal Unionism, which was influenced by the ideal of the Civic Gospel. The strength of Liberal Unionism in Birmingham, and in the West Midlands more broadly, was a direct result of the political machinery forged by Chamberlain and his allies. A question that Reekes wishes to resolve is how this group of politicians achieved long-lasting success.

The book is organised chronologically with each chapter charting a specific phase in the group's development. Whilst Joseph Chamberlain is the central figure, he shares the stage with other important personalities. For instance, each chapter concludes with a biography of key individuals who were crucial to a certain era of the organisation. The first chapter provides the context. Here we see the influences on the Machine from Thomas Attwood and Joseph Sturge, to John Bright and George Dawson. With the assistance of William Harris and Jesse Collins, Chamberlain would build on the political structures that had been present in Birmingham. Following this we have Chamberlain's fight for education reform via the National Education League. Here lies the importance of Nonconformity in the character of Birmingham's politics as he fought against the Forsters proposal which favoured Anglican schools. Chapters 3 and 4 deal with the Machine's capture of the Birmingham School Board and the development of municipal politics respectively. The next two chapters focus on the Machine's application on a national level through the National Liberal Federation and the Home Rule Crisis. Interestingly, both highlight the Machine's appeal to other political parties as Conservatives began to emulate the Birmingham group (p. 111). The final chapter discusses the Machine's work on Tariff Reform. Here Reekes explores the ways in which the Birmingham Machine utilised printed material and appealed to women through the Women's Unionist Association (p. 167). Reekes concludes by noting how the Machine continued to fashion electoral successes up to 1945.

The arguments made in this study have similarities to E. P Hennock's *Fit and Proper Persons*, and Anne Rodrick's *Self-Help and Civic Culture*. Both acknowledge the importance of this group of politicians in directing the development of municipal politics in late nineteenth-century Birmingham. However, Reekes delves slightly deeper by detailing the contributions of certain individuals during specific phases of the Machine's development. There are instances, admittedly a minority, where personal relationships are shown to be rather more tense. The first example is the problematic relationship between Joseph and Arthur Chamberlain over the issue of tariff reform. The second instance can be found in the biography of William Harris who supported Gladstone after the 1886 Home Rule Crisis. These demonstrated how big political issues could have major consequences for the Machine.

This work is part of an impressive research output that includes *Speeches That Changed Britain* (2015) along with *Two Titans, One City* (2016). However, it is inevitable for minor errors to occur. For instance, on page 19 he refers to George Dixon's attempts as mayor of Birmingham to calm the 'Catholic riots' of 1867. This is a reference to the Murphy Riots whose leader, William Murphy, was a Nonconformist preacher. This unrest was directed against the Catholic population, and therefore the terminology may be misleading. Furthermore, on page 126 he writes that Mrs George Dixon had been a key part of the Birmingham Women's Liberal Unionist Association, formed in October 1888. However, records demonstrate that her death occurred three years before the founding of this organisation.

Regardless, this is a fascinating contribution to our understanding of electoral machinery. The continued legacy of Joseph Chamberlain, as demonstrated by references made by modern politicians, demonstrates the relevance of this Machine. Reekes expands our understanding of the key figures and influences of Joseph Chamberlain's career. These underpinned his political success and saw great transformations within Birmingham's municipal politics. The arguments presented are accompanied by a number of colour illustrations drawn predominantly from archives in Birmingham, such as the Cadbury Research Library. These are a great addition and add to a work that will appeal to both general and specialist readers.

James Brennan is an MPhil/PhD student at Newman University, Birmingham. His thesis focuses on the political culture of the West Midlands from 1918 to 1929.

Liberalism in world history

Helena Rosenblatt, *The Lost History of Liberalism: From Ancient Rome to the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton University Press, 2018)
Review by **Alex Tebble**

What we assume liberalism to mean can often obscure more than it clarifies. From the crudest individualism to the most intrusive collectivism, many 'true' liberalisms are distinguished from some ill-fated perversion or façade. It is an omnipresent term used not only to describe a variety of incompatible and incommensurable meanings, but also to both revere and revile those meanings with equal ferocity: 'it's morally lax and hedonistic, if not racist, sexist, and imperialist', and yet responsible for a great deal that is politically valuable within 'our ideas of fairness, social justice, freedom, and equality' (p. 1).

The Lost History of Liberalism aims to illuminate what the word meant to those who originally used the term and gives an account of how those meanings have evolved through a 'world history' of its

uses from ancient Rome to the twenty-first century – an ambitious scope for a relatively short book. Helena Rosenblatt suggests 'we are muddled by what we mean by liberalism', and that we frequently 'talk past each other, precluding any possibility of reasonable debate'. To provide some clarity and grounding, Rosenblatt aims to neither attack nor defend liberalism, 'but to ascertain its meaning and trace its transformation over time' (pp. 1–2).

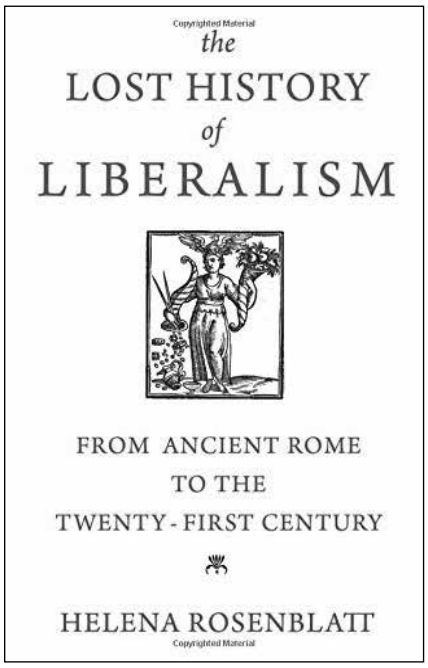
Rosenblatt begins with what it meant to be liberal. Demonstrating 'the virtues of a citizen, showing devotion to the common good, and respecting the importance of mutual connectedness' were indicative of the term. Both duty and self-discipline were necessary requirements for the moral fortitude of a liberal character (pp. 8–9). From the aristocratic ethos of Cicero and Seneca, we are taken on a swift tour of the Christianisation, democratisation and politicisation of liberal virtue. From St Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, to the Spanish and Italian renaissance humanists to Machiavelli, Montaigne, John Donne, the Earl of Shaftesbury, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Adam Ferguson and Adam Smith, we find an overview of the evolution of what it meant to be a liberal citizen in terms of virtue, education and civility. The familiar liberal hero John Locke is briefly mentioned, but only in relation to the meaning of a liberal education, rather than the innate right of individuals to pursue their life and liberty as they see fit with which his name came to be associated. As a pre-history of liberalism, 'by the mid-seventeenth century Europeans had been calling liberality a necessary virtue for more than two thousand years. If ever there was a liberal tradition this was it' (p. 19).

The Lost History not only gives an account of the different meanings that have been ascribed to liberalism and evoked in its uses, but recovers some of those meanings that have been eclipsed, distorted and eroded. Rosenblatt intends to steer clear of historical anachronism, the common pitfall made by those who 'stipulate a personal definition' and shape the past through the lens of the present by 'construct[ing] a history that supports it' (pp. 2–3). Rather than the Anglo-American tradition that has come to be indicative of the term, Rosenblatt turns our attention away from this twentieth-century construction primarily toward the Franco-Prussian origins of liberalism: in nineteenth-century French and German reflections on the American and French Revolutions. Here we find a liberalism of a different hue. Rather than an atomistic individualism concerned with the rights and interests of those individuals, we find liberals concerned with social justice, civic values and the moral development of communities. Where rights were spoken of, they went hand in hand with duties – often as a prerequisite for rights. These liberals were not free-market fundamentalists, but self-avowed moralists.

The bulk of the book explores how liberal ideals came to be distinguished from – but not wholly separate to – a tradition of liberal virtue. Rosenblatt emphasises the key roles played by Marquis de Lafayette, Madame de Staël and Benjamin Constant in setting out influential articulations of liberal ideas, sentiments and constitutions. Liberalism, on this account, was 'forged in an effort to safeguard the achievements of the French Revolution and to protect them from the forces of extremism' – against accusations of illiberalism from Edmund Burke – by prioritising the rule of law, personal freedoms and public morality (pp. 52, 66). These were fundamental to liberalism as a wider political and moral doctrine.

As Rosenblatt has previously explored, Constant's liberalism held a close relationship to religion and an ambivalent one to democracy – a reversal of the relationships we might have come to expect. Early liberals were keen to avoid too close ties to a volatile force that threatened to undermine public morality and the political institutions necessary for upholding the personal freedom required for such moral development. The book then follows liberalism's continental contortions as liberals tried to restate and distinguish their views following the 1848 revolutions and the rise of socialism. Liberals often committed to more collectivist and interventionist ideals – never wholly nor uniformly committing to laissez-faire – in an effort to cultivate the moral character of the majority. This, however, partly led to the darker sides of liberalism in the elitist, imperialist and eugenic territory which some of its key figures tread.

In an interesting and informative read, the book covers an impressive scope of material. Whilst at times, due to its relative shortness, the book cannot always fully illuminate why liberalism held a particular meaning at one moment for an orator – to see things their way,



to borrow Quentin Skinner's phrase – or the tensions and ambiguities within these, it nonetheless maps a clear range of meanings that liberalism historically held, showing the gaps between what these proto-liberals might have meant and what we assume liberalism to mean.

Rosenblatt then briefly turns to how this history was lost. Whilst the meaning of liberalism continued to be hotly contested, its grounding became no longer associated with its French and German heritage. Between two World Wars, Carl Schmitt, Hannah Arendt, John Dewey, Isaiah Berlin and Friedrich Hayek contributed towards purging liberalism of connotations of duty, patriotism and self-sacrifice – gladly, for some liberals, in the context of the totalitarian threat. This shifted liberalism toward a more individualistic and rights-orientated framework with a British heritage, in contradistinction to a now supposed French and German illiberalism. But out with the bathwater went generosity, virtue, the common good, the state as a promoter of that common good and a communal ethical life. Rosenblatt ends by suggesting our task is one of reconnecting with and finding conviction in the resources of this lost liberal tradition.

Across the twentieth century, many liberals articulated a distinct set of meanings, values, practices and prescriptions under the moniker of liberalism, claiming to be the true heirs of a liberal heritage with an accompanying list of genealogical heroes and villains, prophets and charlatans. The strength of the book is in challenging some of the

History Group at Lib Dem conference

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presuppositions regarding where to look when embarking on this endeavour and revealing some of the historical depths of why we have become muddled with these assumptions. Which liberalism has greater claims to rule the present is often unclear, premised on what is perceived to be threatened and receding from view. The problem is that some histories are irretrievably lost and some are more complex than the stories we tell as we try to piece a tradition from fragments, given the shifting and incompatible definitions and accounts of liberalism's history. Liberalism has perhaps always been an elusive tradition.

Alex Tebble is a PhD student in Politics at the University of York; the title of his research is 'On the Genealogy of Liberalism'. This review was originally published on the LSE Review of Books blog at: https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsereviewofbooks/2019/01/04/book-review-the-lost-history-of-liberalism-from-ancient-rome-to-the-twenty-first-century-by-helena-rosenblatt/.

How the Liberal Party in Eastleigh grew in the 1970s

Martin Kyrle, *The Liberals in Hampshire – a Part(l)y History: Part 3 Eastleigh 1972–81: The thorn in the flesh bursts into flower* (Sarsen Press, 2017)

Review by **Mark Pack**

Following on from his two previous volumes, Martin Kyrle's latest foray takes the story of the Liberal Party in his part of Hampshire through to the years of growing political success.

Kyrle's volumes add vital colour to the political historical record, featuring the sort of detail of politics at the grassroots that is vital for understanding how the overall political system really works, but which is often not preserved in the historical record. Even the leaders of local councils, let alone the charismatic first councillor from a party or their demon-organising election agent, frequently leave very little trace behind in conventional records, and although social media means there is more data for future historians to mine, the decline of local media coverage cuts the other way. Obscurity continues to beckon for the personalities who played a key role in shaping the long-term politics of communities. Unless, that is, local histories such as this one preserve them.

But it is not only the people who tend to be forgotten. So, too, the developments in electoral tactics that tell a broader picture about how the operation of elections was changing in the eyes of voters.

The shift from politicians only doing much to contact voters at election time to (outside of safe seats) having to be active all year round has been a major alteration in how politicians spend their time and how voters interact with politicians. It is also a shift that gets only little attention, and even less detail, in more general political histories. It is only local histories such as Martin Kyrle's and *A Flagship Borough: 25 Years of a Liberal Democrat Sutton Council* which help record and explain this shift in a way that many grander political histories from professors completely miss.

This volume of Kyrle's is more a scrapbook of useful information for other historians and interested political activists than a conventional history in its own right. The book is dominated by appendices full of past election leaflets (often reproduced in colour), election results, and other scraps of information (including how the Conservatives ended up paying his election expenses in one general election). There are plenty of names and events here to be enjoyed by those whose memories stretch back to some of these times, and also plenty for future historians to make good use of. There is rather less of the prose retelling of events than in earlier volumes, but the wealth of detail provided by the leaflets and other information means the story is still clearly there to be send, enjoyed and learnt from.

Dr Mark Pack worked at Liberal Democrat HQ from 2000 to 2009, and prior to that was frequently a volunteer member of the parliamentary by-election team. He is co-author of 101 Ways To Win An Election.

A Liberal Democrat History Group fringe meeting

The Liberal Party, Health Policy and the Origins of the NHS

The familiar story of the NHS has it that the health service is a Labour achievement, dating from the Attlee administration of 1945–51. But in reality the Liberal governments of the early twentieth century helped to lay the foundations of the NHS, and the welfare state as a whole.

Join **Dr Chris Renwick** (University of York) and **Lord Kenneth O. Morgan** to discuss the Liberal contribution to health policy and the origins of the NHS. Chair: Baroness Judith Jolly.

7.45pm, Sunday 15 September
Purbeck Suite, Marriott Highcliff Hotel, Bournemouth (no conference pass necessary)