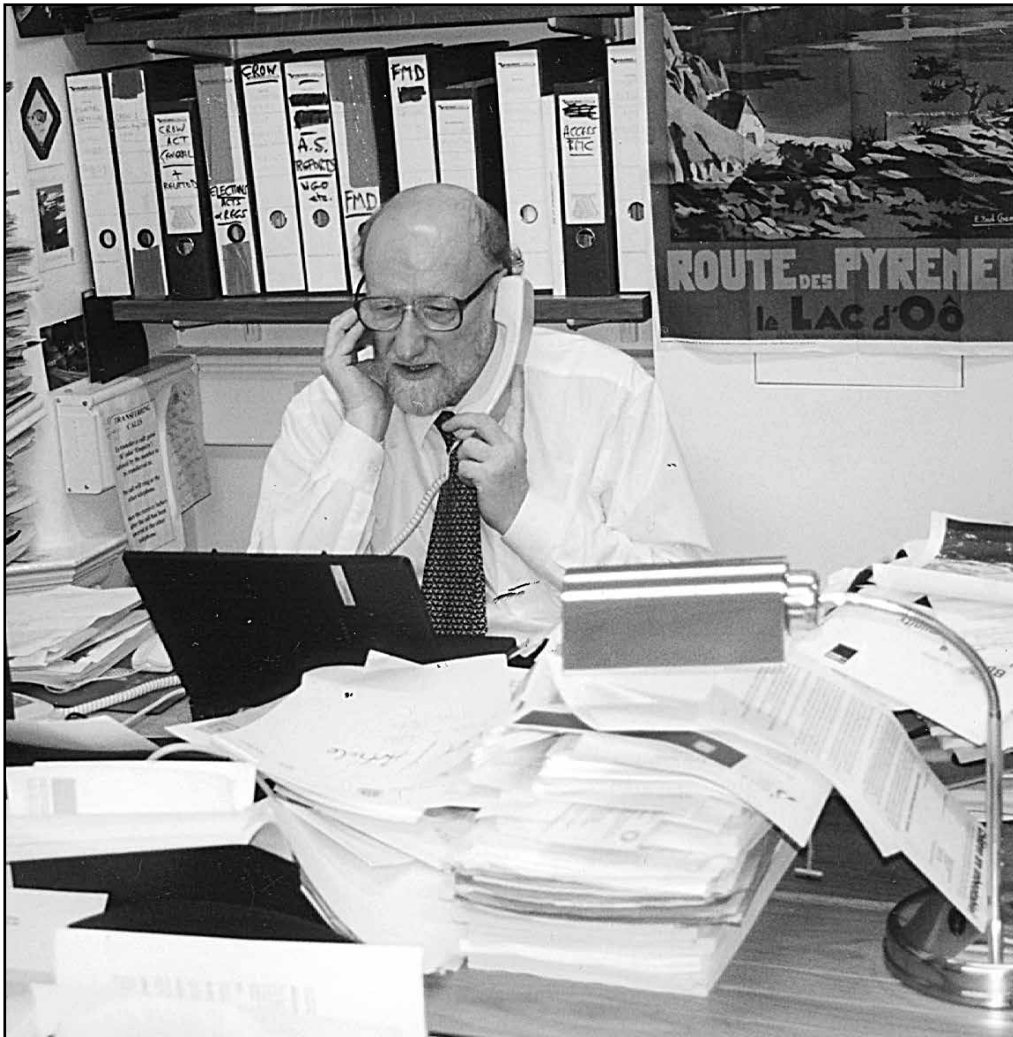


Journal of Liberal

HISTORY



Tony Greaves remembered

Michael Meadowcroft

Lord Tony Greaves, 1942 – 2021 Appreciation

Mark Frankel

T. Edmund Harvey Liberal politician of conscience

John Ayshford

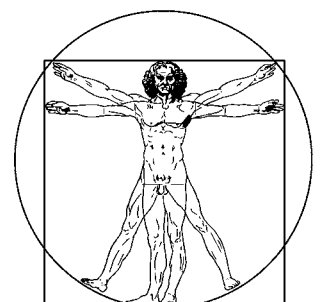
Vision in a time of crisis Ernest Simon and revitalising Liberalism

Jim McGowan

'Universally respected, admired and ... disliked' Gladstone and franchise reform

David Cloke

The post-war welfare state, Beveridge and the Liberal Party Meeting report



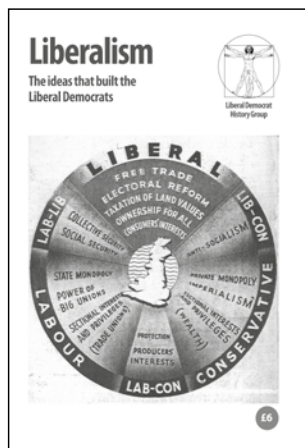
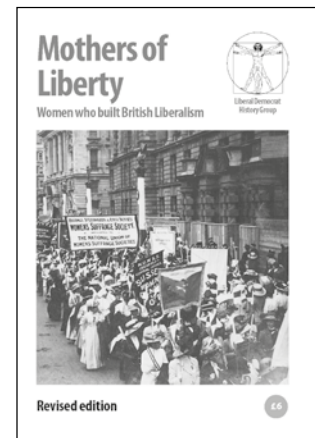
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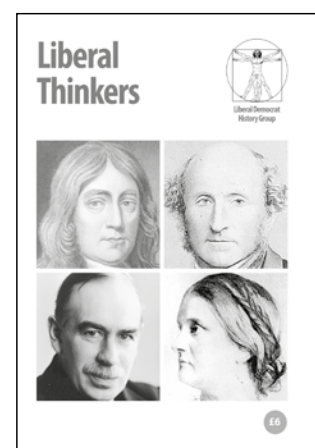
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Liberal Democrat History Group

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 more broadly. The Group organises discussion meetings and produces the *Journal of Liberal History* and a range of books and booklets.

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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Liberal History News

Summer 2021

Editorial

Welcome to the summer 2021 issue of the *Journal of Liberal History*. Our apologies for the late despatch of this issue, which should have been published in July. We will be back to our normal timetable with the autumn issue, which will be published in mid September.

This issue includes four main articles: a biography of the Liberal and independent MP T. Edmund Harvey; a study of E. D. Simon's role in revitalising Liberal industrial policy in the 1920s and 1930s; an analysis of Gladstone's evolving views on franchise reform, in 1864; and an appreciation of that great Liberal stalwart Tony Greaves, a good friend to the History Group, who died, much too early, in March this year.

A commemoration of that other Liberal (and Social Democrat) stalwart, Shirley Williams, will follow in our autumn issue. We also record, in 'Liberal History News', the sad deaths of Trevor Smith (Lord Smith of Clifton), who played a key role in the Rowntree Trust's support of Liberal politics, and of Professors John Vincent and Angus Hawkins, who both contributed to the study of Liberal history and the *Journal of Liberal History*.

Duncan Brack (Editor)

Trevor Smith

Trevor Smith (Lord Smith of Clifton) who died in April, aged 83, was an influential figure in Liberal/Liberal Democrat and academic circles for sixty years, mostly behind the scenes. After joining the Liberal Society at the London School of Economics in 1955, his only electoral contest came in the 1959 general election, when he achieved 11 per cent in Lewisham West – at 22, he was the youngest candidate in the UK.

He pursued an academic career, ending as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ulster 1991–99, the biggest university on the island of Ireland and based at four separate sites around the north. He successfully challenged entrenched attitudes at the university, and embarked on a number of imaginative and liberal initiatives including establishing Incore, the International Centre for Conflict Resolution, with the United Nations University, Tokyo.



He was a board member of the Joseph Rowntree Social Service Trust from 1975, and its Chair from 1987 to 1999; he retired from the board in 2007. During his time as Chair, the Trust saw a significant reorientation of its goals as a non-charitable trust geared towards funding political activity around democratic reform and social justice. In order to reflect this, it was renamed the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust in 1990. For more than fifty years the Trust had been the major financial supporter of the Liberal Party and Trevor continued this but, not being enamoured of the effectiveness of party headquarters, the Trust's grants were given directly to specific organisations, particularly the Association of Liberal Councillors.

He retained his Liberal and Liberal Democrat membership and became publicly active politically when appointed as a life peer in 1997, serving as spokesperson on Northern Ireland in

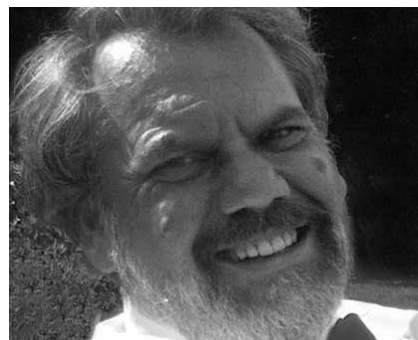
2000–11. He emerged as a vocal critic of the Liberal Democrats' participation in the coalition government, including being one of only four Lib Dem peers to vote against the trebling of tuition fees; in July 2014 he called for Nick Clegg's resignation as leader.

Angus Hawkins

Angus Hawkins died suddenly, aged 67, shortly before Christmas 2020.

His publications helped to refine and reshape over almost four decades historians' understanding of nineteenth-century politics. His arguments about 'Parliamentary government' and the formation of coalitions in the mid-Victorian era, his seminal two-volume rehabilitation of Lord Derby, 'the forgotten prime minister', and his magisterial *Victorian Political Culture* (2015), are just some of the many outstanding contributions to scholarship he leaves behind.

He wrote a number of articles for the *Journal of Liberal History* and was a supporter of our project to install a commemorative plaque on the building in King Street, St James, London, which stands on the site of Willis's Rooms. This was where, on 6 June 1859, Whigs, Peelites and Radicals agreed to combine to bring down Derby's minority Tory government; the meeting is generally held to mark the formation of the Liberal Party.



John Vincent

Professor John Vincent, who died in March aged 83, was a patron of the *Journal of Liberal History*, and spoke at one of the History Group's early meetings, on the repeal of the Corn Laws, on the 150th anniversary in 1996.



The study that made his name, *The Formation of the Liberal Party 1857–68*, was published in 1966; it was hugely important in developing historical understanding of its subject, and, more widely, of Victorian politics. Vincent rejected what he saw as the cruder orthodoxies in social and political history, of change being dominated by simple economic trends or shifts in social structure. Instead, he saw Liberalism as the binding together of disparate elements from varied social backgrounds, as well as pressure groups and religious Nonconformists. Popular radicalism was, he argued, 'the product of

the leisure of Saturday night and Sunday morning, the pothouse [pub] and the chapel, not of the working week'. That often fragile alliance or 'community of sentiment' had, crucially, also depended on the leadership of charismatic individuals such as Gladstone.

It was the calibre of this book, together with *Pollbooks: How the Victorians Voted*, that enabled Vincent, aged thirty-two, to move from a lectureship to a professorship. *The Governing Passion: Cabinet Government and Party Politics in Britain, 1885–86* (with Alastair Cooke) and scholarly editions of diaries by nineteenth and twentieth-century politicians, derived from extensive archival research and added to his reputation.

Politically he moved steadily to the right and in the 1980s developed a sideline as a columnist for *The Times* and the *Sun*. He was an instinctive controversialist, a lover of paradox who enjoyed, in university teaching and personal conversation as well as in journalism, questioning received opinion.

Gladstone and the World Cup of PMs

William Gladstone came close to being crowned winner in The Rest

Is History podcast's World Cup-style competition to find the greatest prime minister earlier this year.

The podcast is co-presented by the historians Dominic Sandbrook and Tom Holland. Followers of the podcast could vote via Twitter.

In a phenomenal run, the Grand Old Man triumphed over Tony Blair before scoring another easy victory over his great nineteenth-century rival, Benjamin Disraeli – 'a real Victorian grudge match,' in Sandbrook's words.

In a shock result, the four-times Liberal premier then overcame Winston Churchill in the semi-finals to reach the final, in which he was pitted against Labour's Clement Attlee.

Sadly 'he couldn't repeat the trick in the final, so it was Attlee who took the crown', observed Sandbrook.

A couple of other Liberal premiers also performed strongly. Asquith triumphed over Margaret Thatcher in the first round but was knocked out in the quarter-finals by Churchill.

Similarly, Lloyd George overcame Labour's Harold Wilson in the first round but met his Waterloo against Attlee in the quarter-finals.

You can see the full results at: <https://twitter.com/TheRestHistory/status/1371400870496149507>.

York Membership

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**.

June

8 June 1904: Winston Churchill joins the Liberal Party, three days after saying (in front of ten thousand people at Alexandra Palace) that he would give the matter 'serious consideration'.

July

15 July 2004: The Liberal Democrats win the Leicester South by-election with 34.9% of the vote from Labour. Local councillor Parmjit Singh Gill is returned to Westminster. Gill fought the seat at the general election the following year but was defeated by the Labour candidate Peter Soulsby.

August

24 August 1931: In the wake of the financial crisis which led to the fall of the second Labour government, Ramsay MacDonald obtains the King's consent to form an all-party National Government and Liberal leader Sir Herbert Samuel and Rufus Isaacs (Lord Reading) agree to become members of the cabinet. They are formally appointed Home Secretary and Foreign Secretary respectively over the next two days.

Edmund Harvey

Mark Frankel tells the story of the Quaker who was one of only sixteen MPs to have sat in Parliament during both world wars.

T. Edmund Harvey, Libera

He went from the days of Edwardian liberalism through to the age of the atomic bomb, and was involved in the great and humble issues of the day as they played out in parliament, in the wider public domain, and in his own life of faith and practice.

T. EDMUND HARVEY (1875–1955) was the Liberal MP for West Leeds 1910–18, for Dewsbury 1923–24 and an independent MP 1937–45. He was one of only sixteen MPs to have sat in parliament in both world wars, putting him among such greats as Lloyd George and Winston Churchill. He was a Quaker who notably expressed his religious values by his work for conscientious objection to military conscription, although he did much more. He went from the days of Edwardian liberalism through to the age of the atomic bomb, and was involved in the great and humble issues of the day as they played out in parliament, in the wider public domain, and in his own life of faith and practice. Yet he is a neglected figure. A biography by the Quaker historian, Edward Milligan, remains uncompleted. Harvey has a vivid few pages in parliament's illustrated publication, *Duty and Democracy* in the First World War, but mention of him elsewhere in the secondary literature is confined to a few lines on his connection with conscientious objection in the First World War. Aside from the secondary literature, there is *We Were Seven*, a childhood memoir by his brother, William Fryer Harvey. With the personal and place names altered, it is an account of an upbringing in a wealthy Quaker family in the north of England in which Harvey features as 'Tom, the kindest and most good natured of elder brothers'.¹ This article is in seven sections. The first section gives a brief account of Harvey's early years and outlines the six further sections which make up the remainder of the paper. These further sections are in chronological order, from Harvey's time as warden of Toynbee Hall through to his final years.

1. Harvey was born into a prosperous Quaker family in Leeds in 1875. His given name was Thomas Edmund but he preferred to be known as Edmund and his nickname was Ted in a play on his initials. His father, William Harvey, was

a businessman, philanthropist and active Liberal. The family had close ties to the Rowntrees; Arnold Stephenson Rowntree, who was Liberal MP for York 1910–18, became his brother-in-law in 1906. Harvey went to Bootham, the Quaker school in York, then to Oxford, where he got a first-class degree in *Litterae Humaniores*. After a study tour of Berlin and Paris, in 1900 Harvey went to London to be an assistant in the British Museum but intent on a career in social reform and politics. Mentored by Joseph Allen Baker, a Quaker and one of the Progressive group on the London County Council, Harvey became an LCC councillor and in 1906 succeeded Rev. Samuel Barnett as warden of Toynbee Hall, the university settlement in London's East End. His time at Toynbee Hall, dealt with in section two, begins the thematic episodes which make up the remainder of this paper. Section two explains how Harvey, while at Toynbee Hall, took on work to reform the Balfour Act and published articles on the liberal approach to social reform. The paper then moves on to section three about Harvey's election to parliament in 1910 and his interest in imperial affairs. In the years before war in 1914 he campaigned for the indigenous population of British East Africa. Subsequently, when he was back in parliament from 1937, he spoke on Indian independence. The fourth section of the paper deals with the high point of his career, which came in 1916, when he won the right of conscientious objection to military conscription and went on to help set up and administer a system for alternative national service. In addition, during the First World War he sacrificed his career to his conscience not once but twice, and stood down from his parliamentary seat in December 1918. The paper then moves to the fifth episode which is about how, when he was back in parliament for the short duration of the Labour minority government of 1924, he opposed naval rearmament, acting both as a Quaker pacifist and a loyal party man. After October 1924 Harvey was out of parliament until March 1937, when

al politician of conscience



he was elected as an independent for the Combined English Universities, a seat he held until the general election of July 1945. His years as an independent MP are covered in the sixth section of the paper, which has two sub-themes. The first is his support for the abortive Criminal Justice Bill of 1938–39 out of a lifelong commitment to prison reform. The second is the reintroduction of conscription when war came again in 1939 and Harvey reprised his role as protector of the rights of conscientious objection. The seventh and final section of the paper deals with the years between his retirement

from parliament in July 1945 and his death in May 1955, during which he was one of the first to speak against the atomic bomb.

2.

The first episode of Harvey's career begins with his time at Toynbee Hall, where he was appointed deputy warden in late 1904 and warden proper in May 1906, leaving the post in July 1911 on his marriage to Alice Irene, daughter of Professor Silvanus P. Thompson FRS. In 1908–10, he was involved in trying to settle

Thomas Edmund Harvey, 17 November 1918 (Bassano Ltd, whole-plate glass negative; © National Portrait Gallery, London)

T. Edmund Harvey, Liberal politician of conscience

the controversy over Balfour's Education Act of 1902, which had continued after its enactment. He worked with a cousin, the educationist Michael E. Sadler, as joint secretaries to the Education Settlement Committee, an independent body set up to deal with Nonconformists' objections to the provision in the Balfour Act empowering local education authorities to support Church schools. Completing its deliberations in 1910, the committee published a sizable booklet, *Towards Educational Peace*, co-authored by Harvey and Sadler. What was effectively a privately produced Green Paper made ingenious proposals which would meet the Nonconformists' concerns while being administratively feasible and consistent with the strategic aim of the Balfour Act, which was an efficient national education system. The Liberals' attempts to reform the Balfour Act were thwarted by the House of Lords. This meant that nothing came of *Towards Educational Peace* in the short term, but it had a long-term effect in two ways. Firstly, it looked forward to the Butler Education Act of 1944, when coincidentally Harvey was back in parliament, which finally implemented the recommendation to formalise the place of religious education in schools. Secondly, Harvey's work boosted ecumenism, bringing the warring Christian denominations together in the face of growing secularisation.

Harvey's work for the Education Settlement Committee was an instance of an activism which reflected his secular credentials as a political progressive and his religious commitment to interdenominational goodwill. This would not have been of interest to Clement Attlee, an unobtrusive atheist, who was briefly secretary to Toynbee Hall during Harvey's time and found him 'a vague and amiable Liberal'.² Unlike Attlee, Harvey believed the solution to socio-economic deprivation lay other than in socialist structural changes. As he wrote, 'The answers to the problems of the age must be worked out in the lives of men.'³ This meant, for example, middle-class families settling in working-class areas, to counter what Harvey called suburbanism, the geographical separation of the well-to-do from the poor. 'If we are to make Christ's teaching of human brotherhood a reality, we must share our neighbour's burden and not be content with protesting against its weight.'⁴ Harvey lived this example himself at Toynbee Hall. Of his activities there, the most colourful was his chairing of the Thursday evening Smoking Debates, which were an opportunity for lively exchanges between

In parliament he associated with the Liberal Radicals, a group of backbenchers, journalists and intellectuals interested in foreign and colonial policy who clustered around the editorial board of the periodical *The Nation*, which was owned by the Rowntrees.

the local proletarians and the Oxbridge residents of Toynbee Hall. Harvey's one vice was smoking tobacco, which he justified because it helped him fraternise with working-class men. He would call the Smoking Debates to order by knocking out his pipe with the emollient words 'There is much to be said on both sides.'⁵

3. January 1910 marks a turning point in Harvey's career when he was elected as the Liberal MP for West Leeds. He had secured the nomination because of his status as warden of Toynbee Hall and his family's good name. During the election campaign, he handled raucous public meetings with skills acquired from the Smoking Debates. In parliament he associated with the Liberal Radicals, a group of backbenchers, journalists and intellectuals interested in foreign and colonial policy who clustered around the editorial board of the periodical *The Nation*, which was owned by the Rowntrees. In line with this, Harvey took up the case of the Masai, the independently minded nomadic people in British East Africa whose traditional grazing lands were coveted by white settlers. In 1911 Harvey was asking parliamentary questions about the tribespeople being transferred from good northern lands to less desirable territory to the south. The government replied that the change had the full approval of the chief of the Masai, his regents and tribal representatives. Harvey took the matter to *The Nation* with an anonymous piece, 'Naboth's Vineyard'. The article drew its title from the story in 1 Kings 21 about the coveting of land by a neighbour. Harvey showed that the colonialists were taking the best land from the Masai who, wrote Harvey ironically, had the misfortune to be rich. In another ironic thrust, Harvey explained how the *East African Standard* of 10 June 1911 had 'ingenuously expressed the settlers' gratitude to His Excellency the Governor, who placed their cause so clearly before the Masai tribe as to cause them to realize the advantages to them of settlement in one reserve.'⁶ Harvey returned to the matter two years later, in June 1913, with a question in the House of Commons which was met by the government's stock reference to the consent of the tribal hierarchy.⁷ This prompted another article in *The Nation*, 'Naboth's Vineyard – the sequel'. It began '... beneath the shelter of a British Protectorate, the hand of Sir Having Greedy has been stretched out to seize the possessions of a savage tribe, unhappy in their too great wealth'. The article

went on to say how in the face of court action by tribesmen, the Colonial Office had been trying to delay the governor's expropriations, but the last legal obstacles having been removed the governor had prevailed. In the course of transfers from one reservation to another, the article continued, the Masai had suffered the immense economic loss of hundreds of thousands of livestock. Prolonged legal action by the Masai had eventually failed. Harvey concluded, 'The imperfect story of our dealings with this people is not pleasant reading but at least we can be glad that under British rule it should be possible for a subject tribe to impugn the justice of the action even of the highest of the King's officials.'⁸

Harvey was a progressive imperialist in that he favoured the constitutional approach of Whitehall against the local colonial administration's unscrupulous support for 'Sir Having Greedy'. He was able to re-assert his preferred form of imperialism when he was back in parliament 1937–45 during the agitation for Indian independence. He regularly spoke in the Commons about India, urging the protection of minorities, including Muslims and the primitive tribes, and gradual moves towards eventual Dominion status. This put him at one with the wartime secretary of state for India, Leo Amery, who was in turn at odds with Prime Minister Churchill's expansive vision of global empire. Harvey condemned the campaign of civil disobedience renewed by Gandhi and the Congress Party in August 1942 under the slogan of 'Quit India'. Harvey said the campaign of non-violence misled the ignorant into acts of violence and crime. The following March, Harvey called on Gandhi to have the 'magnanimity to admit that he had made a Himalayan blunder in believing that the Indian people would act non-violently'.⁹ Three years later in 1945, the last words that Harvey was to utter in parliament were on India. He spoke figuratively of how the lamp of parliamentary democracy should be shared with India and the wider human family. He had urged peace and reconciliation on the terms as he understood them, which was as a progressive imperialist who offered to India the model of the British system of government as a means for the protection of human rights and the gradual transfer to self-rule of a united country. As history knows, he was to be disappointed.

4.

Harvey's reputation is based on his work for conscientious objection in the First World

Harvey's reputation is based on his work for conscientious objection in the First World War. Britain's declaration of war in August 1914 was the occasion for him to commit an act of conscience himself, because the Quaker testimony to peace compelled him to resign his post as PPS to Charles Masterman.

War. Britain's declaration of war in August 1914 was the occasion for him to commit an act of conscience himself, because the Quaker testimony to peace compelled him to resign his post as PPS to Charles Masterman. He had been appointed the previous year but refused to be a part, however so junior, of the governmental war machine. Responding to other moral imperatives of war, he threw himself into relief work on the continent organised by the Friends War Victims Relief Committee, of which he was one of the honorary secretaries. His focus shifted in December 1915, when, as a prelude to the introduction of conscription, Asquith appealed in parliament for unmarried men to enlist and Harvey responded by calling for an exception for religious conviction. The following month, the government accepted an amendment that Harvey moved to the Military Service Bill which meant that conscientious objectors could be absolutely exempted, or directed either to civilian work of national importance or to the non-combatant corps. This was a novel measure in unprecedented times, so it is not surprising that problems immediately arose, one of which was the lack of advice to tribunals as to what constituted work of national importance. To meet this challenge, the government set up a committee which became known by the surname of its first chairman, Thomas Pelham, and to which Harvey was appointed along with two other Christian pacifists, Charles Fenwick and Graham Spicer. On 14 April 1916 the Pelham Committee issued a circular with a list of occupations recommended to tribunals as being of national importance. The circular reflected Harvey's influence in two ways. Firstly, there was the prominence given to welfare work. The Friends' Ambulance Unit, which had been operating since the start of the war, had already been recognised as an option for alternative service, but work in asylums might not have found its way onto the circular but for Harvey's intervention at a crucial stage in the committee's deliberations. Secondly, and less to be expected in wartime, was the emphasis that the circular placed on flexibility and freedom of choice. During a session of the Pelham Committee on 30 March 1916, Harvey had suggested vacancies could be offered to conscientious objectors conditionally, because the precise connection of a trade or occupation with the war effort was a matter of judgement. For example, the apparently innocuous timber trade was producing props for trenches. Conversely, the committee recognised that there could be ostensibly war work such as welfare

T. Edmund Harvey, Liberal politician of conscience

services in a munitions factory which a conscientious objector might be willing to undertake. As Harvey was to point out, the strength of the British legislation was that, unlike comparable legislation in the US, it did not depend on membership of a stipulated denomination but allowed for a range of reasons, secular or religious, for the objection.

The Pelham Committee's flexible policy facilitated a matching flexibility on the part of exempted men and made for a successful scheme, some 4,000 men being placed in suitable civilian posts in the course of the war. In his work for conscientious objection, Harvey had a conception of the Christian's duty to God and the state which showed the influence of the liberal philosopher T. H. Green. Harvey believed that the Christian citizen ought to pay for the privilege of conscientious objection by an enhanced duty of service to the state and that a civilised state had an obligation to facilitate the giving of that enhanced service. Harvey's intellectual coherence and his personal integrity made him the leader of those moderate Christian pacifists who sought to reconcile their duty to God and to the state through non-military service. It was Harvey's skill and good standing which led to the first ever system of alternative national service for conscientious objectors, in spite of the fact that few MPs, let alone members of the government and the wider public, shared his anti-war principles. As Harvey was later to say, although modestly without mentioning his own crucial contribution, it was remarkable that 'a state in the midst of a great war recognised the right of conscience, at any rate in principle, for its individual citizens'.¹⁰

Harvey's pacifist stand was all the more remarkable in that it cost him his political career. Having resigned as a PPS in 1914, he sacrificed himself a second time, in 1917. When war started, West Leeds Liberal Association realised that Harvey, as a Quaker, could not take part but they appreciated the relief work which he carried out in France. With the introduction of conscription, however, the Association feared that Harvey's work for conscientious objection would damage their reputation. Matters became worse in March 1917 when Harvey appeared on a platform at the Stockton by-election with Edward Backhouse, a family friend and Quaker standing for peace by negotiation. Backhouse was the one candidate to stand against the Liberal bidding to succeed the previous Liberal MP, who had died in post. Harvey's supporting the rival candidate prompted an interview with his constituency

association, after which Harvey wrote to its president, Alderman George Ratcliffe:

The time has come when I ought to take steps to leave the Association entirely free to choose as their future candidate one who can command their individual support. ... I value more than I can say the trust that you have placed in me and I am reluctant to say farewell to friends who have been so true, but I think it best now to inform the Executive that I do not wish in these circumstances to offer myself as a Parliamentary candidate for West Leeds at the next General Election. After careful thought, I consider that it would probably also be in the best interests of the constituency that I should make way in the near future for the candidate of your choice, and I am prepared to take the steps to carry this out at an early date to meet the convenience of the Executive.

Following this gracious letter, the local Liberals asked Harvey to retain his seat for the remaining life of the parliament and expressed 'their high appreciation of all the services he has rendered in the great cause of social reform during the period he was their member prior to the war.' The resolution recognised that, in taking the course of action leading up to the severance, Harvey 'had always been guided by what he believed right, and in the best interest of the country.'¹¹ At the general election of December 1918, Harvey's successor as MP for West Leeds was the Coalition Liberal candidate, John Murray.

5.

The next episode in Harvey's career was when he was back in parliament for the ten months of Ramsay MacDonald's minority Labour government, during which there was a controversy over naval disarmament. Having in effect been deselected from West Leeds in 1918, Harvey sought another candidature and was adopted by the Liberals of Dewsbury. He failed to win at the general election of November 1922 but at the one of December 1923 was victorious in a straight fight with Labour. He succeeded because the Conservative candidate left the field for personal reasons too late for a replacement to be found, although at the next election, in October 1924, the Conservatives claimed they had intentionally stood aside for Harvey to spare Dewsbury the fate of a socialist MP. Back in the Commons, he became engaged in

It was Harvey's skill and good standing which led to the first ever system of alternative national service for conscientious objectors, in spite of the fact that few MPs, let alone members of the government and the wider public, shared his anti-war principles.

Harvey spoke to the Dewsbury Liberals of his disappointment in the Labour government under Ramsay MacDonald. 'What a contrast we've had already between Labour platform promises at the election and the Labour Government. What a contrast we have seen between the speeches and votes of the present Labour Ministers and those they gave when in Opposition, a year ago.'

an issue which played to both his Liberal Party affiliation and his Quaker pacifism. In April 1924 he was one of the signatories to an open letter on the subject of a planned expansion of the Royal Navy which was against the spirit if not the letter of reductions agreed at Washington Naval Conference of 1921–22. The letter opposed Labour's decision to carry on with the preceding Conservative administration's decision to construct five cruisers. The Liberals held more warships to be unnecessary from the standpoint of defence, economically disastrous, and morally wrong. The letter alleged the new vessels were being built to provide not security for the nation but profitable work for shipbuilding constituencies. Harvey spoke to the Dewsbury Liberals of his disappointment in the Labour government under Ramsay MacDonald. 'What a contrast we've had already between Labour platform promises at the election and the Labour Government. What a contrast we have seen between the speeches and votes of the present Labour Ministers and those they gave when in Opposition, a year ago.' To build five cruisers would 'begin again the wretched, mad race in armaments.'¹² The Quakers corporately lent support. In an open letter to MacDonald, the Clerk of Meeting for Sufferings (the Quakers' executive body) reiterated Harvey's points about renewed rivalry in armaments, loss of good will amongst nations, and keeping men in work by building ships whose purpose was purely destructive and would be paid for by excessive taxation involving the unemployment of other men. MacDonald ignored the various representations and continued with the naval building programme because it was an inherited responsibility in regard to national defence. The episode of the five cruisers, when a left-leaning British government rejected the spirit if not the letter of multilateral naval disarmament, was an opportunity for Harvey to act on a happy coincidence of Quaker pacifism and party-political considerations. Harvey's time back in parliament was brief and part of the Liberals' Indian summer. He lost the seat of Dewsbury at the election of October 1924 and was not back in parliament until March 1937, when he was successful at a by-election for the constituency of the Combined English Universities.

6.

His return to parliament in March 1937 marks the start of Harvey's final period there, during which he was concerned with prison reform, appeasement and war. The by-election was

occasioned by the death of Sir Reginald Craddock, one of the two members for the double-member constituency of the Combined English Universities. The other incumbent was the social reformer Eleanor Rathbone, who was one of those who nominated Harvey for the vacancy. He also benefited from being on the council of Leeds University, which put him in good standing with the constituency's electorate, who were the graduates of the redbrick universities. Harvey stood as an Independent Progressive aligned with the cross-party Next Five Years Group. His election address dealt with the necessity of maintaining academic freedom, extending the education system and 'pursuing a foreign policy aimed at removing the causes of international grievances which lead to war'.¹³ The Liberal Party did not field a candidate though there was an Independent Liberal contender, Henry Britten Brackenbury, an erstwhile president of the British Medical Association. Ramsay Muir, vice-president of the Liberal Party and the party's leading intellectual, had been invited to stand but in the event refused to do so. In his reply to the invitation, Muir said,

I had the idea when your invitation came that elaborate preparations had already been made to put forward my old friend, Mr. T. E. Harvey, as Independent Progressive. Mr Harvey, whom I have known for many years is as convinced a Liberal as I am, and the phrase 'Independent Progressive', which he has adopted seems to be a good definition of the word Liberal as I understand It. Obviously one of us ought to be sufficiently magnanimous to retire in the favour of the other. Mr. Harvey does not see his way to withdraw. The unpleasant duty, therefore, falls to me, and I have decided with great regret not to accept the invitation you have addressed to me.¹⁴

Harvey's refusal to give way to Muir shows a certain ruthlessness. In after years, the Quaker educationalist Harold Loukes recalled asking Harvey if it were possible to be a Christian in the House of Commons. Harvey replied, 'Yes, I think it is, but it is terribly hard to be one while you are getting there'.¹⁵

Until the approach of war became all-consuming, Harvey used his position in parliament to pursue his interest in prison reform, drawing on his experience as a prison visitor which had started in 1921 and went on for the next thirty years. The Criminal Justice Bill, which was in gestation in 1938–39, was intended to put into

T. Edmund Harvey, Liberal politician of conscience

Harvey's strongest personal commitment was to the cause of prison reform but his time as a MP for the Combined English Universities was dominated by appeasement and war, issues on which he disagreed with the other member for his constituency.

law reforms which had been introduced piecemeal in the previous twenty years, particularly for the young offender. Unfortunately for the supporters of the Criminal Justice Bill, difficulties in deciding on provisions such as those to abolish corporal punishment delayed the passage through parliament. By March 1939 the likelihood of war overtook the legislative timetable, so that it was not until 1948, after Harvey had left parliament, that a major measure of criminal justice was enacted. At the time, however, Harvey strongly supported the bill, on one occasion saying movingly:

I am not speaking only from a study of books. For some 16 years I have been into prisons as a visitor. I had a weekly class in the prison at Armley in the days of the old silence system. I saw the change of atmosphere when the silence system was abolished. Only 18 years ago if a prison officer found a young lad in prison for the first time, weeping, broken down, as I have seen them again and again, if he laid his hand on his shoulder and said, "Cheer up my lad, this need never happen again. Make the best of it, and with God's help it will be a turning point in your life", if he were overheard by another officer, it would have been the duty of that officer to report him to the governor, and it would have been the duty of the governor to reprimand him for undue familiarity to a prisoner. The whole of that has been swept away.¹⁶

In articles in the press Harvey wrote proudly of improvements in his locality which pointed the way to further reforms. Armley prison in Leeds had pioneered changes to the old regime of imposed silence by creating teams for 'associated labour'. He singled out for special praise the farm colony at Wakefield. He wrote that hard work in the open air was the healthiest and best occupation for most prisoners whose physique permitted it. He went on that they might go out fitter in body and mind to take up life afresh when their prison sentence was over, not embittered against the world and with hope in their hearts. In the press Harvey praised the success of reformers inside and outside government and called for further progress. For example, he showed how reforms had kept out of prison thousands who previously would have been incarcerated for such minor reasons as failure to pay court fines. Despite the loss of the Bill, Harvey continued to promote the cause of prison reform and the practice of prison visiting. His wartime book, *The Christian Church*

and the Prisoner in English Experience (1941), was a manual about how the Christian could best contribute to the betterment of society through service to the prisoner.

Harvey's strongest personal commitment was to the cause of prison reform but his time as a MP for the Combined English Universities was dominated by appeasement and war, issues on which he disagreed with the other member for his constituency. Although Eleanor Rathbone had supported Harvey's nomination, the two were different personalities with only limited shared interests. One of these interests was refugees – from the Spanish Civil War, the Sudetenland and Nazi Germany – but the two differed on rearmament and appeasement, Rathbone being an outspoken supporter of Churchill. Harvey, by contrast, was among the many MPs who welcomed Chamberlain back to parliament after the Munich Agreement, writing to his wife how the prime minister 'carried the House away – many congratulated him, me included.'¹⁷ He worked with other Quakers following the Agreement on proposals to preserve the peace, some of which looked forward to later European integration, but the failure of these efforts and the coming of war in September 1939 was a bitter blow. In a circular to the graduate electors of his constituency in November 1939 he intoned that 'the war lies like a heavy curtain between our lives today and that far-off world in which we were living only a few months ago'.¹⁸ Harvey continued to hope for a negotiated peace. In August 1940 he signed a letter to the press, along with other notables including Sybil Thorndike, James Joyce and John Middleton Murry, urging the British government to state its terms for peace. It was only with the German invasion of Russia in June 1941 that he gave up all hope of a peaceful settlement. Of the invasion, Harvey reported to the Guild of St George – a charity founded by John Ruskin, of which he was Master 1934–51 – that 'millions more of the peoples of Europe have come beneath the power of a ruthless invader with whom they thought they had no quarrel; and now the great plains of Russia are being made desolate and her peasant homes destroyed.'¹⁹

In the Second World War, Harvey reprised his role as the protector of the conscientious objector. The arrangements which Harvey more than anyone else had helped to establish in the First World War meant that when another war loomed, opinion was already attuned to an exemption from conscription for conscientious objectors. The reintroduction of conscription began in May 1939 with the preliminary

Military Training Bill. Harvey criticised the principle of the bill at its second reading, saying that the totalitarian preparation for war was a notion foreign to the British tradition of individual freedom. At the same time, he paid tribute to the government for their efforts to ensure justice for conscientious objectors and he contrasted the bill favourably in that respect with the Military Service Act of 1916. The passage of the bill was characterised by an absence of the acrimony which had marked the controversy during the First World War. Well might Harvey comment, 'Hardly a touch of bitterness in the Debate – a striking contrast from 1916.'²⁰ Four months later war broke out and an emergency National Service Bill was rushed through parliament, opposed in the Commons only by Harvey and six others. The next move, which was in response to the German bombing campaign which started in September 1940, came in January 1941 with the introduction of compulsory fire-watching. Crucially, there was no exemption for conscience, only for hardship. Harvey foresaw that some pacifists would consider civil defence so closely associated with military service as to entail a conscientious objection. The minister of labour, Ernest Bevin, refused a right of conscientious objection despite an enabling amendment from Harvey. However, Bevin said he was willing to effect administratively that which he was not prepared to make law, meaning that the government would be generous in allowing exemption on grounds of personal hardship. The next legislative step came in December 1941 with the call-up of women for military service together with other measures representing further encroachments on the already diminished liberties of the individual. Harvey again spoke of these measures as a 'great step forward to the totalitarian State' and was successful in getting a small concession to conscience in the form of an amendment which freed female conscripts from an obligation to bear arms unless they had signified in writing their willingness to do so.²¹ Eleven months later, in November 1942, the government introduced a bill to facilitate the calling up of youths as soon as they became 18. By the summer of 1943, the nation's entire human resources, civil and military, had been mobilised for war.

When measures for conscription came before parliament, Harvey's practice was to vote against the principle of compulsion but to welcome concessions to conscience. The paradoxical effect of this was that, while his fellow parliamentarians saw Harvey as a man of principle, his own faith community saw him as a

compromiser. When conscription was extended to civil defence, Harvey was aware that many Quakers saw this in the same light as compulsory military service. He reminded them that conscription was regarded by the government, rightly or wrongly, as essential to the survival of the country, and he cautioned against too much stress being laid on conscientious objection as opposed to conscientious obligation. This neat expression summarised Harvey's ethic of the Christian pacifist citizen. He argued for the need to balance the privilege of permissible conscientious objection with a matching obligation to serve the state by alternative means. For Harvey this was not just an abstract proposition applicable to others but summarised his own politics of conscience. He would speak of how he sought to put himself under the guidance of Christ the Master, but he used such language not as evangelist or prophet but as a Christian citizen. He exemplified in his own life and work the belief that privilege and power brought with them an enhanced duty to serve.

7.

Harvey retired from parliament aged 70 at the general election of July 1945. Next month came the atomic bombing of Japan, against which he was one of the first to speak out. In the annual report of the Guild of St George, he published his feelings:

I had all but completed the writing of this report when the solemn news arrived of the invention and first use of the Atomic Bomb, followed so swiftly by that of the surrender of Japan. Thankfulness for the end of this vast and awful conflict is mingled with sorrow and shame for the use to which civilization has turned the gift of knowledge and the power of the forces of nature with which we have been entrusted.²²

In powerful words Harvey went on to express horror, penitence, a sense that science had been abused, a call for spiritual transformation and the tentative hope that international control and cooperation could be the means to avoid further horror and destruction. He again pronounced against the Bomb in a 'Peace Symposium' published in the communist newspaper, the *Daily Worker*, in June 1950. Under the headline 'Don't Wait for Others to Ban the A-Bomb' he argued that the existence of the nuclear weapon increased fear and insecurity.

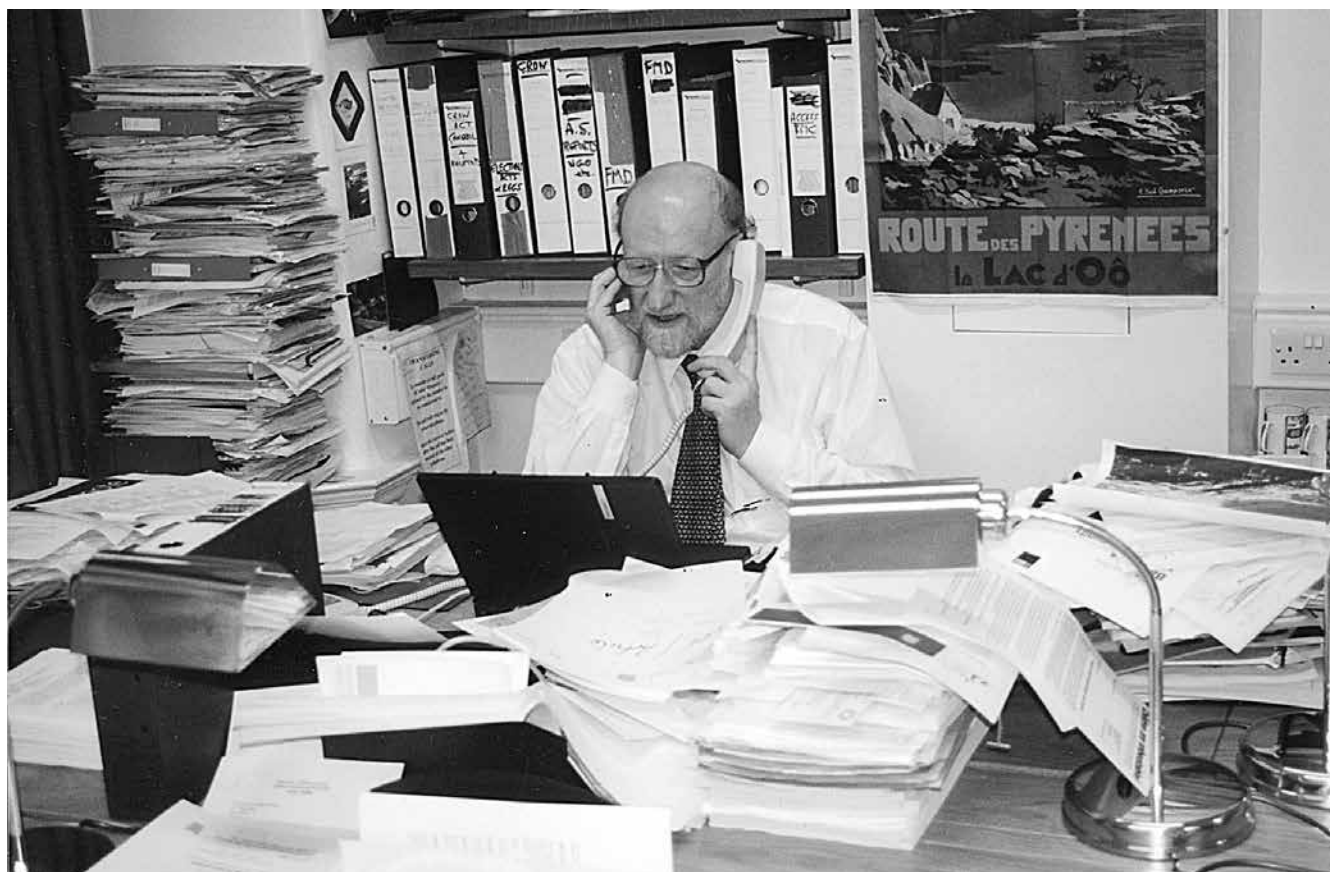
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When measures for conscription came before parliament, Harvey's practice was to vote against the principle of compulsion but to welcome concessions to conscience. The paradoxical effect of this was that, while his fellow parliamentarians saw Harvey as a man of principle, his own faith community saw him as a compromiser.

Appreciation

Michael Meadowcroft looks back at the life and career of a Liberal and Liberal Democrat stalwart.

Lord Tony Greaves (27 July 1926 – 27 July 2021)



TONY GREAVES NEVER seemed to age. He had a firm belief that politics was capable of transforming society, and his consistent advocacy of local campaigning, community politics and the necessity for both to be anchored in a radical Liberalism had hardly changed from his Young Liberal days. His election to the Lancashire County Council, in 1973, disqualified him legally from his job teaching geography and from then on to his sudden death almost fifty years later he became one of that committed band of Liberals who put the cause before comfort and struggled to find a succession of jobs that would enable him to keep politics as his first priority.

His life before politics captured him was that of a scholarship boy separated from his background by intelligence and an ability to pass exams. Born in Bradford into a family with

no direct political involvement, he passed the extremely competitive examination for the direct-grant Bradford Grammar School, but an employment move by his police driving-instructor father took him instead to Queen Elizabeth Grammar School in Wakefield. His successes at 'O', 'A' and 'S' levels enabled him to go to Hertford College, Oxford, and to gain a BA in geography. He followed this with a Diploma in Economic Development at Manchester University. By this time, he had discovered a passion for politics and particularly for political debate. By personality – and influenced by the non-statist radicalism of the then party leader, Jo Grimond – Greaves naturally gravitated to the Liberal cause. He never varied from this commitment except that he soon realised that it was necessary to link theory to activism and to local campaigning. His student

ly 1942 – 23 March 2021)

Liberal and Young Liberal years were taken up by the burgeoning debates on radical issues of the day, and he was a founding force in the 'Red Guards' revival of the Young Liberals in the later 1960s. They became a force at the annual party assembly; in Brighton in 1966, they voted for the party's commitment to NATO to be referred back and came within one vote of committing the party to putting the nationalised industries under worker control. At a quarterly party council meeting the following year, they were instrumental in committing the party to supporting political asylum in the UK for US citizens leaving their country to avoid being drafted to serve in the Vietnam War and to committing the party itself to aiding such asylum seekers. At this time, 1965–68, he was also agent for Geoff Tordoff in the Knutsford constituency. The Young Liberals were also prominent in the 'Stop the Seventy Tour' campaign of direct action to prevent the apartheid South African cricket team touring England in 1970.

In 1968 he married Heather Baxter, a school-teacher and herself a committed Liberal who became a long-term councillor on the Barrowford Urban District Council and the Pendle Borough Council. Never previously a domesticated 'new man', with the birth of their daughters, Victoria (1978) and Helen (1982), Greaves moved from being baffled by others' attachment to children to being a doting and committed father, including looking after daughter Victoria when Heather returned to teaching. Later, he became an even more smitten grandfather with the birth of Robin in January 2019. Typical of Tony was to start a second-hand bookshop in 1993, specialising in Liberal history, from his home and then, after five years, to let it drift, though he still carried on some book-selling until the week before he died. It was also typical that he remained a lifelong supporter of Bradford Park Avenue Football Club despite it playing way down in the sixth tier of English football. He returned to regular attendances at Park Avenue in 2008, even becoming a season ticket holder shortly afterwards.

Despite being an exceptionally transparent individual, he was regularly misunderstood and misinterpreted by political opponents within and without the Liberal Party and the Liberal Democrats. He was a dogged adherent to principle rather than a malevolent opponent on any personal grounds. Attempts to pull rank on him, as Jeremy Thorpe attempted to do in 1970 as party leader over the Young Liberals' public policy on Palestinian rights, were always going to be met by intransigence, whereas he was always amenable to discussing ways and means of finding acceptable solutions.

In 1981 with a by-election in Croydon North West imminent, the then Liberal leader, David Steel, tried to bounce the party into replacing the adopted Liberal candidate, Bill Pitt, with the SDP president, Shirley Williams. The party took the lack of any consultation badly and responded by backing Pitt, who subsequently won the by-election. Thirty years later this still rankled with David Steel, who drew attention to it in his chapter in a book of essays in honour of Shirley Williams.¹ At the time of its publication I consulted Tony Greaves as to whether he agreed that, had David Steel come to party officers and put the case for Shirley Williams standing, we could have delivered the party. He replied, 'Of course.'

Tony also acted as conciliator at the Liberal Assembly in Southport in 1978. The long-term leader, Jeremy Thorpe, was the subject of hugely embarrassing press stories about his alleged homosexual relationship with Norman Scott and the alleged plot to murder Scott – of which he was subsequently acquitted in court. The party eventually succeeded in persuading Thorpe to resign and obtained an undertaking, which he subsequently broke, that he would not attend the party assembly. At the assembly, Dr James Walsh, Liberal candidate for Hove, tabled a motion censoring the party officers for their treatment of the party leader. The three key party officers at the time, Gruffydd Evans, party president,² Geoff Tordoff, party chair,³ and myself as chair of the Assembly

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Committee, decided to take the motion head on and to tell the delegates what party officers had not been able to divulge of Thorpe's behaviour in recent years. If the motion were carried all three of us would resign. Tony Greaves and a *Radical Bulletin* colleague, John Smithson, unaware that the trio wanted to force a vote, headed it off by successfully canvassing delegates to have the motion withdrawn.

Tony Greaves wrote a great deal but invariably it was either practical campaigning guides or short pithy commentaries on current political issues or on Liberal Democrat failings. Typically, his six entries in the British Library catalogue are all campaign guides for local elections.⁴ He was temperamentally more suited to being a skilful editor and an amenable and constructive joint author than the long haul of being a sole drafter of more formidable philosophical pieces. His long series of *Liberal News* short sharp commentaries would make a study in themselves. His views remained consistent throughout his long political career but he tended to become bored with a task that took too long. Opponents often believed that he was tough and thick-skinned, but this was a style he affected, usually when exasperated with them, and was a misjudgement of his real self, which was warm and sympathetic. I recall that Tony wrote to Jeremy Thorpe criticising his leader's speech at the 1970 party assembly, just a couple of months after the death of Caroline, Jeremy's wife, in a road accident. Tony showed me Jeremy's reply which had upset him: he thanked Tony for his comments and then wrote, 'there were times this year when I wondered whether there would be any speech.'

His first significant foray into publishing was his editorship of the Young Liberals' *Blackpool Essays* produced for the party assembly of 1967.⁵ Tony's introduction contains a typically forthright statement: 'The Executives of NLYL⁶ and ULS⁷ meeting together informally ... seemed to agree that the party lacked a political direction. It was, we arrogantly felt, our job to give it that direction.' The rest of his introduction is much more self-effacing than he would become. He would not in later years have presented a publication with the comment, 'Here, then, are the essays. Lambs to the slaughter.'

His next strategic initiative was more significant. Following the disastrous general election in June 1970, at which well over half the Liberal candidates lost their deposits and only six MPs were elected, Tony Greaves worked with Gordon Lishman to present the party assembly in Eastbourne, three months later, with a wholly new party strategy. In what became known as

the 'community politics amendment', Greaves argued for a 'dual approach', working within and without parliament, empowering communities to take initiatives themselves, particularly on local issues, rather than waiting for their elected representatives to take action. It was a strategy that put the Young Liberals' radical thinking into a political framework and also built on the early signs of Liberal success at local elections.

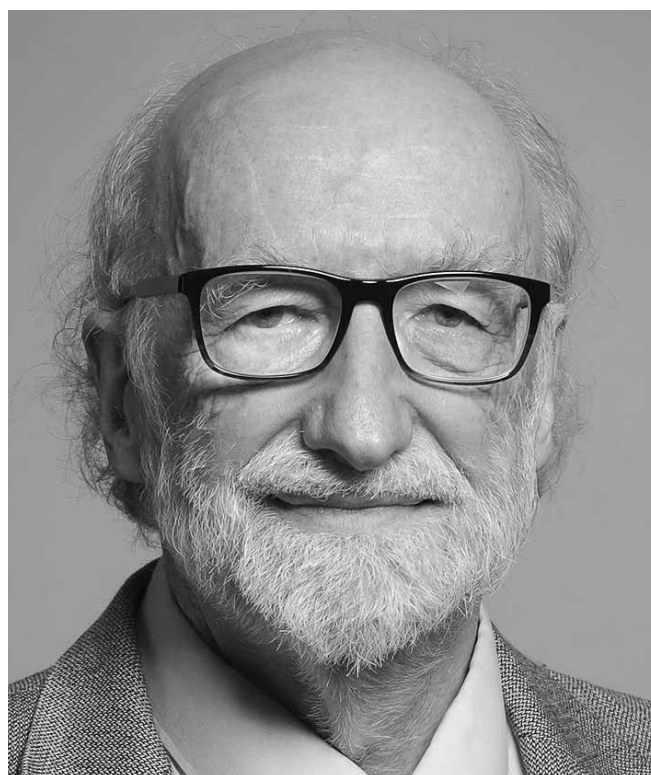
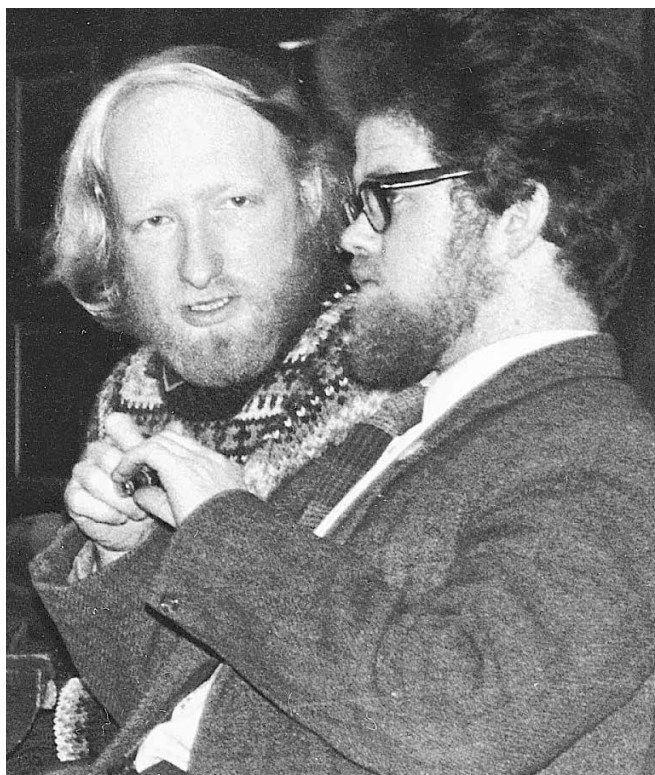
Accompanying the strategy was a programme of delivering local leaflets urging action and reporting on action taken. Despite the fact that the strategy was not to replace a parliamentary focus but to add to it, it was strenuously opposed by establishment figures in the party. Despite this opposition, the amendment was carried by 348 votes to 236.⁸ The strategy was taken up enthusiastically by younger and by urban Liberals and led to the burgeoning of the party's local government base. Ironically, the dramatic increase in the party's national vote, and its revival at the February 1974 general election, came more from a succession of five parliamentary by-election gains.

Greaves fought his local Nelson & Colne constituency at the two elections in 1974. His three years on the district council, and being elected for the larger county division the year before, produced a respectable vote share of 23 per cent in the February general election but this slumped to 12.4 per cent and a lost deposit in October (the vote needed to retain a candidate's deposit was then 12.5 per cent). Fast forwarding to his only other local parliamentary contest, in 1997 in the redrawn Pendle constituency, and following sixteen years of highly successful Liberal and Liberal Democrat local government successes and considerable personal popularity, he still only polled 11.6 per cent. It was another salutary lesson – in common with most other cities, and even more marked in the three most recent general elections – that community politics on its own did not produce a sufficiently entrenched core Liberal vote to bring wider success.

After his enthusiasm for Jo Grimond's leadership and in particular Grimond's openness to ideas, he was disappointed with his very different successor, Jeremy Thorpe, who believed that it was necessary to be an autocratic leader and, therefore, to try to end the Young Liberals' radical influence, which he found personally embarrassing. Greaves has stated that 'Thorpe was a hopeless leader with no philosophical depth of any kind. ... He thought he was an organisation man but his efforts there flopped too.'⁹

In 1976, after Jeremy Thorpe had been persuaded to resign the party leadership, Greaves

His views remained consistent throughout his long political career but he tended to become bored with a task that took too long. Opponents often believed that he was tough and thick-skinned, but this was a style he affected, usually when exasperated with them, and was a misjudgement of his real self, which was warm and sympathetic.



– perversely, many thought, given his commitment to campaigning and activism – backed David Steel rather than John Pardoe, stating that ‘At first he thought Steel was a “man of the future”, Grimond-style Liberal.’¹⁰ But fairly soon he came to change his judgement, not least through Steel’s Lib–Lab Pact initiative in 1977. Greaves believed that, in keeping with Steel’s own perceptions of politics, it was ‘too Westminster’ and ‘was not translated into an effective ground-strategy’.¹¹ He also commented, ‘There was nothing in it for the party. I am not against coalitions. For example, I am a great fan of the current, very successful coalition in Scotland, but in the Lib–Lab Pact we gave everything and got nothing.’¹² Greaves’ opposition to Steel’s leadership grew steadily over its course, as Steel increasingly demonstrated his disdain for the party organisation and his predilection for running the party by diktat rather than by cooperation;¹³ and it eventually led to his call for Steel’s resignation when he bounced the party into immediate moves to merge with the SDP following the 1987 general election.¹⁴

Greaves was a consistent advocate for community-based campaigning throughout his political life. He wrote a somewhat romanticised chapter on how he saw it being applied in Pendle.¹⁵ Sometimes he was too forgiving of the later distortion of the principle into the incessant delivery of the ubiquitous *Focus* leaflet, which all too often boasted of the Liberal and Liberal Democrat councillors’ successes rather than providing communities with the

From Young Liberals to the Lords –

Left: Greaves and Gordon Lishman at the YL conference, 1971

Rights: official portrait for the House of Lords, 2019 (© Roger Harris Photography, Creative Commons 3.0)

ammunition to achieve their own successes. Allied to his visceral commitment to local campaigning was his complete absence of pomposity. Even after his appointment to the House of Lords on Charles Kennedy’s nomination in May 2000, he was just as happy to be at a Pendle Borough Council meeting as he was annoying the lordships on the red benches. He remained as loyal and supportive as ever of his long-term Liberal colleagues, but the one change over the years was that his exasperation threshold grew lower with those he felt were wasting his time.

After four years surviving on council allowances and short-term agents’ jobs, he took on a key role as the newly created, and Rowntree Reform Trust funded, organising secretary for the Association of Liberal Councillors (ALC) from 1977 to 1985. A particular attraction of the job was that he could avoid being based at party headquarters in London, setting up a new office in the Birchcliffe Centre, a converted Baptist chapel in Hebden Bridge. Such was his success that, by the time he moved on in 1985, the staff had expanded from Greaves on his own to seven, and the number of Liberal councillors on principal authorities had grown from 750 to 2,500. It was his political skills, organisational drive and ability to produce effective practical guides that underpinned the successes. Following his eight years running ALC, Greaves remained at the Birchcliffe Centre to manage Hebden Royd Publications, which ran the national party’s publishing and marketing operation until the new post-merger party

Lord Tony Greaves

relocated it back to London. After this, Greaves survived by a series of agent and political organiser jobs, plus his bookseller role referred to above.

Greaves' time with ALC and with party publications spanned the whole fraught period of the Alliance with the SDP and the subsequent merger. His views at the time of the launch of the SDP, as set out in a highly analytical article,¹⁶ were a mixture of principle and pragmatism. He deplored the need for the creation of the SDP which he ascribed to the failure of Liberals adequately to define and promote radical Liberal values, particularly as he identified the policy positions of the SDP as to the right of the Liberal Party. He was not entirely negative on the potential for an alliance but went on to oppose an electoral pact that involved giving away swathes of Liberal-fought seats. At the 1983 general election it was noted that:

in a move which, after the election, was to lead to David Steel to call for his resignation, Tony Greaves of the Association of Liberal Councillors had already circulated to Liberal candidates a line-by-line briefing on the differences between the manifesto and Liberal policy designed to demonstrate how the SDP had watered it down.¹⁷

This 'sabotage', according to Steel,¹⁸ was tacitly acknowledged by the authors of the definitive history of the SDP: 'leading ALC people – people like Tony Greaves and Michael Meadowcroft – saw themselves as being as distant from social democracy as from conservatism.'¹⁹ Greaves related later that the Alliance was initially stimulating and brought many more council seats but soon proved to be debilitating.²⁰ In particular he stated, 'it resulted in the intellectual energies on the Liberal side being devoted to promoting Liberal policy to the SDP and defending it (often against what we thought was a more right-wing or more centralising view from our SDP oppos.)' He went on:

Worse was to follow. The existential crisis that really did follow the merger, combined with a widespread view that the new party should not be plagued by the 'old' Liberal versus SDP arguments which had wasted too much energy for too long, meant that discussing policy in the new party was like treading on eggshells. The previously agreed, the non-controversial, and the blandest non-value-laden stuff was the order of the day.²¹

Immediately following the 1987 general election Greaves, jointly with Gordon Lishman, produced a comprehensive paper on the brief history of the SDP and the Alliance, the nature of liberalism and social democracy, coupled with an appeal to all those in the Liberal Party who were inevitably going to be drawn into the maelstrom of a debate on the existence of their party and the future of liberalism.²² Their appeal was not heeded and the party voted massively for what Greaves clearly saw as the chimera of an easy route to electoral success.

When, following the disappointing setback at the 1987 general election, David Steel pushed the parties into an early merger, Greaves was one of eight Liberals elected to the Liberal negotiating team in addition to the ex-officio members. Together with Rachael Pitchford, the chair of the Young Liberals, he produced a blow-by-blow account of the five months he and I spent closeted together with a number of like-minded colleagues in the vain endeavour to produce a merger document that would keep the Liberal Party together.²³ I have written a short note on Tony's role in the negotiations;²⁴ suffice to say that Tony was one of the four members who resigned from the negotiating team, unable to accept the final report.²⁵ He spoke against the pro-merger motion at the special Liberal Assembly in Blackpool in January 1988 but, despite his warnings, it was carried on a wave of emotion. His final judgement on the merger was 'Merger has failed to achieve something better. The new party is universally labelled a "centre party" in a way the Liberal Party never was.'²⁶ His lasting contribution to the new party is the preamble to its constitution, produced – as a third version – by him and Shirley Williams under great time constraints towards the end of the negotiation process and which has survived largely intact.²⁷

Greaves' personal position in the Liberal Democrats was succinctly summed up in his contribution to a 1996 book of testimonies:²⁸

Fundamentally I am not a 'Liberal Democrat' for fundamentally I don't know what it means!

Only very rarely is a new political ideology invented. Liberal democracy is a set of ideas underlying kinds of government, but it is not an ideology, and nothing has happened in the past eight years to turn it into one.

But simply in order to survive, the Liberal Democrats need an ideology. Liberalism needs a party. And as a liberal who wishes to take an active and serious part in

He deplored the need for the creation of the SDP which he ascribed to the failure of Liberals adequately to define and promote radical Liberal values, particularly as he identified the policy positions of the SDP as to the right of the Liberal Party.

politics, I too need a party. There is only one choice on offer.

He went on to set out why socialism has now had its chance, why he opposes ‘all the malignant forces of corporatism and the greedy and intolerant right which are growing in strength throughout the world’, and sets out his definition of liberalism. He concludes:

So I do my best to encourage the Liberal Democrats to become truly liberal, and liberals to truly embrace the Party. And I produce Focus leaflets and try to help create a liberal local community. What else can I do?

What has happened to the Liberal Democrats since, particularly in its ongoing problem of establishing a clear, defined philosophic identity, able to withstand the chill winds of illiberalism, can in many respects be a vindication of his predictions. One strand that united many of those who opposed the merger, including Greaves, was an understanding that the Labour Party was not a radical reforming party but an autocratic and hegemonic party. Given his leading and often controversial role in national Liberal politics at this time and henceforth, it is surprising that he never appeared on the BBC’s *Question Time* and only once, on 3 March 1988, on its *Any Questions?* programme.

Greaves was an admirer of Paddy Ashdown’s principled and consistent espousal of two unpopular causes: the right of all citizens of Hong Kong to acquire British citizenship if the Chinese Communist Party’s increasing dominance became intolerable; and the need for the UK government to intervene to protect the citizens of Bosnia from the military atrocities and war crimes of the Serbs. Ashdown’s continual questioning of the John Major government on Bosnia led a number of Conservative MPs to refer to him as the Member for Sarajevo. However, in a *Journal of Liberal History* review,²⁹ Greaves was ‘stunned’ by the revelations on domestic policy in the first volume of Ashdown’s diaries.³⁰ Greaves expresses amazement that Ashdown could conceivably believe that he would be able to carry the party with him if he had succeeded in forging some sort of secret political alliance, or even coalition, with Tony Blair’s Labour Party. He wrote in his review of Ashdown’s attempts to persuade Blair of the need for a Lib-Lab arrangement, ‘The result was that Liberal Democrats loved their leader but, insofar as they sensed his strategy, most wanted none of it.’

In 2000 Charles Kennedy, the then Liberal Democrat leader, had the imaginative idea of nominating Greaves as a life peer. He took to his role in the Lords as if it were an enlarged Pendle Borough Council with broader opportunities to achieve worthwhile policies. He had no qualms as to its undemocratic basis, comparing it to the manifest fact that the Commons was also undemocratic in that it did not represent the results of general elections, plus, of course, arguing for a democratic House of Lords elected by the Single Transferable Vote. In her contribution to *Liberator* magazine’s tribute to Greaves, fellow peer Liz Barker wrote: ‘We saw Tony arrive, harrumph loudly about the flummery of the place, and then settle down to use the Lords to campaign on the subjects about which he was knowledgeable and passionate.’³¹ In the same obituary, she wrote that: ‘People expected Tony to be sexist. He wasn’t.’ She may have had in mind an uncharacteristic and insensitive comment by Greaves in defence of fellow Liberal Democrat peer, Chris Renard, who had been accused by a number of party women of harassment:

Lib Dem peer Tony Greaves ... made an astonishing attempt to defend Lord Renard by describing the complaints as ‘mild sexual advances’ and saying ‘half of the House of Lords’ had probably behaved in a similar way. Lord Greaves wrote on an internal party message board: ‘We don’t know the details of anything that may have happened. But it is hardly an offence for one adult person to make fairly mild sexual advances to another. What matters is whether they are rebuffed.’³²

It is interesting to note how often commentators who were not close friends or colleagues of Greaves got him wrong. They tended to see the one side of him – as described by a fellow Liberal Democrat peer, ‘uncompromising, argumentative, curmudgeonly, stubborn’³³ – without seeing the other side of him: ‘He was our heart and sinew. I can’t begin to tell you how much we will all miss him.’³⁴ The *Daily Telegraph* obituarist wrote that he ‘was a thorn in the side of party leaders from David Steel to Nick Clegg.’³⁵ It also goes on to state that ‘Paddy Ashdown described one policy session in 1998 with Greaves at full throttle as “probably the worst meeting I have ever attended”’. In fact the relevant Ashdown diary entry only mentions Greaves in passing and clearly it was David Howarth, the later MP for Cambridge and not a natural firebrand, who was the main

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Lord Tony Greaves

It was necessary to know Greaves socially or to have worked with him on campaigns or other political initiatives over some time to know and appreciate him fully. Similarly, he had infinite time for constituents in Pendle who had a genuine problem that required his attention. Underneath the often-forbidding carapace was a warm and sensitive individual.

protagonist.³⁶ Crewe and King in their history of the SDP describe Greaves as ‘the heaviest cross ... the modern Liberal leader has had to bear. ... In the SDP team’s eyes, Greaves was the Liberals’ Tony Benn – just as fanatical, just as wild, just as committed to “participatory democracy” of a fundamentally undemocratic kind’.³⁷ If this assessment is correct, it is curious that the SDP team turned to Greaves to work with Shirley Williams on the preamble to the constitution for the newly merged party that was accepted by both delegations.

These one-dimensional views of Greaves are the result of lazy journalism or minimal research. It was necessary to know Greaves socially or to have worked with him on campaigns or other political initiatives over some time to know and appreciate him fully. Similarly, he had infinite time for constituents in Pendle who had a genuine problem that required his attention. Underneath the often-forbidding carapace was a warm and sensitive individual. He was the personal epitome of the application to politics of Newton’s Third Law of Thermodynamics, that ‘for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction,’ and to approach him with a positive and constructive request or suggestion would elicit an equivalent response, but to attack or criticise negatively would be summarily dismissed. Certainly, he could be exasperating from time to time with all his friends and colleagues, but we knew and appreciated his loyalty and solidarity and that he never harboured any animosity towards those he regarded as ‘sound’. What exasperated his colleagues more than anything was the reality of his lack of commitment to a longer-term literary or philosophical project that required significant research and composition. Certainly, the concept of having to revise and rewrite anything was alien to him. The consequences of this trait of ‘moving on’ to another issue was that, although he had considerable influence on Liberal politics over more than fifty years, it could have been so much more.

He took his politics very seriously and, when he did take a break from it, he needed a very different environment. He found the means of escape and of recharging his batteries by taking to the solitude of open spaces. For many years, even after he was ill in 2011, he always spent some weeks climbing, including family holidays in Barèges in the French Pyrenees, and latterly he would holiday with his family on the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides. He was still hiking and cycling in late 2020. Allied to the geography, he was a long-time fan of

the Scottish folk-rock band Runrig. Increasingly he became a rather unlikely family man. He was a patron of the Friends of the Lake District. He took great delight in helping to get the Countryside and Rights of Way Act into law and to be involved in supporting the Marine and Coastal Access Bill. He regarded his work on these latter issues as a way of repaying ‘a little of the huge amount I have got from the mountains and moorlands of this country over so many years as a climber, hill walker, geographer and botanist’.³⁸

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T. Edmund Harvey, Liberal politician of conscience

Continued from page 13

By the time of this article, Harvey was 75 years old. He had suffered a heart attack the previous year and by September 1954 was an invalid. His death on 3 May 1955 brought forth appreciations of his character and commitment to social betterment at the grassroots. A fellow Quaker and Leeds townsman, Wilfrid Allott, wrote the following encomium:

As chance would have it whenever I saw Mr. T. E. Harvey it was over some question of helping an orphanage, helping people in trouble or helping to get citizens informed about some wrong that ought to be put right. I feel sure there was no day of his life on which he did not try to think of some good that he could do. So I am wrong to say 'as chance would have it'. What I saw of the man was typical of his interests. He was one of the products of the best education in England, France and Germany. I was often impressed by the wealth of his knowledge of social problems in various countries. He

served in many capacities [...] He was not a demagogue who could inflame a public meeting; he never wanted to be. A member of the Society of Friends, he was content to do his good work quietly and with no desire for acclamation. Few of our reformers have such a record of continuous, solid work.²³

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Liberal thought

John Ayshford examines E. D. Simon's role in developing a Liberal solution to Britain's economic crisis of the 1920s and 1930s, and in revitalising Liberalism.

Vision in a time of crisis Ernest Simon and the revival of Liberalism



Marchers on the 'Jarrow crusade', an organised protest against the unemployment and poverty, October 1936 (Science and Media Museum)

IN HIS BOOK *In Place of Fear* (1952), the socialist firebrand Aneurin Bevan recalled a story told to him by Robert Smillie, the trade union leader of the Miners Federation of Great Britain, of when he and the other leaders of the Triple Alliance met Lloyd George in 1919. The Triple Alliance was a pact between the miners, the railwaymen and the transport workers in which they agreed to strike sympathetically if one of them went on strike. The alliance formed a formidable force and, according to Smillie, the prime minister informed them that they were in a position whereby they

could overthrow the government. As Lloyd George said, 'if a force arises in the state which is stronger than the state itself, then it must be ready to take on the functions of the state, or withdraw and accept the authority of the state'.¹ This anecdote, as told by Bevan, far from being an exaggeration was reflective of the condition of post-war British industrial relations. Following the armistice, relations between capital and labour nearly broke down completely – to the extent that the spectre of class conflict seemed to loom on the horizon. This was exemplified most notably by the episode of mass industrial

Time of crisis vitalising Liberalism



unrest on Clydeside in 1919. In January, an unofficial strike led by shop stewards in the ship-building industry demanding a shorter week in order to provide employment for demobilised veterans grew exponentially, bringing Glasgow to a complete standstill within a few days. On 31 January, or 'Bloody Friday', a fracas between police and strikers on George Square erupted into widespread violence in the city centre. The government viewed this (incorrectly) as a precursor to a communist revolt similar to recent ones across Europe and deployed soldiers and tanks to the city to quell the strikers.²

The abysmal state of industrial relations, worsened by increased labour militancy, stemmed from a decline in Britain's economic fortunes. Britain's staple industries were losing out to foreign competition and trade union membership doubled to eight million between 1914 and 1920. Inevitable industrial disputes arose when industry returned to competitive conditions with the termination of wartime controls on the economy, which was followed by wage reductions and a large rise in unemployment. Tens of millions of working days were lost due to strike action in the years

Ernest Emil Darwin Simon, 1st Baron Simon of Wythenshawe, 26 November 1926. (Lafayette; © National Portrait Gallery, London)

Vision in a time of crisis: Ernest Simon and revitalising Liberalism

immediately following the First World War with unrest peaking at over 85 million days lost in 1921.³

Like Britain's industrial relations and economy, the Liberal Party too was facing its own infamous post-war crisis. The party following the war was divided and a shadow of its former self. On the one hand, Lloyd George was turning away from the party, experimenting with fusion. On the other, Asquith, who could have arguably campaigned for a bold post-war programme, was 'lethargic'. He moved away from New Liberalism and reverted back to 'the classic doctrines of Gladstonian individualism' which were unfit for the post-war world.⁴ Thus, in contrast to the pre-war years where it achieved great social and political reforms, Liberalism was not only split but also, in the words of Dutton, a 'backward-looking movement' which had 'failed to develop relevant social and economic policies to confront the problems of industrial Britain'.⁵

The paucity of any ideas and the inability of the leadership to address these pertinent industrial issues spurred Ernest Simon, a radical Liberal from Manchester, commonly referred to as E. D. Simon, to launch a campaign to get the party to adopt new policies to face the challenges of the present age. In the final year of the First World War, Simon had hoped for a Liberal manifesto which would tackle Britain's industrial issues and rival Labour's bold 1918 programme drawn up by Sidney Webb. Simon's hopes, however, were in vain. He wrote the day after the general election in 1918 how there was an 'utter lack on the part of the Liberal Party ... of any knowledge of or interest in industrial problems and the great question of equality between the two nations of England'.⁶ Simon thus embarked, along with his fellow Manchester radicals such as Ramsay Muir and Thomas Tweed, upon creating a new industrial programme in order to reinvigorate Liberalism. In 1921, this grouping not only managed to get the party to outline a position on industrial issues, but also founded the Liberal Summer School which set out to resolve:

the great question of industrial relations, the application of the Liberal principles of freedom and equality of opportunity to the life of the working man and the slum-dweller today, and the whole problem of working-class discontent with the present economic system.

Whilst the radicalism of this new Manchester School was not fully embraced immediately

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by the mainstream of the party, by the following year the Liberal Summer Schools had become a staple fixture in the party's calendar.⁷ The work of the Liberal Summer Schools which Simon pioneered led to a renaissance of ideas within the party which culminated in the publication of *Britain's Industrial Future* (1928), more commonly known as *The Yellow Book*, which presented a Liberal solution to Britain's demanding economic problems. Accompanying other chapters written by figures such as Lloyd George and Keynes, in *The Yellow Book* Simon, alongside Muir, formulated a joint chapter on a Liberal industrial programme. Here they rejected socialist ideas of class struggle, nationalisation and worker control of industry, and instead espoused a fairer capitalism which would address the grievances of workers and prevent labour militancy in order to solve Britain's industrial misfortune and divided society.⁸ The chapter was farsighted, foreshadowing later developments to the British economy following the Second World War. Examining how Simon came to envisage a Liberal solution to address Britain's economic crisis in order to revitalise Liberalism shines a light on a pivotal decade in the party's history and also the progress towards the post-war consensus.

Ernest Simon of Manchester

Ernest Simon (9 October 1879 – 3 October 1960) was born in Manchester to German émigrés who had come to live in Manchester and join its German community. Simon inherited his father's firms, who himself had been an innovative industrialist, and continued their successful expansion. Despite being very wealthy, Simon was a benevolent figure. His obituary in the liberal *Guardian* reflected his altruism. As the article stated: 'if the ghosts of just men are allowed to walk the earth it is here that the ghost of Ernest Simon will walk'. He saw it as his duty to make the world a better place for others and could not understand how some could draw happiness from being selfish.⁹ As such, Simon had a strong sense of civic virtue and served on Manchester City Council from 1912 to 1925. In 1912 he also married Shena Potter who was a leading feminist and who too became a city councillor in 1924. They had three children, Roger, Brian, and a daughter, Antonia or 'Tony', who tragically died at a young age. Simon was a radical Liberal and served as the MP for Withington in Manchester between 1923–24 and 1929–31. There are some physical monuments which testify his legacy,

notably the Lovell Telescope at Jodrell Bank in Cheshire which Ernest and Shena Simon helped to finance. The Wythenshawe area of Manchester also owes its existence in part to the Simons. They fervently championed the idea of a garden city for Manchester and bought Wythenshawe Hall and Park, endowing their purchase to the City Council to help bring about its creation.¹⁰ Whilst Simon is discussed in histories of the Liberal Party by Michael Freeden and David Dutton, in older accounts he remained a relatively obscure figure.¹¹ For example, in works written in the 1960s and 1970s by Michael Bentley and Trevor Wilson, notable scholars of the history of the Liberal Party, there is barely any mention of him at all.¹² As Dutton has shown in his recent article in this journal, however, Simon is an important figure in twentieth century British Liberalism and merits plenty of attention.¹³

Socialism and public ownership

Despite initiating the drive to reinvigorate Liberalism in the 1920s, Simon came rather close to never founding the Liberal Summer Schools or pioneering the publication of *The Yellow Book*. As Dutton has illustrated, Simon nearly quit the Liberal Party in favour of joining Labour.¹⁴ An examination of the reasons why he did not leave the Liberals, however, provides the context behind Simon's envisagement of an industrial programme to afford Liberalism the tools to address Britain's economic crisis and its terrible inequality.

Following the disastrous election results for the Liberals in 1918 and in 1924, Simon seriously considered joining the Labour Party as late as 1925 despite having recently founded the Liberal Summer School and having served as a Liberal MP the previous year. Simon's deliberation was not too surprising given that he had been close both politically and amicably to leading socialists such as the Fabians Beatrice and Sidney Webb since before the outbreak of the war. Indeed, foreshadowing his later political endeavours, Simon, invited by Beatrice Webb, spoke at the Fabian summer school in 1910 'on competitive industry'.¹⁵ He also shared a healthy friendship with another Fabian, R. H. Tawney; not only did he admire Tawney's political beliefs, but, for Simon, when he was a shy young man, Tawney was amongst the select group of people that he could talk to freely.¹⁶ Simon's decision to remain in the Liberal Party was a difficult one as he was seemingly stuck in two minds. For instance, having publicly rejected any form of pact with Labour, calling

for 'a strong and independent Liberal Party', during an unsuccessful by-election campaign in Dundee in November 1924, several months later Simon confided in his diary that despite this he had much in common with Labour.¹⁷ As he wrote:

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. At Dundee I agreed with my extreme Labour audiences as regards political aims far more than with my Liberal chairman.¹⁸

Simon agreed with the contention of Labourites 'that the present social order was grossly unjust, [with] some people being born with silver spoons in their mouths, others in slums'.¹⁹ Indeed, having already as a councillor recorded his excitement at the prospect of cooperating with the Labour Party on Manchester City Council in his diary in 1919, Simon had previously hoped in 1920 to join a party composed of a mix of radical liberals and socialists.²⁰ Even after reaffirming his faith in the Liberal Party in 1925, following much deliberation with himself, Simon still considered the split in radicalism into Labour and Liberal factions as a 'tragedy' as it had allowed the Conservatives to govern, whose views were in the minority compared to the progressive 'sentiment of the nation'. Indeed, Simon believed that the working class ultimately 'would have been a great deal better off' had such a rupture not occurred.²¹

One of the reasons that lay behind his final decision was Labour's commitment to sweeping nationalisation as outlined in its 1918 constitution.²² On a private level Simon was concerned that this would place him in an awkward position as, in conjunction with becoming a director of a colliery in 1924, one of his companies, Simon Carves Ltd, 'had dealings with colliery companies to whom the idea of nationalisation was anathema'. Fundamentally, however, he was concerned that Labour was too confident in its belief that the socialisation of the economy would bring prosperity.²³ Simon claimed that if the collective ownership of the means of production could eradicate destitution he was 'ready to become socialist or communist', but ultimately, he could not become a convert as for him it did not hold the key to addressing poverty.²⁴ Indeed, as a self-proclaimed radical Liberal, Simon believed like socialists that drastic action was needed to redress inequality in Britain. As he wrote, for a radical Liberal:

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Vision in a time of crisis: Ernest Simon and revitalising Liberalism

Liberalism stands for economic freedom just as much as for political or religious freedom, and he knows that economic freedom and equality of opportunity can never be achieved so long as the present excessive inequalities of wealth continue. He recognises that it is necessary not only to make the poor richer, but to make the rich—especially the very rich—poorer. He is prepared to support any steps, however drastic, that are needed to fight inequality.

Unlike socialists, however, Simon did not contend that the simple idea of extensive nationalisation would resolve economic ills. Simon felt that far more consideration was required to resolve Britain's economic predicament and rampant inequality than the socialist doctrinaire commitment to public ownership of the means of production.²⁵ Simon held this belief very firmly as he on several occasions directly challenged socialists on their attachment to nationalisation. For example, during an address at the Independent Labour Party Summer School in 1929, Simon boldly stated that Liberals were 'less intellectually arrogant' in accepting, unlike socialists, that the human mind did not have the capacity to replace a well-established capitalist economic system with a new socialist one 'which would at once produce better conditions'. As Simon bluntly put it to his leftist audience: 'we [Liberals] think you would make a mess of it'.²⁶ Additionally, in another instance, in 1927 in a debate in Manchester with Labour MP Rhys Davies, a junior Home Office minister in the previous Labour administration, Simon contended that there was a paucity of evidence to prove that nationalisation worked. Moreover, given the failure of nationalisation elsewhere, socialists, argued Simon in the debate, 'had dropped socialism like a hot brick, had accepted the hated capitalist system, and had adopted liberal or radical methods'.²⁷ Ultimately for Simon, as he made clear in his partisan speeches and debates, 'any attempt to alter suddenly the whole constitution of industry... [would] only end in disastrous and early failure'.²⁸ Simon believed that capitalism was 'on the whole extraordinarily efficient' and therefore it was far better not to change the system but to build 'on the experience of the past and to modify it according to experience'.²⁹

In sum, Simon could not subscribe to Labour's advocacy of mass nationalisation. Instead he believed that the Liberal Party was the best vehicle through which an alternative economic strategy, based on extensive formulation, could be realised. A Liberal industrial

policy, as Simon would come to outline in length in *The Yellow Book*, would aim to fashion an economy which was socially just but at the same time harnessed capitalism's productivity.

It should be noted, however, that Simon was not dogmatically opposed to public ownership; quite the opposite was true. Simon believed that collective ownership of an industry should be adopted if it *proved* to be more efficient.³⁰ Indeed, Simon was in favour of experiments in 'alternative methods of production' to capitalism if they seemed promising 'even if there ... [was] a risk of some decrease in production'.³¹ On several occasions, Simon was even active in promoting public ownership. Simon was instrumental, for instance, in the creation of Ramsay Muir's book *Liberalism and Industry* (1920) which advocated 'the experimental transfer of the railways and coal mines to public ownership'.³² Another example at around the same time was Simon's campaign for the municipalisation of the distribution of milk in Manchester. Simon believed that milk distribution was 'peculiarly unsuited for handling by people whose motive is private profit' given how easily milk could become infected and because it was expensive to keep milk clean.³³ He was very much concerned at a personal level because his son Roger contracted tuberculosis from what was suspected to be infected milk in 1915. Indeed, after this incident Simon even bought a farm in Herefordshire, Leadon Court, home to the meeting in 1920 which would form the germ of the Liberal Summer Schools, in an attempt to produce clean milk himself. Following Roger's illness, he convinced Manchester City Council to investigate the city's milk supply. In 1920 the council published the report of its inquiry which presented a 'practicable' and 'profitable' scheme for the municipalisation of the distribution of milk. This scheme, however, was rejected in a vote by the city's councillors. Simon was dismayed by the result as he felt that it was more essential to wellbeing than gas, which was already municipalised. Simon was particularly aggrieved due to the contradictory attitude of Conservative councillors who happily accepted the successful municipal supply of gas yet rejected a worthier scheme because it was 'socialistic'.³⁴

Class conflict

The main factor which lay behind Simon's continued loyalty to the Liberal Party and which was to feature as a core element in his envisagement of a Liberal industrial programme was his dislike of class division which had come to

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The main factor which lay behind Simon's continued loyalty to the Liberal Party and which was to feature as a core element in his envisagement of a Liberal industrial programme was his dislike of class division which had come to the fore following the economic turmoil and accompanying industrial unrest in the years following the First World War.

the fore following the economic turmoil and accompanying industrial unrest in the years following the First World War. The Labour Party in Simon's eyes was fanning its flames and thus he could not join it. For Simon class division posed a pernicious threat to the country which could only be resolved by a radical Liberal industrial programme.

Simon's fears, which underpinned his attachment to the Liberal Party, were exacerbated by the General Strike in 1926. In November and December of that year Simon gave several lectures in Manchester entitled 'Liberalism or Class War?'. Here Simon outlined his belief that the General Strike demonstrated that the threat of class war in Britain was real. This was exemplified by the behaviour of trade unionists who had, during the General Strike, Simon asserted, placed their loyalty to the Trades Union Congress 'above their loyalty to their country'. For Simon this was 'an ominous sign' given that not that long ago many had fought for their country during the First World War.³⁵ Whilst he recognised the intransigence of the colliery owners as well, this was an issue which seriously concerned Simon.³⁶ Simon saw socialists as responsible for inciting this dangerous situation and he was more than willing to criticise them for this.³⁷ In Simon's mind the Labour Party had not only 'fostered a spirit of dissatisfaction and class hatred' through its anti-capitalist propaganda, but had during the General Strike seen itself engaged in a class war. Labour's pursuit of class conflict thus 'made it impossible for anyone of liberal instincts to join it'.³⁸

Consequently, Simon believed that the revival of Liberalism was essential, for only Liberals could resolve the crisis afflicting industrial relations in a just, but non-partisan manner. As Mary Stocks, a friend and biographer of Simon explained: whilst Simon believed that progressive Liberalism's beliefs were 'part and parcel of the Labour faith', he believed that the Labour Party too narrowly and dangerously pursued the interests of the working-class instead of that of the nation. He was thus persuaded to remain a Liberal because 'the future of the country and the world', in his eyes, depended on the continued existence of Liberal opposition 'against selfishness and class interest'.³⁹ Simon felt that the survival of the Liberal Party was paramount in order to prevent a dangerous clash between labour and capital as, if the party disappeared, then there would only be the division between the rich and the poor.⁴⁰ Indeed, the liberal-leaning members of the Conservative and Labour parties could not be relied upon to prevent such a potential situation arising either as they were

'swamped' by those who dogmatically upheld the interest of their respective class.⁴¹ As such, Simon stressed the need for a revitalised and 'strong militant Liberal Party in the House of Commons' to act as a 'bulwark' against the forces of reaction and socialism.⁴² For Simon, a resilient and radical Liberal Party free from sectarian class interests would be able to address existing social evils 'in the interests of the whole community'.⁴³

A new Liberal industrial programme

Despite any leanings he had towards socialism, for Simon the evils of the existing economic order could not be solved by 'sweeping formulae, or by violence or class-conflict ... but only by hard-thinking' and 'careful examination'.⁴⁴ Simon ultimately believed that the Liberal Party, through the Liberal Summer Schools, was capable of forging radical yet well-considered ideas which would address the economic crisis afflicting Britain as well as the party's dismal fortunes. And, indeed, by 1928, two years after the beginning of the Liberal Industrial Inquiry, Simon's belief had come to fruition with the appearance of *The Yellow Book*, a comprehensive Liberal programme composed by prominent members of the party and leading liberal intellectuals to address Britain's economic problems.⁴⁵

In *The Yellow Book*, Simon, alongside Ramsay Muir in their joint chapter on industrial relations, outlined a new Liberal industrial programme which reflected Simon's desire to address Britain's inequality, but also his rejection of doctrinaire nationalisation and his disdain for class division. This new programme to revive Britain's ailing industry lay in the creation of a fairer capitalism to end class struggle. It would represent a third way between 'the harsh individualism and the employer-autocracy of the nineteenth century' and 'the scheme of rigid state control or the scheme of trade union dictatorship'.⁴⁶ This new, more just economy would resolve the grievances of the workers and thus improve industrial relations, instilling a spirit of cooperation and minimising disruption which, over time, would reap far greater rewards for everyone.

In the chapter Simon and Muir expounded their belief that the existing economic system was unjust and that the industrial unrest which hampered economic growth would only end when the system was reconstituted in a fairer manner. 'Widespread discontent' amongst the working-class was a chief obstacle, in their eyes, to an economic revival.⁴⁷ It was a belief

Simon and Muir stressed that high wages and even profit-sharing would not be detrimental to capitalists as, beyond endowing workers with higher purchasing power which would increase domestic demand, these measures would end industrial unrest and drastically improve the efficiency of labour as workers would feel that they had a stake in the prosperity of the firm.

that Simon had held even before the First World War had ended:

The problem of output is perhaps the great problem of industry ... it certainly cannot be solved until the worker gains confidence in the whole system, and feels that he is fairly treated. Limitation of output is the natural reaction and defence of a man who feels any grievance as to the conditions of his work.⁴⁸

Simon and Muir asserted that the workers had valid complaints against the present industrial order due to insufficient wages, a want of security given the threat of unemployment, and the lack of influence over working conditions.⁴⁹ The answer to these issues lay not in collective bargaining or public ownership, but in cooperation between labour and capital which would be fostered by addressing the workers' grievances. As Simon had argued at the Liberal Summer School in 1927, real wages had increased fourfold in the past one hundred years and through cooperation and technological development he believed that they could be doubled in the next thirty years. Simon espoused the view that there was 'ten times more to be hoped for from co-operation and increased production than from fighting and squabbling'.⁵⁰ Whilst Simon and Muir recognised the role trade unions had played in improving the position of the working man and the necessity of the strike tool, striking for them was wasteful and class struggle afflicted the community. The high level of labour militancy since the end of the nineteenth century had been detrimental to gains in real wages as it had limited production and had compounded Britain's present uncompetitive position. To Simon and Muir, organised labour arbitrarily believed that it could 'only improve its position at the expense of capital', as if it was involved in a game of tug-of-war with the capitalists. In actual fact, however, capital and labour had 'enormous' shared interests, so 'instead of pulling against one another', argued Simon and Muir, both sides should pull together to improve efficiency and thereby increase the wealth of all.⁵¹

Consequently, Simon and Muir contended that the way to overcome working-class discontent and foment conditions favourable for cooperation between capital and labour was not only to consult the workers regularly via work councils in every factory, but also to inform them how much the company's investors were receiving. In this way workers would know that their wages, which had to be high

as possible according to Simon and Muir, were proportional to the firm's profits and not detrimental to unemployment or prices. These measures would simultaneously improve the standard of living for the worker and convince them that they were no longer being exploited but getting a 'square deal'.⁵² These ideas, which echoed the aims of the Whitley Councils of the previous decade, would form the basis for a new Liberal industrial programme. Simon and Muir hoped that by settling these grievances the worker would no longer feel like 'a mere tool' but a free member of a 'cooperative society' who was party to determining the conditions of their work. As they wrote, the old 'relation of master and servant' in industry had simply 'become untenable in a democratic era'.⁵³

Simon and Muir stressed that high wages and even profit-sharing would not be detrimental to capitalists as, beyond endowing workers with higher purchasing power which would increase domestic demand, these measures would end industrial unrest and drastically improve the efficiency of labour as workers would feel that they had a stake in the prosperity of the firm.⁵⁴ Simon and Muir believed that they would engage in a very serious spirit of cooperation to the extent that they would perform Stakhanovite-like feats, improving productivity beyond what the employer saw as possible in order to claim higher wages.⁵⁵ Simon and Muir also envisaged that these measures to cultivate cooperation would be complemented by a Ministry of Industry, which would expand the existing Ministry of Labour, to facilitate much larger government involvement in industrial relations. The Minister of Industry would work with a Council of Industry, a body composed of government-appointed figures and representatives of capital and labour, to improve the machinery designed to resolve industrial disputes, determine wages and bring unions and employers together to cooperate.⁵⁶

Additionally, Simon and Muir also recognised that the worker felt aggrieved due to the ownership of the means of production by the rich. They felt that society was divided in two between a small minority who owned property and enjoyed a life of luxury, and themselves whose wellbeing was dependent on how much they could force this minority to pay them.⁵⁷ As such, Simon and Muir asserted that giving workers a stake in the ownership of industry would also provide a strong impetus towards fostering cooperation and addressing inequality. Whilst Simon and Muir agreed with socialists that the present level of disparity in property ownership was intolerable, instead of

collectivising property, they envisaged distributing it to individual workers. This would promote freedom and teach responsibility, and also provide individuals with capital with which they could invest in the economy.⁵⁸ The diffusion of ownership would be ‘a real advance’, Simon and Muir stated, ‘towards that goal of Liberalism in which everybody will be a capitalist, and everybody a worker’.⁵⁹

Whilst Simon and Muir’s industrial programme envisaged sweeping changes, they only intended to tame capitalism, rather than radically alter the constitution of the economy. Consultation, for instance, did not entail industrial democracy or worker control of production. This did not mean that Simon could not understand and empathise with workers’ demands for democratic control over industry. Speaking in 1921 at the University of Oxford, Simon recognised workers’ frustration at wartime profiteering and state bureaucracy, and complimented the Guild Socialists on their ‘democratic ideals of liberty and responsibility’. Simon, however, as a self-described ‘autocratic employer’, doubted the ability, rather condescendingly, of workers to manage industry. As he stated in his lecture: ‘there seems to be an extraordinary delusion among Guild Socialists that the wish and power to take responsibility successfully are common to most men’.⁶⁰ In *The Yellow Book*, he and Muir therefore precluded any sort of worker-control over management. Even if workers shared some control with existing managers they would do no more than ‘sit dumb and dubious, only half understanding what was going on’ in meetings.⁶¹ Simon and Muir also called for trade unionists in essential industries to be stripped of holiday pay and have their immunities provided in the 1906 Trade Disputes Act waived if they struck before there had been negotiations on resolving the dispute.⁶² This anti-union segment of the chapter was likely influenced in part not only by Simon’s aforementioned dislike of labour militancy, but also by the anti-trade union reaction following the General Strike which culminated in the Trade Disputes Act 1927 during which the Liberal Industrial Inquiry was underway.⁶³ Indeed, as discussed above, Simon had himself in his 1926 lectures on class war reproached those who had participated in what he called ‘a very dangerous and illegitimate kind of strike’.⁶⁴

Simon’s significance

After his second spell in Parliament, Simon decided to step down as an MP in 1931. During his time in the House of Commons Simon had

lost faith in the leadership of Lloyd George and was scornful of the behaviour of politicians. His decision also followed the sharp criticism he faced from many leading liberals, including Ramsay Muir, as a result of his proposal in 1930 to introduce tariffs to help reduce unemployment.⁶⁵ In the course of the decade between 1918 and 1928, however, Simon had rejuvenated Liberalism, helping to stimulate the forging of new ideas to resolve Britain’s economic strife. Reviewing the decade, Simon thought it was:

a great success ... I learnt from Webb and Tawney the necessity of an industrial policy – the Liberal leaders ignored it. Through the Summer School we both [Simon and Ramsay 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’.⁶⁶

In the years which immediately followed the publication of *The Yellow Book*, however, Simon’s accomplishment seemed somewhat hollow. Firstly, he was concerned that *The Yellow Book* did not go far enough in addressing the issue of poverty and improving economic opportunity; Simon claimed that they were ‘dealt with rather superficially’.⁶⁷ Moreover, the 1929 Liberal manifesto, *We Can Conquer Unemployment*, which was derived from *The Yellow Book*, did not include plans for Simon and Muir’s Ministry of Industry.⁶⁸ In addition, Simon incorrectly predicted that *The Yellow Book* offered a means through which the Liberal Party could cooperate with Labour, who he felt were lacking in ideas, and prevent a repeat ‘of the kind of friction and misunderstanding that existed in 1924’.⁶⁹ Whilst the general election in 1929 saw Simon elected along with a majority of ‘progressive’ MPs, there was to be no cooperation between Labour and the Liberals along the lines of *The Yellow Book*. Robert Skidelsky, a renowned economist and scholar of the 1929–31 minority Labour government, writes how the Labour leadership, embarrassed by how radical the Liberal programme was, decided against cooperation and blamed Liberal hostility (largely without justification) to deflect criticism from their own failings to tackle unemployment and to implement a socialist programme.⁷⁰ Moreover, from late 1930 John Simon, and Liberal MPs aligned to him, opposed Lloyd George’s attempts at cooperating with Labour and instead aimed to bring the government down and negotiate a deal with the Conservatives.⁷¹

Whilst Simon and Muir’s industrial programme envisaged sweeping changes, they only intended to tame capitalism, rather than radically alter the constitution of the economy. Consultation, for instance, did not entail industrial democracy or worker control of production.

Despite these shortcomings, in the years following the publication of *The Yellow Book* the long-term significance of Simon's work was far greater. *The Yellow Book* – as the realisation of the work of the Liberal Summer Schools and the Liberal Industrial Inquiry which Simon was pivotal in creating – played a substantial role in influencing political and economic thought for years to come. The Summer Schools and Liberal Industrial Inquiry galvanised the intellect of Keynes, whose ideas concerning the role of the state in the economy in *The Yellow Book* formed the backbone to his ground-breaking ideas formulated later on in his influential work *The General Theory* (1936). Similarly, other proponents for a mixed economy in the 1930s, such as The Next Five Years Group, which future post-war Prime Minister Harold Macmillan was part of, all owed a debt to *The Yellow Book*.⁷² Most importantly of all, in specific regard to Simon, his and Muir's formulation of a Liberal industrial programme anticipated the liberal welfare capitalism of the post-war period which afforded an unprecedented standard of living for working-people. Indeed, the post-war era witnessed the creation of a Ministry of Industry which Simon and Muir had envisaged years beforehand in *The Yellow Book*.⁷³

To conclude, then, whilst the Liberal Party was not to be restored to its previous great heights, through his efforts to revitalise Liberalism in a period of turmoil in Britain, Simon not only spurred developments in economic thought but also helped to form the groundwork for the post-war settlement. In short, Simon demonstrated vision in a time of crisis. Today, we find ourselves in a not too dissimilar situation to the one facing Simon and his contemporaries a century ago. The economic slump caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and the impending threat of disastrous climate change requires bold and urgent thinking and the history of Simon's efforts should act as an inspiration, not only to the Liberal Democrats, but to all across the political spectrum in addressing the challenges posed by these contemporary crises.

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Through his efforts to revitalise Liberalism in a period of turmoil in Britain, Simon not only spurred developments in economic thought but also helped to form the groundwork for the post-war settlement. In short, Simon demonstrated vision in a time of crisis.

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Voting reform

Gladstone's speech in 1864 opened the way to what was to become the Second Reform Act – but that was not what he intended. Jim McGowan analyses the speech and its impact.

'Universally respected, a Gladstone and franchise'



Sir Edward Baines, 1870s (Window & Grove, albumen carte-de-visite; © National Portrait Gallery, London)



William Ewart Gladstone, 1861

Henry John Temple, 3rd Viscount Palmerston, 1864 (John Cann, albumen carte-de-visite; © National Portrait Gallery, London)



IN MAY 1864, Edward Baines, the Liberal MP for Leeds, introduced a reform bill aimed at extending the franchise in boroughs. Baines was a committed and long-standing advocate of electoral reform – like his father before him, Edward Baines Snr, who had also served as MP for Leeds. The younger Baines's support for reform was almost certainly confirmed and strengthened by his experiences as a 19-year-old journalist working for the *Leeds Mercury*, when he had been an eyewitness to the Peterloo massacre of August 1819. Given this background, the debate on Baines's bill was significant, but he would have known that it was highly unlikely to lead to any material change; it was (in the words of one commentator) a 'gesture' bill.¹

The House of Commons was sharply divided on the issue of franchise reform – many MPs had come to accept that the 1832 Reform Act could no longer be viewed as 'the final settlement' on the subject, but there was no

consensus on the way forward and none of the four reform bills introduced between 1852 and 1860 had met with any success. Palmerston, the prime minister, was known to be unimpressed with the case for further franchise reform.²

In his speech, Baines surveyed the changes that had taken place in Britain since the 1830s and argued that the time was now right for a 'considerable and yet not excessive number of the working classes' to be included within the franchise. He argued that this change would be the logical extension to the support that Britain had given in recent years to the expansion of liberty across the rest of Europe.

Palmerston was too ill to attend the debate,³ and Gladstone, as chancellor of the exchequer, was due to speak on behalf of the government. Despite the fact that the bill had negligible chance of success, there were rumours that Gladstone's speech would be particularly significant and many were 'prepared for a startling declaration'.⁴ Because of this background,

Admired and ... disliked' Franchise reform, 1864

Palmerston had written to Gladstone on the morning of the debate stating, 'I hope that in what you may say upon Baines's bill you will not commit yourself and the government as to any particular amount of borough franchise.' Palmerston recognised that at some stage public opinion might require the government to introduce a reform bill, but he was in no hurry to do this and wanted to keep his options open – so he stressed that 'it is of great Importance that we should be free to look at the question without any fresh pledges'. He also warned Gladstone of the dangers of opening the franchise door too widely for fear of the votes of the working classes 'swamping the classes above them' and because 'these working men are unfortunately under the control of trades unions, which are directed by a small number of agitators.'⁵

Gladstone began his speech by arguing that now was not the time for a change of the franchise – pointing out that the Liberal Party was very far from being unanimous on the subject. For the most part, his speech was balanced and restrained, especially when compared to the Conservative opponents of the bill, who had already stated that any measure of franchise reform was liable 'to plunge the country into the troubled waters of domestic revolution.'⁶ Given that the time was not yet ripe for change, Gladstone stated that he wanted to avoid discussions on precisely what level the franchise should be set at, but he continued:

I put aside every question except the very simple one which I take to be at issue, and on this I will endeavour not to be misunderstood. I apprehend my hon. Friend's Bill to mean (and if such be the meaning I give my cordial concurrence to the proposition), that there ought to be, not a wholesale, nor an excessive, but a sensible and considerable addition to that portion of the working

classes – at present almost infinitesimal – which is in possession of the franchise.⁷

He argued that the existing position was that only 2 per cent (or one-fiftieth) of the working class possessed the franchise – and he challenged the House of Commons:

Is that a state of things which we cannot venture to touch or modify? Is there no choice between excluding forty-nine out of every fifty working men on the one hand, and on the other a 'domestic revolution'?⁸

He compared the current condition of the country with that which prevailed fifty years earlier and argued that now working people had a much greater trust in parliament and quoted a delegation of working men who he had met recently who stated: 'It is true that, since the abolition of the corn laws, we have given up political agitation; we have begun from that time to feel that we might place confidence in parliament; that we might look to parliament to pass beneficial measures without agitation.'⁹ He argued that given the constructive engagement of working people in the development of the country, it was a wise move to assess the extension of the franchise and:

I think the investigation will be far better conducted if we approach the question at an early date, in a calm frame of mind, and without having our doors besieged by crowds, or our table loaded with petitions; rather than if we postpone entering upon it until a great agitation has arisen.¹⁰

After speaking for half an hour and providing multiple examples of the constructive engagement of the working classes in the development of the country over the past thirty years,

Despite the fact that the bill had negligible chance of success, there were rumours that Gladstone's speech would be particularly significant and many were 'prepared for a startling declaration'.

he reasoned that it was the responsibility of the advocates of the permanent exclusion of the working class from the franchise to justify why their view should prevail. Then Gladstone stated:

And I venture to say that every man who is not presumably incapacitated by some consideration of personal unfitness or of political danger is morally entitled to come within the pale of the Constitution.¹¹

This was qualified in his very next sentence by saying, 'Of course, in giving utterance to such a proposition, I do not recede from the protest I have previously made against sudden, or violent, or excessive, or intoxicating change',¹² and then continued to speak for a further six or seven minutes on similar themes of the increased responsibility of working people. But it was the single sentence about 'every man ... [being] morally entitled to come within the pale of the Constitution' that made most impact. One contemporary review stated that 'he did not succeed in reassuring his astounded hearers. The rapturous cheers of his Radical allies accompanied him to the end of his speech.'¹³ Gladstone was puzzled by the response and recorded in his diary: 'Some sensation. It appears to me that it was due less to me than to the change in the hearers and in the public mind from the professions at least if not the principles of 1859.'¹⁴ Gladstone would attempt to clarify his statements, but the impression he had given many of his hearers was that he accepted that the vote was a right (not a privilege) and was potentially open to all, irrespective of whether or not they had a substantial 'stake in the country'. That evening Lord Stanley reported that the speech was the 'general subject of conversation' and that Gladstone was 'universally respected, admired, and, except by [John] Bright'¹⁵ and a few of that school, disliked.'¹⁶ The queen was similarly disturbed and wrote to Palmerston that she was 'deeply grieved at this strange and independent act of Mr Gladstone's.'¹⁷ Sir Charles Wood, Gladstone's predecessor as chancellor of the exchequer, also disapproved of the speech, but considered Gladstone's language 'so vague as to pledge him to nothing' and that it indicated 'no settled conviction, but is only one of Gladstone's odd inexplicable freaks: would not be surprised if he were to make another speech in the opposite sense next week'.¹⁸

Gladstone wrote immediately to Palmerston to try and repair the situation, writing that 'others will give you a better account of

any impression left by what I said than myself ... I hope I did not commit the Government to anything: nor myself to any particular form of franchise.'¹⁹ Palmerston responded by stating that 'there is little in [the speech] that I can agree with, and much from which I differ' and that it was 'more like the sort of speech with which Bright would have introduced the reform bill which he would like to propose, than the sort of speech which might have been expected from the Treasury Bench in the present state of things.'²⁰ Palmerston also probed into Gladstone's phrase 'the Pale of the Constitution' stating 'that all who enjoy the Security and civil Rights which the Constitution provides are within its Pale' and he contended that Gladstone was really laying down the Doctrine of Universal Suffrage – 'which I can never accept.'²¹

The exchange of letters continued between them – with a total of eleven letters being sent on this subject over a few days. Palmerston rebuked Gladstone for exciting agitation amongst working men, to which Gladstone responded that he had done no such thing, which led Palmerston to respond by including a cutting from *The Times* talking about agitation for parliamentary reform. Gladstone's response was that he had not called for agitation, but he had remarked that the lack of agitation was hindering the progress of reform.

By this time, Gladstone appreciated that the response to the speech had been much greater than he had anticipated (or in his own terms, he had 'unwarily, it seems, set the Thames on fire')²² and he suggested to Palmerston (in what Roy Jenkins called 'a superb display of both the irrepressible and the naïve sides of his character'²³) that the best solution to the outcry would be if he were to publish his speech, thereby getting 'rid of the strange misconstructions of which it has been the subject.'²⁴ He argued that he didn't want his views to be distorted by the newspaper coverage and noted 'the tendency of all reporters, especially in the case of a speaker difficult to follow, to omit qualifications.' Palmerston had his reservations about this approach, but accepted that Gladstone should be the judge of his actions.

When the speech was published Gladstone was at pains to make clear that this single sentence that had produced such a reaction was not 'a deliberate and studied announcement'²⁵ and had been made in response to opponents of franchise extension who were proposing that the existing arrangements could be maintained indefinitely. He continued to argue in his preface that his statement was not one of 'startling novelty' and stated that 'If I regret the manner

Then Gladstone stated: 'And I venture to say that every man who is not presumably incapacitated by some consideration of personal unfitness or of political danger is morally entitled to come within the pale of the Constitution.'

in which my declaration has been interpreted, it is chiefly because of its tendency to produce in other quarters an exaggerated estimate.²⁶

Although Gladstone's speech caused such dramatic shock waves, his main themes were clearly consistent with the way in which his thinking had been developing over the previous few years. Accusations that he was simply jumping on the 'democratic bandwagon' in response to the successes of the Union forces in the American Civil War and less than six months after Lincoln delivered his famous address at Gettysburg are plainly unfounded when the progression of Gladstone's thinking is considered.

Initial opposition to reform and long-term development of views

Going back over thirty years before to the early 1830s when the Whig government was trying to steer the Reform Bill through parliament, Gladstone was still a student at Oxford, but he was clear that he disapproved of the reform initiatives that Grey's government were proposing. As Richard Shannon states, Gladstone concurred with 'Canning's arguments against the folly of attempting to replace the organic creation of centuries of history and experience with the paltry contrivances of presumptuous radicalism.'²⁷ While he was at Oxford, he helped raise money to oppose the Reform Bill, organised a petition amongst fellow students, joined demonstrations and spoke against reform at the Oxford Union. 'His anti-reform zeal was such as to lead to his "skipping chapel" thrice in five days, "of which I am really ashamed."²⁸ At the 1831 general election, he arranged for the printing, at his own cost, of placards which criticised the new constitutions of South America and France for bringing chaos and called on electors 'TO RESIST REVOLUTION TO THE DEATH'.²⁹

In his Oxford Union address (May 1831), Gladstone dismissed contemporary views about the will of the people, condemned the 'diabolical' press for stirring up popular feelings and argued that:

Human will therefore has nothing whatever to do with the foundation of government – it can never establish nor overthrow its legitimacy – divine will alone is its ground – and as to human opinion, it is only valuable and deserving of regard in exact proportion as it is calculated, from the virtue and ability of those who hold it, to embody and develope [*sic*] those eternal laws which alone are the source

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of authority, and which alone propose to us the objects of true and legitimate obedience.³⁰

Later that year, Gladstone attended a whole week of debates in the House of Lords, where opposition to the bill was most pronounced. For a conscientious student like Gladstone giving up an entire week, especially so close to his final examinations, was a major sacrifice, but it is an indication of the strength of his disapproval.³¹

His views were developed in more detail in a paper entitled 'On the principle of Government' which Gladstone wrote while he was still at Oxford.³² In this paper, he argued that humans are social beings and therefore are necessarily part of a community. And if there is community and association, then there must also be government and subordination.³³ He argues 'that a state of graduated subordination is the natural law of humanity', with the principle of subordination being:

... inferred from 'the analogy of the universe'. The whole cosmos, 'infinitely divisible into parts from its ruler downwards' is organised so that each part is dependent on the part above it in the structure, and so is ultimately dependent on the Almighty.³⁴

In Gladstone's view, authority descended from heaven; it did not arise from the people. And the imposition of order from above was not an evil to be minimised, but a good to be respected. Given this position, he was not supportive of popular self-government or the development of personal freedoms. He continued:

... as a guide in framing or modifying a Constitution, the right principle seems to me to be, not to give as much political liberty to the subjects as can be conceded compatibly with the maintenance of public order, but as little.³⁵

He drew parallels between the family and the state and argued that just as everyone was born into a family, so they were also born into a state. The relationship between the parent and the child was comparable to the relationship between rulers and their subjects – rulers were in a strong sense the fathers of their people. Given this approach it is unsurprising that monarchy is given a central role. 'Unrestricted [or absolute] monarchy I should conceive to be the government best suited to man in his perfect state because the most efficacious',³⁶ although

he did concede that human failings and frailties could lead to a tyrannical monarch, so there was a need for checks and balances within the state.

A few years later, after his first experience of ministerial office, Gladstone's position had changed little and he remained determined to resist pressure for concessions. He wrote in his private notes that 'our duty [is] ... firmly to grasp by the understanding that human will, though it has power has not authority, in the fundamental matters of government.'³⁷

By the early 1850s Gladstone's priorities had started to shift, with a much greater focus on sound budgets and financial reform, but this did not feed through into increased support for franchise reform – rather the reverse. He saw sound finances 'as the sovereign remedy for creating social confidence and content and thus obviating the need for [parliamentary] reform. He told his fellow-Peelites that the 'financial feebleness and the extravagance' of the Whigs was the 'sure means of generating successive demands for reform.'³⁸ Similar thinking was at play when, as chancellor of the exchequer, he introduced his 1853 budget, where he renewed income tax, but also set out a step-by-step reduction until its abolition in 1860. Gladstone reduced the income level at which people started to pay tax (from £150 to £100), so that there was a much greater alignment between those who paid income tax and those who were enfranchised. His intention was that the whole of the 'educated' part of the community was brought into the tax net, but the 'labouring part' was left outside the net. As Shannon writes, 'By thus imposing a special tax burden on the electorate Gladstone hoped to impose a sense of responsibility for the mass of the unenfranchised, a fiscal doctrine of trusteeship.'³⁹

A similar approach was evident a few months later, when Lord Aberdeen's cabinet were assessing the relative priorities to be given to Russell's proposal for a new reform bill or Gladstone's plans to address reform of the civil service. Gladstone appreciated that the support for parliamentary reform was gradually starting to gain momentum, but he considered the needs of the civil service to be a much higher priority. As he explained to Sir James Graham, he saw reform of the civil service as 'my contribution to parliamentary reform.'⁴⁰

Five years later, when Derby's minority government was in office, Gladstone's support for the different reform proposals under discussion was becoming more positive. Russell was preparing some ideas for a new reform bill and he asked Graham to sound out Gladstone on whether or not he would be supportive. After

their discussions, Graham reported back to Russell that Gladstone 'made little comment but thought it would be unwise prematurely to fix details. He was less hostile to reform than I expected, and he expressed an opinion that no government could now stand which blinked the question.'⁴¹

Soon after this (in March 1859) when Disraeli introduced the government's own reform bill, Gladstone was supportive of reform and extending the franchise, arguing that 'I cannot be a party to a Reform Bill which does not lower the suffrage in boroughs. I may go a step further, and say it appears to me that the lowering of the suffrage in boroughs is the main purpose of having a Reform Bill, and that unless we are to have that lowering of the suffrage, it would be better that we should not waste our time on this subject.'⁴² Gladstone stated that parliament's failure to satisfactorily address the issue of reform was damaging its reputation in the country:

I confess it appears to me that, although the feeling of the people of this country with respect to the proceedings of the House of Commons is eminently satisfactory ... they have begun, especially of late years, to entertain a warm sentiment both of gratitude and confidence in the authority and institutions of the country, and particularly in their representative assembly – yet I doubt whether any part of that gratitude or confidence is due to the manner in which we have recently treated the subject of parliamentary reform.⁴³

In addition, the failure to resolve the reform question was undermining the efficiency of parliament:

It is bad for the nation that this House, which has so much business to transact on the part of this country and our vast empire, should be perpetually engaged in constitutional and organic discussions ... We cannot afford – as a mere matter of time – to pass year after year, to fritter away the principal part of each session in debating the question of parliamentary reform.⁴⁴

The other key theme of Gladstone's speech was the treatment of small boroughs, with this also linked to the efficient operation of parliament – 'to proceed far in the disfranchisement of small boroughs is a course injurious to the efficiency of the House of Commons.'⁴⁵ He argued for the retention of small nomination boroughs, so that they could continue to act as nurseries for

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great statesmen – citing various examples from Pelham to Pitt, Canning and Peel who had all entered the Commons at a young age as representatives of small boroughs.⁴⁶ He saw the strength of these constituencies being their willingness 'to take upon trust the recommendation of candidates for Parliament from noblemen or gentlemen who may stand in immediate connection with them,'⁴⁷ thereby enabling promising young men to enter parliament at an early age.

It is not too much to say that no one of these mere boys could have become a Member of Parliament if it had not been for the means of access to the House of Commons which then existed. You must recollect that they were nearly all chosen when they were about twenty-one or twenty-two.⁴⁸

He could also have been thinking of his own case, having first entered the Commons for Newark which was under the influence of the Duke of Newcastle.

You cannot expect of large and populous constituencies that they should return boys to Parliament; and yet if you want a succession of men trained to take part in the government of the country, you must have a great proportion of them returned to this House while they are boys. The conclusion to which this brings me is that the matter will be a more serious one if you are prepared to part with your whole system of small boroughs.⁴⁹

A year later (May 1860) when Gladstone spoke in support of the Liberal government's own reform bill he again argued strongly for an extension to the franchise:

I do not admit that the working man, regarded as an individual, is less worthy of the suffrage than any other class. I do not admit the charges of corruption ... I do not believe that the working men of this country are possessed of a disposition to tax their neighbours and exempt themselves: nor do I acknowledge for a moment that schemes of socialism, of communism, of republicanism, or any other ideas at variance with the law and constitution of the realm are prevalent and popular among them.⁵⁰

Given Gladstone's speech in 1859 (and in 1860), it becomes easier to understand his diary comment of 1864 that the reaction to his 'Pale of the Constitution' speech was largely down to

a change in the public mood, rather than his statements. Quinault argues that 'Gladstone's strong support for reform in 1859 has been underplayed by historians, partly because he endorsed a Tory bill and partly because of his conservative views on the redistribution of seats.'⁵¹ Although Gladstone consistently advocated the extension of the franchise in each of his three speeches, there are a number of possible reasons why the reaction to his comments was so much greater in 1864. The 1864 speech was the shortest of the three and a 'sensible and considerable' extension of the franchise was the sole focus of the speech, whereas in 1859 franchise extension may have been somewhat overshadowed by his concern for promoting the efficiency of parliament and the retention of small boroughs and in 1860 by a very detailed and complex analysis of the number of people affected by potential changes in franchise limits. Secondly, as the 1864 debate was around a 'gesture' bill (as opposed to government business) this may have, somewhat perversely, caused less distraction and given increased prominence to the opinions expressed. Finally, Gladstone's increased stature, both in parliament and with the public, by 1864 and his prominence as a prospective leader of the Liberal Party would guarantee that his speeches would generate more interest and demand more scrutiny than in either 1859 or in 1860.

There were a number of factors that influenced the development of Gladstone's thinking, but this analysis will focus on two aspects of this change.

Growing respect for the masses

The first factor was the increased exposure he had to sections of the working class, which led him to re-evaluate and assess his initial views. As his experience of the labouring classes increased, his understanding and appreciation of their behaviour and their achievements grew. They were no longer a simple aggregated block of people, but a mixture of intersecting groups taking a variety of self-generated initiatives to improve their lives and their communities.

Early in his career while at the Board of Trade, Gladstone spent time investigating the workings of the coal trade in London and in particular the employment conditions of the coal whippers, labourers who were employed on a casual basis to unload coal cargoes as ships arrived at the London docks. On a number of previous occasions, parliament had legislated to tackle the most severe problems in the industry, but with little success. When Gladstone

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addressed the issue, the practice was still for the captain of a coal ship to approach a local publican to provide a gang of men to unload the coal, with the gang being sent out from the public house. A contemporary commentator described the operating conditions as follows:

There was no professed or pre-arranged deduction from the price paid for the work; the captain paid the publican, and the publican paid the coal-whippers; but the middleman had his profit another way. The coal-whipper was expected to come to the public-house in the morning; to drink while waiting for work; to take drink with him to the ship; to drink again when the day's work was done; and to linger about and in the public-house until almost bedtime before his day's wages were paid. The consequence was, that an enormous ratio of his earnings went every week to the publican ... The captains preferred applying to the publicans rather than engaging the men themselves, because it saved them trouble; and because (as was pretty well understood) the publicans curried favour with them by indirect means.⁵²

Gladstone helped to steer the Coal Vendors Act (1843) through parliament and this placed the coal whippers in a much more advantageous position, with the creation of a central employment office, curtailing the power of the publicans. The example of the coal whippers gave Gladstone accurate and detailed experience of the harsh and degrading employment conditions suffered by some working people, but it also gave him a deeper connection with this particular group of workers. A few years later, at the height of the Chartist agitation, he was eager to make the Commons aware of the support provided by the coal whippers who, like Gladstone himself,⁵³ had offered their services as special constables. He spoke warmly of 'the encouragement given to all classes of labourers by the tribute of approbation which, on our part, such conduct will never fail to receive.'⁵⁴ The wider message he was drawing was that where the state was able to make judicious interventions to improve the lives of working people, there was an excellent chance that those people would respond with gratitude and a desire for self-improvement.⁵⁵ He maintained his links with the coal whippers and in May 1851 addressed them in a public meeting at Shadwell – their gratitude for Gladstone's support was very clear.⁵⁶

Two years after addressing the coal whippers in the East End, Gladstone was in Manchester

for the inauguration of the Peel monument, where he spoke to an audience with a large proportion of working men. It was an occasion for mutual admiration – the people of Manchester for Gladstone's eminence and progress in initiating admirable commercial measures and Gladstone expressing his support and appreciation for their 'advanced intelligence' and commitment to self-improvement.⁵⁷

Building on the connections that had been made in London and Manchester, Gladstone was keen to note over the next few years the various pieces of evidence to demonstrate the multiple different ways in which the working classes were changing. Examples included the formation of friendly societies, trade unions and the cooperative movement (which he described as having 'no greater social marvel at the present day'),⁵⁸ increased participation in municipal government,⁵⁹ self-improvement and education.⁶⁰ He was also very aware of the dramatic growth in libraries, reading rooms and newspaper circulation, all of which were described in detail by Edward Baines when he opened the debate on his bill for extending the franchise. Gladstone's links with Manchester gave him a particular insight into the suffering during the Lancashire cotton famine of the early 1860s: in the midst of this distress, he argued, the people had shown 'self-command, self-control, respect for order, patience under suffering, confidence in the law, regard for superiors.'⁶¹ Were not these the very qualities that you would desire in someone who was to exercise the franchise?

Developing theology

The second factor that had a bearing on Gladstone's evolving views on the franchise was the development of his theology between the 1830s and the 1860s. Gladstone's Christian faith was vibrant and dynamic and as such his theological understanding changed and developed throughout his life, but one particular aspect of that development is of interest.

As a child, the major influences on his faith had been his mother and his elder sister, Anne. Anne's influence over William was heightened by the fact that she was seven years his senior and was also his godmother. Both his mother and his sister had strong and clear evangelical convictions, which William also developed.⁶² Prominent amongst these convictions were an emphasis on the fallen state of human beings, their unworthiness before God, and their reliance on God's free and unmerited gift of grace in order to be reconciled with him. While

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Gladstone was studying at Oxford and considering a vocation in the church, he weighed and reassessed many of the doctrines that he had understood from childhood, but his overall approach was still heavily influenced by a strongly evangelical perspective.

Over the next twenty years, Gladstone's ideas on multiple aspects of his faith shifted and developed as a result of numerous influences, including friendships, reading, thinking and deliberation, personal experiences, exposure to different Christian traditions and involvement in bitter controversies.⁶³ Crucial to this development was that Gladstone 'altered his doctrine of the cross so as to put it in a broader context'⁶⁴ and, coupled with this, reassessed his view of the role of humanity within God's creation. Rather than putting all his emphasis on the sinfulness of man and the redemption of mankind by Jesus on the cross – in theological terms 'the atonement' – he now saw this as part of a wider narrative where the high point in the story was in fact the Son of God being born in human form in a stable – in theological terms 'the incarnation'. As Robert Wilberforce (who was a significant influence on Gladstone at this time) wrote: 'For that Our Lord should become man, was a far greater descent, than that when He was man he should suffer contempt and death.'⁶⁵ In a sermon in early 1864, Gladstone declared that the incarnation was 'the master-key of religion.'⁶⁶ And 'the incarnate Christ had imparted a new grandeur to humanity.'⁶⁷

And if God himself could stoop to take on human form, then humanity had to be viewed in a more positive light. As Gladstone stated in his 1860 address on the 'The Work of Universities', 'man himself is the crowning wonder of creation,'⁶⁸ the pinnacle of God's work. As David Bebbington states:

From his fresh insight into the achievement of the incarnate Christ, however, Gladstone had come to see that human beings are also capable of transformation. Christ, through coming into the world without any trace of imperfection, was made perfect over time. Similarly his followers, though possessing unalterable characteristics, could make moral advances ... Gladstone did not ... uncritically embrace a full-bodied notion of inevitable progress; but he did come to accept that major improvement was possible. Humanity had immense scope for betterment.⁶⁹

Gladstone's more favourable view of humanity and the potential for moral improvement

helped to make him more receptive than earlier in his career to a much wider expansion of the franchise.

Conclusion

Although Gladstone was very clear that his statement that 'every man ... is morally entitled to come within the pale of the Constitution' was not 'a deliberate and studied announcement' and he stated that he regretted how his declaration had been misinterpreted to produce 'an exaggerated estimate', it is clear that he believed that a sensible and substantial expansion of the franchise was both a political and a moral imperative. The absence of detailed proposals in his 1864 speech had the effect of making it a clear and unambiguous call for parliament to effectively address the issue of franchise extension and resolve it in a satisfactory manner.

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- 1 R. Jenkins, *Gladstone* (Macmillan, 1995), p. 247.
- 2 D. Cannadine, *Victorious Century: The United Kingdom, 1800–1906* (Allen Lane, 2017), p. 297.
- 3 D. Southgate, 'The Most English Minister ...': *The Policies and Politics of Palmerston* (Macmillan, 1966), p. 529.
- 4 R. Shannon, *Gladstone* (BCA, 1999), p. 506.
- 5 Palmerston, letter, 11 May 1864, in H. J. T. Palmerston, W. E. Gladstone, & P. Guedalla, *Gladstone and Palmerston: Being the correspondence of Lord Palmerston with Mr. Gladstone, 1851–1865* (V. Gollancz Ltd, 1928), p. 280.
- 6 Hansard, Parl. Debs. (series 3) vol.175, col. 310 (11 May 1864).
- 7 *Ibid.*, col. 316.
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 *Ibid.*, col. 318.
- 10 *Ibid.*, col. 326.
- 11 *Ibid.*, col. 324.
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 *The Quarterly Review*, July 1864, quoted in Shannon, *Gladstone*, p. 508.
- 14 Diary entry for 11 May 1864, H. C. G. Matthew, *The Gladstone Diaries: Volume VI* (Clarendon, 1978), p. 275.
- 15 Radical MP for Birmingham.
- 16 Shannon, *Gladstone*, p. 510.
- 17 Quoted in Southgate, *Most English Minister*, p. 531.
- 18 Quoted in Shannon, *Gladstone*, p. 511.

Although Gladstone was very clear that his statement that 'every man ... is morally entitled to come within the pale of the Constitution' was not 'a deliberate and studied announcement' and he stated that he regretted how his declaration had been misinterpreted to produce 'an exaggerated estimate', it is clear that he believed that a sensible and substantial expansion of the franchise was both a political and a moral imperative.

'Universally respected, admired and ... disliked' – Gladstone and franchise reform, 1864

- 19 Gladstone, letter, 11 May 1864, in Guedalla, *Gladstone and Palmerston*, p. 280.
- 20 Palmerston, letter, 12 May 1864, in Guedalla, *Gladstone and Palmerston*, p. 281.
- 21 Palmerston, letter, 12 May 1864, in Guedalla, *Gladstone and Palmerston*, p. 281.
- 22 Quoted in Guedalla, *Gladstone and Palmerston*, p. 73.
- 23 Jenkins, *Gladstone*, p. 248.
- 24 Gladstone, letter, 21 May 1864, in Guedalla, *Gladstone and Palmerston*, p. 286.
- 25 W. E. Gladstone, *Speech of the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the bill for the extension of the suffrage in towns, May 11, 1864* (John Murray, 1864), p. 2.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 3. Gladstone also used the preface to expand on his statement's two qualifications – the franchise 'should exclude those who are, presumably, in themselves unfitted to exercise it with intelligence and integrity. Secondly, it should exclude those with respect to whom it might appear that, though no personal unfitness can be alleged against them, yet political danger might arise from their admission; as, for example, through the disturbance of the equilibrium of the constituent body, or through virtual monopoly of power in a single class.'
- 27 Shannon, *Gladstone*, p. 30; relates to Gladstone's reading in 1830–31
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 32.
- 29 Roland Quinault, 'Gladstone and Parliamentary Reform', in David Bebbington and Roger Swift (eds.), *Gladstone Centenary Essays* (Liverpool University Press, 2000), p. 77.
- 30 Gladstone Papers 44721, British Library, quoted in D. Bebbington, *The Mind of Gladstone: Religion, Homer, and Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 13.
- 31 Shannon, *Gladstone*, p. 32.
- 32 Gladstone Papers 44721, British Library, quoted in Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, p. 15.
- 33 Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, p. 24.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- 36 Gladstone Papers 44721, British Library, quoted in Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, p. 20.
- 37 GP 44725, quoted in Shannon, *Gladstone*, p. 53.
- 38 Shannon, *Gladstone*, p. 244.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 269; see also H. C. G. Matthew, *Gladstone, 1809–1898* (Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 123.
- 40 Shannon, *Gladstone*, p. 280; see also J. Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone* (Macmillan, 1903), vol. i, p. 511.
- 41 C. S. Parker, *Life and Letters of Sir James Graham: Second Baronet of Netherby, P.C., G.C.B., 1792–1861* (J. Murray, 1907), vol. ii, p. 360 (quoted by Shannon, *Gladstone*, p. 362).
- 42 Hansard, Parl. Debs. (series 3), vol. 153, col. 1053 (29 Mar. 1859).
- 43 *Ibid.*, col. 1050.
- 44 *Ibid.*, col. 1066.
- 45 *Ibid.*, col. 1054.
- 46 *Ibid.*, col. 1056.
- 47 *Ibid.*
- 48 *Ibid.*, col. 1058.
- 49 *Ibid.*
- 50 Hansard, Parl. Debs. (series 3), vol. 158, col. 632 (3 May 1860).
- 51 Quinault (2000), p. 80
- 52 Henry Mayhew, letters to the *Morning Chronicle*, 1849–1850, retrieved from <http://www.victorianlondon.org/mayhew/mayhew22.htm>
- 53 Quinault, 'Parliamentary Reform', p. 79.
- 54 Hansard, Parl. Debs. (series 3), vol. 97, col. 459 (13 Mar. 1848).
- 55 Shannon, *Gladstone*, pp. 208–9.
- 56 *Ibid.*, p. 244.
- 57 *Ibid.*, p. 277.
- 58 Hansard, Parl. Debs. (series 3), vol. 175, col. 326 (11 May 1864).
- 59 Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, p. 274.
- 60 Chris Wrigley, 'Gladstone and Labour' in Roland Quinault, Roger Swift & Ruth Clayton Windscheffel (eds.), *William Gladstone: New Studies and Perspectives* (Routledge, 2012), p. 55.
- 61 Hansard, Parl. Debs. (series 3), vol. 175, col. 325 (11 May 1864).
- 62 Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, p. 44.
- 63 See Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, chapters 3 and 4.
- 64 *Ibid.*, p. 104.
- 65 Quoted in Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, p. 102.
- 66 Gladstone Papers 44781, British Library, quoted in Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, p. 137.
- 67 Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, p. 141.
- 68 Gladstone, 'Inaugural Address: The work of Universities', quoted in Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, p. 214.
- 69 Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, p. 137.

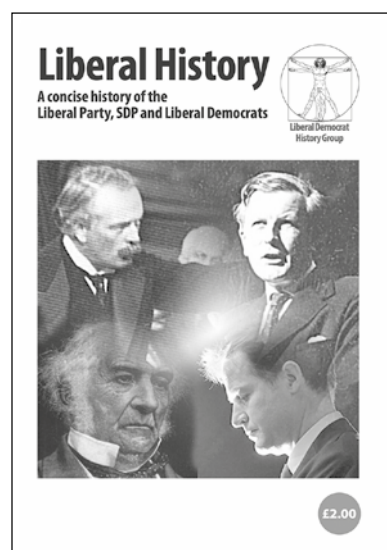
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Report

Liberals with a radical programme: the post-war welfare state, Beveridge and the Liberal Party 75 years on

Conference fringe meeting (online), 26 September 2020, with Dr Peter Sloman and Professor Pat Thane; chair: Baroness Tyler

Report by David Cloke

CLAIRE TYLER INTRODUCED the meeting by reminding the audience of the context; 2020 was the 75th anniversary of the 1945 general election and the beginnings of the post-war welfare state that emerged after it. This included measures to provide free secondary education, an extended safety net for the sick and unemployed through National Insurance and the establishment of the NHS. Often described as one of the greatest achievements of the Labour Party, the intellectual origins of the proposals in fact stretched back over a number of decades and were profoundly shaped by Liberal thinkers and politicians, including David Lloyd George and William Beveridge (a topic discussed in our fringe meeting the year before, on ‘the Liberal Party, health policy and the origins of the NHS’; see report in *Journal of Liberal History* 105 (winter 2019–20).)

Dr Peter Sloman was invited to provide the wider context of the 1945 election and to outline the particular role of Beveridge. He began by acknowledging that the Liberals were indeed at the heart of the post-war welfare state, with many of the ideas that shaped social policy during the 1940s originating with Liberals such as Keynes. Nonetheless, Sloman also noted that the Liberal Party’s campaign in the 1945 general election was a real failure, with its seats falling from 21 in 1935 to 12; it effectively became a party of the Celtic fringe – and this was despite putting Beveridge at the forefront of the campaign and letting him run it as MP for Berwick-upon-Tweed. His picture was on most of the party’s publicity.

The 1945 election was also the first time that Labour managed to win by themselves; previous Labour governments had been minority administrations dependent on Liberal support. In turn this destroyed the Liberal argument that any progressive alternative to a Conservative government was going to require Liberal ideas and Liberal votes. The 1945 election was, therefore, Sloman argued, the point when the Liberal Party moved from being a central force in British politics to being a small political player.

What was the context of the Liberal Party’s engagement with the Beveridge Report? Sloman argued that the party was more divided on economic policy during the war than at any other time in the twentieth century. While socialists argued that the country should emulate the central planning of the Soviet Union, and free marketeers like Hayek argued that this was the road to serfdom, Liberal activists and MPs could be found at either end of that wide spectrum.

During the 1930s the Liberal leader Sinclair had tried to develop a progressive agenda for the party that was nevertheless based on commitments to the free market and free trade. Liberals criticised the National Government for abandoning free trade in 1932, for subsidising agriculture and declining industries and for pursuing forms of interventionist economic policy. At the same time, Liberals also argued for the dispersal of economic power as widely as possible, rather than concentrating it in the hands of the state or large private companies – quite different to the Labour agenda. The party’s 1938 report, *Ownership for All*,

written largely by Elliott Dodds, set out plans for breaking up monopolies, taxing inherited wealth, supporting small businesses and dispersing legacies as widely as possible. The aim was to encourage people to build up their own economic assets and establish a property-owning democracy. If there had been a general election in 1939/40, this would have featured in the party’s manifesto alongside opposition to appeasement.

However, after World War Two broke out, and especially after the establishment of Churchill’s coalition, the political landscape changed radically. Sinclair and his allies in the party focused on their government responsibilities (Sinclair was Secretary of State for Air) and came to absorb the values and preoccupations of the coalition. At the same time, Liberal MPs like Clement Davies and Thomas Horabin were effectively calling for permanent government control of the economy, based on the advice of the Hungarian-born economist Thomas Balogh, later one of Harold Wilson’s advisers in the 1960s. Their argument was that Keynesianism was not enough. To ensure full employment and avoid the mass unemployment of the Great Depression, the government needed substantial control over investment, which might involve regulation of private investment and greater public ownership. Unsurprisingly, these positions led to significant debate within the party at the Liberal assemblies of 1942 and 1943.

The publication of the Beveridge Report in November 1942 should be seen in this context. (Sloman noted that Beveridge was not at this point a member of the Liberal Party, though he had been associated with it in the 1920s; he joined in order to fight the Berwick by-election in October 1944.) Beveridge stood firmly in the tradition of the social insurance model that he had helped to develop with Lloyd George and Churchill before the First World War. His proposals sought to unify the patchwork of schemes that had developed over the preceding twenty-five years and to extend the social insurance model to the whole of society.

Report – Liberals with a radical programme

Sloman then outlined the Liberal response to Beveridge's proposals, which was not uncritical. Many feminists pointed out that the Beveridge model was based on a particular vision of male industrial employment in which most had regular full-time employment, with social insurance tiding individuals over periods of interruptions of earnings. Arguably, therefore, the model reinforced the male breadwinner family structure which led to forms of financial dependence within the family. Single mothers or disabled people never built up social insurance rights through work and National Insurance contributions, but had to rely on the means-tested national assistance scheme, which was potentially stigmatising and degrading. Seebohm Rowntree criticised the Beveridge proposal for flat-rate social insurance contributions, arguing that this was regressive: a poll tax on workers. Some on the Liberal right argued that compulsory insurance organised by the state risked crowding out private and voluntary forms of welfare provision.

The main alternative to Beveridge that Sloman noted had been canvassed at the time was a form of basic income scheme (a policy, Sloman added, that Liberal Democrat conference had just adopted the previous evening), developed mainly by Juliet Rhys Williams, a Liberal activist from Wales. The party's report on the scheme by a group chaired by Walter Layton (Editor of *The Economist*) concluded that the proposal was 'sound in principle' but expensive.

All these discussions were overtaken, however, by the wider political debate on the Beveridge Report. The government's response was initially hesitant; Sloman argued that when Beveridge submitted his proposals Conservatives, especially, were keen to avoid making firm commitments, wanting to see how much money the country had after the war; they feared both extending the wartime tax burden into peacetime and the possibility of heavy burdens on industry.

In a Commons debate on the report in February 1943, the Labour MP James Griffiths put down an

amendment demanding that the government implement the report in full immediately. Nine Liberal MPs, led by Sir Percy Harris, the Chief Whip and MP for Bethnal Green, and David Lloyd George, in his last-ever vote, backed the Labour amendment. This led to a furious row with Sinclair and the Liberal ministers. Harris' diaries revealed his strength of feeling: 'I am convinced Liberals may as well go out of business if they left care of Beveridge policy to Labour, as, if they have stood for anything they have for the insurance principle.' Harris concluded that regardless of the details of the proposals the best move the party could make was to wrap itself in the mantle of Beveridge and claim it as a Liberal policy.

This is in effect what happened. Harris and other Liberals outside the government, such as Violet Bonham Carter, drew Beveridge into the Liberal fold. They wined and dined him, invited him to party meetings and made him feel important. They also made him feel that he could have more freedom of action in the Liberal Party than in Labour.

The party thus shelved its interest in basic income because it believed that it made more sense politically to throw its weight behind Beveridge. On economic policy, the party adopted Beveridge's 1944 Report, *Full Employment in a Free Society*, as the basis for its post-war agenda: a highly interventionist form of Keynesianism which recognised the need for greater public ownership in order to make full employment possible, and a National Investment Board to control private investment – in other words, forms of central planning with which the Labour Party was generally more comfortable. Just as in 1929 the party had seized on Keynes' proposals for conquering unemployment as a short-cut to electoral recovery so, in 1945, it seized on Beveridge.

Of course, as we now know, it didn't work. According to Sloman, probably the most important reason was simply that Liberal organisation had deteriorated so much since the previous general election in 1935. Even though the Liberals ran 306 candidates

in 1945, contesting half of the seats, it found it difficult to persuade voters that they had a good chance of winning. The tactic of focusing on local issues, or tactical voting, was much harder to follow after many local parties had shut down during the war and many people had been dislocated by wartime service or evacuation. Another problem was that in the end all parties promised to implement the Beveridge scheme.

The Labour Party argument that economic planning was essential for social reconstruction resonated with many voters. After Beveridge had come to speak for him in his campaign for Bethnal Green South West, Percy Harris noted that everyone was on board but that voters did not know how Liberals would deal with unemployment. Labour had persuaded many voters that they could only have the good things all parties agreed on if there were economic foundations that made that possible, including economic planning, which was beyond what Conservatives and some Liberals were prepared to support.

Pat Thane, Professor of Contemporary History at King's College London, discussed the role of Beveridge in social policy. She began by noting that he had been closely involved in social policy from the beginning of the twentieth century when he had been based at the Toynbee Hall Settlement in East London and engaged in social work in the district. Beveridge remained strongly committed to voluntary action by the better-off to help the less advantaged, believing that it was a central component of a cohesive society. He was also committed to ending unemployment and under-employment, which he saw as the major cause of poverty.

In 1908 Beveridge was appointed as adviser on employment to Winston Churchill, then President of the Board of Trade. In this role he was responsible for the introduction of labour exchanges in 1909, and of National Insurance in 1911, the first scheme of its kind in the world. During the First World War he advised the government on labour market matters and was behind the improvements in

unemployment benefit after the war. He also remained active on social policy during the inter-war years as director of the LSE.

During the Second World War he was appointed as adviser to Ernest Bevin, the Minister of Labour, to work on planning the wartime labour market. After bombarding Bevin with unwanted advice and criticism, however, Bevin sidelined him by appointing him to the committee that the government had established to consider reforms to social insurance, set up in response to criticisms that the methods of providing pensions and insurance had grown up in a haphazard and uncoordinated fashion. It had become clear during the war, Thane noted, that these provisions had failed to prevent severe poverty: surveys revealed destitution among old people because the pension never provided enough to live on and the evacuation of children had revealed the deprivation of many.

The committee had been intended to propose ways of improving the system; the government had not thought it particularly important and so had given it rather vague terms of reference. Indeed, Beveridge had initially been disappointed by the appointment, but became convinced that he could achieve something with it. With the other committee members being civil servants who were too busy to give it much attention, Beveridge took over; the Committee's 1942 report was essentially his work.

The Report proposed a comprehensive programme of state action to abolish want and associated social problems. Thane noted that Beveridge used vivid language to draw attention to his ideas and worked hard to promote them on the BBC and in newspapers. He framed the report dramatically as attacking the five giants blocking the way to social improvement: want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness.

Thane noted that the Report claimed that the five giants could be destroyed by a range of measures: a national health service to cure disease; universal education; good, affordable housing to end squalor; full employment to end idleness; and improved

universal social security benefits to protect people from destitution from cradle to grave. However, because the Committee had been asked to consider social insurance, the detailed report only covered this issue and not other matters, such as the NHS. Nonetheless, the Report made clear that social insurance reform alone was not enough.

The Report proposed a unified system of national insurance providing old age and widows' pensions and unemployment, sick, disability and maternity benefits for the whole population, not just for manual workers as had been the case before. The scheme would be funded by contributions from workers, employers and the state. Thane argued that Beveridge believed that if all contributed to the benefits, all would regard them as their right, something they had paid for. If the better-off received the benefits they would less resent paying taxes to help the poor. In turn this would mean that receiving benefits would no longer be a source of stigma, something, Thane noted, that Beveridge was determined to bring to an end. The system would, thereby, help social cohesion.

The benefits themselves would be high enough to cover all essential needs, but just that. Unlike other systems there would be a flat rate of contributions and a flat rate of benefits.

Thane went on to discuss support for women, where Beveridge had drawn on the work of Eleanor Rathbone. He did not believe that women should stay at home but recognised that most women had no choice because of the marriage bar that forced women to give up work in the professions and many other occupations. He also recognised the practical difficulties, such as childcare. Beveridge, therefore, picked up the argument from many women's organisations that women's work in the home should be treated and respected just like paid work, and supported Rathbone's idea of family allowances as the means of paying women for their essential work in the home. Women would also receive benefits by virtue of their husband's contributions (or partner's, in the case of 'cohabiting wives') Allowances

for divorced and separated wives were paid for by their ex-partners' contributions.

Interestingly, Thane noted that, with a falling birth rate since the late nineteenth century and life expectancy rising, the inter-war years had seen something of a national panic about an ageing society and the cost of a shrinking younger generation supporting a growing older generation. Indeed, both Beveridge and Keynes had contributed to the pre-war debate on the issue, proposing that older people should work longer where possible. Beveridge's proposals on pensions should be seen in that context. The pension would be paid once someone was retired from paid work at 65 for men and 60 for women, with higher payments beyond the minimum if they retired later.

Thane also suggested that the proposals for family allowances should be seen in this context, as it was felt that the allowance would encourage people to have more children and help to equalise the age structure. As it happened, the birth rate was already rising in 1942, leading into the post-war baby boom, but this was not recognised at the time.

Finally, a new means-tested system of national assistance would replace the Poor Law and provide help for people who fell through the National Insurance safety net. Beveridge believed that his proposals would be so comprehensive that few people would need national assistance. Indeed, Thane noted that he strongly opposed means-testing as it was inefficient and costly, and many in need failed to apply because of the stigma associated with it or because they were unaware that they were eligible – a situation that Thane felt still held true today.

The Beveridge Report grabbed the headlines, partly because Beveridge promoted it so effectively, but also because the Ministry of Information thought that it would raise morale by holding out the promise of better lives after the war. People queued up to buy it and within a month an unprecedented 100,000 copies had been sold. Thane did wonder, though, how many of the buyers read all its 299 pages!

One person who was not enthusiastic was Winston Churchill, who tried to stop the summary being circulated to the armed services, though in the event the report proved so popular that he had to give in. Nonetheless, Thane noted that he never supported the proposals and hoped that they could be shelved. Nevertheless, the 1943 debate on the Report saw the largest backbench anti-government vote of the war. Labour strongly supported the proposals and Thane argued that this was one reason for their victory in 1945.

Nevertheless, Thane noted that the Labour government did not in the end fully implement the proposals. In government they thought that reconstructing the economy had to come first: full employment and a successful economy were key to improved living standards. Full employment was indeed achieved but the full implementation of the welfare policies

was delayed until the economy had revived. However, Labour narrowly lost the 1951 general election, with the result that the welfare state that eventually emerged was less comprehensive than Beveridge and Labour had hoped. Benefits, especially pensions, were not paid at a full subsistence levels, and within a few years millions had to claim additional help through national assistance. In addition, few people worked beyond the minimum retirement age and family allowances were not paid to unmarried partners for fear of encouraging immorality – an early example, perhaps, of the social conservatism of some parts of the Labour Party. Thane closed her talk by noting that Beveridge was not consulted on the implementation of his proposals – much to his great annoyance!

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Falloden, in 1917. In any case, unless Grey kept copies of his own letters, the lost archive would have largely consisted of letters sent to him. His own writings lie scattered in the collections of his many correspondents. Robbins laboured mightily fifty years ago to track down this literary diaspora. Since then, however, many more archives have emerged and been opened up for inspection, and Thomas Otte, in his new life of Grey, has been assiduous in tracking them down and making full use of their holdings. He lists in his bibliography no fewer than 117 consulted collections of private papers, in addition to the extensive governmental resources at the National Archives. The result is an outstanding biography, beautifully written, richly documented and persuasively argued, that will be read with enjoyment and profit by all who are interested in British diplomacy and Liberal politics from the 1890s to the 1930s.

Grey's tenure of the foreign secretaryship – the longest continuous span in the history of this office – has long been a source of great controversy. Contemporary cabinet colleagues and backbench radical MPs placed upon him the burden of responsibility for the outbreak of war in 1914 and the involvement of Britain in this tragic conflict. Grey, it has been argued, through secret agreements and undertakings with Paris, allowed the Entente of 1904 to develop far beyond the intentions of its original British architect, his predecessor as foreign secretary, Lord Lansdowne. As a result, Britain had no real freedom for manoeuvre in the crisis of 1914 and could not escape military involvement on the side of France – a fact fortuitously disguised by the outrage that followed Germany's violation of Belgian neutrality. Even so, in the crisis itself, Grey was thought to have dithered. Instead of using British influence to shape the course of events, he failed to make it clear to Germany that Britain would stand by France. Such a clear warning, critics have claimed, could have defused the crisis and preserved peace.

Such trenchant criticism has never really gone away. As recently as 2013,

Reviews

Edward Grey reassessed

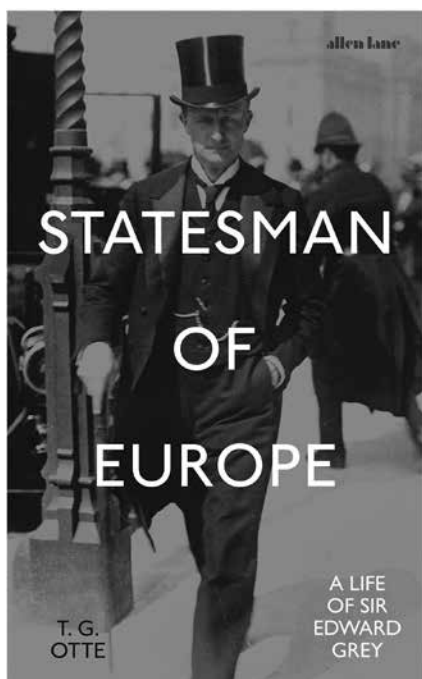
T. G. Otte, *Statesman of Europe: A Life of Sir Edward Grey* (Allen Lane, 2020)

Review by David Dutton

I WAS AN UNDERGRADUATE at the time of the publication of Keith Robbins's biography of Edward Grey. I well remember my university tutor – who knew Robbins and admired his work – suggesting that I should read what he believed would be the definitive account of Grey's career. Over the five decades that have since elapsed, I have become suspicious of the idea of any work of history being truly 'definitive'. New evidence, changing understanding and fresh perspectives will always come along to challenge received wisdom. Nonetheless, it is a tribute to Robbins's scholarship that

his book on this most enigmatic of Edwardian politicians has indeed held the field – until now.

One of the factors holding back a potential challenge was the absence of any known collection of Grey's private papers. The so-called Grey MSS at the National Archives are made up of semi-official correspondence received by Grey in his capacity as foreign secretary. Indeed, Robbins began his biography with an appeal to his readers to let him know if they had knowledge of such a collection. In all probability, however, if this once existed it was lost in the fire at his family home,



the former Labour cabinet minister Andrew Adonis suggested that Grey was ‘arguably the most incompetent Foreign Secretary of all time’. But the man who did more than any other to destroy Grey’s reputation was his fellow Liberal minister and one-time ally, David Lloyd George. As Otte puts it: ‘What Churchill did to the history of the 1930s and 1940s, his predecessor ... did to the reputation of Grey. He dished him.’ (p. xxiv). Though, as Otte stresses, the two men had collaborated fruitfully before 1914, their relationship soured considerably during the war and, more particularly, through the 1920s. By the time of the publication of his highly influential, but self-serving and tendentious *War Memoirs* in September 1933 – Grey had just died – Lloyd George was keen to stress the inadequacies of the European statesmen of 1914. Ignoring his own position as a senior minister in the British government of that time, he implied that, had the country’s destiny been in his hands, the outcome of the July crisis would have been a much happier one. Special scorn was reserved for Grey. Lloyd George described ‘a pilot whose hand trembled in the palsy of apprehension’, an insular figure content with Northumberland or, at a pinch, his fishing lodge in Hampshire, who knew ‘less of foreigners through contact with them than any Minister

in the Government’.¹ The image is a powerful one but, Otte insists, entirely unjustified.

Grey spent his entire ministerial career in the Foreign Office. Prior to his eleven-year stint as foreign secretary, he had served from 1892–95 as parliamentary under-secretary of state for foreign affairs. Ironically, he had hoped that his first ministerial appointment might have been to the Local Government Board. Granted that his successive masters, Rosebery and Kimberley, were in the Lords, Grey achieved an early prominence that might otherwise have been denied him. In a revealing comment, the Treasury mandarin Sir Edward Hamilton noted that ‘so well has Edward Grey done at the FO that but for his being a commoner R[osebery] said that he apparently possessed qualifications that might fit him for promotion some day ... to the Secretaryship of State’ (p. 85). That the foreign secretary should be a member of the upper chamber was at this time the norm rather than an exception. Contemporary constitutional doctrine suggested that foreign policy was an aspect of the royal prerogative.

Out of office after 1895, Grey continued to rise in the Liberal Party’s ranks. He remained a Rosebery man but, by around 1903, it was clear that the brilliant but erratic earl was unlikely to play a major role in a future Liberal government. Grey seamlessly transferred his loyalties to Asquith and Haldane, but the radical streak in his attitude towards domestic politics makes it necessary to soften the usual demarcation between the party’s radical and Liberal Imperialist wings. These three rising politicians botched their challenge to Campbell-Bannerman’s authority as party leader, but Grey at least soon realised that he had underrated Campbell-Bannerman’s considerable qualities.

Yet it might have been useful for Grey to have had at least some experience of a ‘public-facing’ government department. As it was, he seems, on becoming foreign secretary in December 1905, albeit as a commoner, to have accepted the prevailing doctrine. At all events, considering the length of his

tenure, he made few important statements to the Commons and certainly never expected MPs to scrutinise his conduct of policy in any detail. As regards the cabinet, Otte insists that this acted ‘as a considerable, constitutional restraint’, but at the same time he admits that Grey ‘did not believe that it should closely supervise any details’ (p. 259). Otte does, however, show that later claims by radical ministers, including the Lord Chancellor, Lord Loreburn, that they had been kept in the dark by the foreign secretary were, at the very least, exaggerated.

The greatest internal challenge to Grey’s authority as foreign secretary came in 1911. At heated cabinet meetings in November, his critics complained that the staff talks held between British and French officials had not been authorised by the full cabinet and were, in consequence, wholly unconstitutional. The cabinet now confirmed that no further talks, without prior cabinet approval, would be permissible which might ‘commit the country to military or naval intervention’. Yet, as Otte notes, in practice nothing changed and the talks continued. (p. 422).

The author mounts a particularly strong defence of Grey’s conduct in the last couple of years before the outbreak of the First World War. He argues that the fact that Europe was not plunged earlier than it was into conflict owed much to the foreign secretary’s ‘shrewd and subtle crisis diplomacy’ in the face of a succession of upheavals in the Balkans (p. 451). By early July 1914, Grey was fully aware of the danger of an escalation of the latest Balkan crisis. He pursued the same basic strategy as in earlier moments of tension, seeking the cooperation of the French and German governments in an effort to restrain Austria-Hungary and Russia. He pursued a diplomatic solution until the very last moment. This meant leaving doubt in the minds of the French that Britain would join any resulting conflict and equal doubt in Germany that she would not. His policy of constructive ambiguity was dependent on an underlying desire in the chancelleries of Europe to avoid war. Sadly, in July 1914 that condition no longer

prevailed. War might prove disastrous for Britain, but Grey also believed that Britain would face enormous dangers by remaining on the side-lines, either in terms of a German-dominated continent or, if France and Russia were victorious, the loss of British influence over their future conduct.

The outbreak of war provided an obvious opportunity for Grey to retire, not least because of his mounting concern over failing eyesight. But he could not. Not only would this have been a public admission of failure, but resignation would have significantly weakened Asquith's government, the cohesion of the Liberal Party and national unity itself. Nonetheless, as a wartime foreign secretary Grey presented a diminished figure. He could not, in Otte's words, 'reinvent himself, Churchill-like, into an amateur strategist' (p. 544). Perhaps his greatest remaining achievement was to facilitate the entry of America into the conflict. Though this came after he left office, 'without his patient, conciliatory and yet firm handling of British policy towards the United States, it might well not have taken place' (p. 580).

When retirement did come, at the formation of Lloyd George's government in December 1916, Grey's expression of relief was in no sense feigned. 'I feel like a man who has walked 1000 miles without rest & has at last been told he may lie down.' (p. 622). Still only 54 years of age, he lived on until 1933, but his public life was now confined to the political fringe. His commitment to Liberalism, notwithstanding a growing detestation of Lloyd George's version of it, remained undimmed. Shortly before his death, Grey told the annual meeting of the Liberal Council that 'it is Liberalism which has made England what it is today, and it will endure. As long as people are what they are in this country, they will be liberal, even if they do not belong to the Liberal Party.' (p. 672).

Much of the debate over Grey's conduct of British foreign policy will no doubt continue. The scenarios presented by his critics depend heavily on the possible outcomes that an alternative strategy might have secured and

can, in the nature of things, be neither proved nor disproved. But Otte has given us a superb biography of this important figure. *Statesman of Europe* is sub-titled *A Life of Sir Edward Grey*. For the foreseeable future it is likely to be the life of Sir Edward Grey.

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

1 D. Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, vol. 1 (London, 1933), pp. 94, 98.

Rosebery's son

Martin Gibson, *A Primrose Path: The gilded life of Lord Rosebery's favourite son* (Arum Press, 2020)

Review by Paul Holden

THIS IS THE first full-length biography of Neil Primrose (1882–1917), Liberal member of parliament for Wisbech between 1908 and 1917. It is a sequel to a shorter biographical essay published by the same author in 2015.¹ Not surprisingly the five-year wait for a deeper, more exhaustive analysis has been well worth it.

Like all good biographies, this work redefines our understanding of its subject. The book succeeds in assertively portraying an eminently likeable, charmed and charming man whose wealth and influence made him want for nothing. After losing his mother, Hannah de Rothschild, at the impressionable age of 7, he was raised under the steady hand of his father, Archibald Primrose, 5th Earl of Rosebery, whose Liberal clique underwrote the young Primrose's future career in politics. His political successes, however, were very much his own, based on attributes which included his obvious popularity, his clear oratory skills and a sensible diplomatic approach. The real triumph of this biography is the author's approach to Primrose's personal life, in particular his scrutiny of the close relationships he had with his two best friends, namely his father and the Cornishman, Thomas Agar-Robartes (1881–1915).

Much of what we know about Neil Primrose before now has been contextualised by the relationship he had with his father—a relationship described by Lord Birkenhead as a 'singular love and

affection by which these two men were united', adding: 'They were indeed more like brothers in their easy and affectionate intimacy than like father and son.' This closeness and tenderness is well explored throughout the book, so much so that the reader shares his father's sense of loss when Primrose's life and political potential was cut short by the First World War.

Indeed, their lives followed similar patterns. Beyond their often commented upon physical likeness, father and son both managed considerable fortunes (Neil inherited money and property from his maternal great aunt in 1907); both had challenging relationships with education (Rosebery left Christ Church, Oxford, without a degree whilst Neil graduated with a third-class degree in History); together they were united in their passion for the turf and travel (to the detriment of their educations); for different reasons both failed to achieve their political potential; and both suffered reputational damage through gossip that they were homosexuals. The author neatly narrates his way through these facets of Primrose's character and goes on to highlight how Lord Rosebery at times distanced himself from his son's political and military career in order to uphold reputations.

Primrose's initial path to electoral victory was in January 1910 when he secured Wisbech, a seat contested against a backdrop of the Conservatives trying to pit father and son's politics against each other. Although

the victory was marginal, with a 200 majority, at the second general election in 1910 his majority was doubled when he fought off Lord Robert Cecil, the third son of the Marquess of Salisbury. His maiden speech, centred on the relationship between the Commons and the Lords, was topically set around the Lords' rejection of the People's Budget. As his father looked on, Primrose called for the reform of the upper chamber but defended their role and championed their purpose. It was a position that he shared in part with his friend and fellow Liberal Thomas Agar-Robartes.

Agar-Robartes was a similarly popular and compelling character; he was a much-respected speaker yet perceived by some to be more careless in his approach. Both had privileged upbringings; both attended Eton and Oxford; both served as president of the Bullingdon Club; together they shared a hedonistic lifestyle mixing foreign travel and a passion for the turf, lavish parties, London clubs and grand homes in town and country. Moreover, both lived in Great Stanhope Street, Mayfair – Thomas with his siblings at No. 1 and Neil at No. 5 – and, most significantly, both shared similar politics and attitudes on serving the country during times of war.

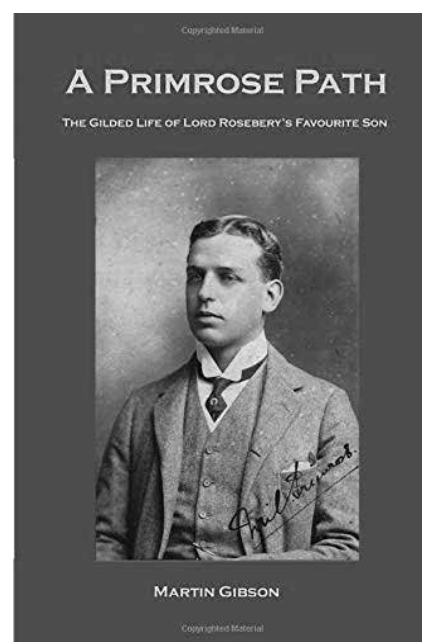
Such was their friendship that it was inconceivable that anyone other than Thomas would be best man at his wedding. Hence, in April 1915, the pair were together for the last time, Thomas returning from active service on the Western Front to oversee Neil's marriage to Lady Victoria Stanley, daughter of the Earl of Derby, in St Margaret's church, Westminster. The poignancy of this event is articulated by both eventually sacrificing their lives to their commitment to soldiery and patriotism – Thomas died at Loos in September 1915 and Neil at Gezer in November 1917. Both, it appears, would have received high award for their heroism had they survived their injuries.

It is this inordinately close relationship that engages and captivates the reader in equal measure. The author rightly treads with some caution around this topic, although he does

mischievously quote contemporary press stories that the pair were 'inseparable companions' and a modern-day Damon and Pythias – 'a comparison', the author notes, 'with strong homoerotic overtones'. For this reviewer there is no reason to believe that the pair were more than good friends – perhaps in the very spirit displayed by Greek mythology's Damon and Pythias, whose story became an idiomatic expression for true friendship. To substantiate this claim, the author alludes to an affair between Gerald, younger brother of Thomas and later 7th Viscount Clifden, and Lord Berners, based on the evidence that they shared rooms in a house. However, any personal relationship is not sustained, as indicated by an extract from Sofka Zinovieff's book which reads, 'In London, Gerald [Berners] shared rooms with other bachelors. There are some who wonder whether he might have been involved with one of his few close friends, Gerald Agar-Robartes (Viscount Clifden from 1930), though there is no solid evidence'.² The roguish Edwardian press further cogitated over Thomas's close friendship with Lord Rosebery, a man who had an almost hypnotic hold over the young Cornishman.

Regardless, this biography is a testament to their friendship. Letters between the two 'inseparables' are almost impossible to find, and references to each other in their correspondences are few and far between. Like his brothers Gerald and Victor, Thomas was also extremely close to Neil's cousin James de Rothschild (1878–1957) and his wife Dorothy (1895–1988). In a letter to Dorothy dated 19 August 1915, Thomas wrote from the Front to say, 'I am so sorry to hear that there is a chance Neil going off to Egypt soon,' adding, 'I am so awfully sorry about Neil it maddens me that the ... Jesuit Cecil should displace him' – a reference to Neil losing out on a foreign office post to Lord Robert Cecil, his sometime political opponent at Wisbech. It was to Dorothy that Thomas wrote his last known letter before his death in Loos.

Much like their political lives, their military careers took a very similar



course. Both joined the Royal Bucks Hussars, Neil in 1909 as a second lieutenant, Thomas in the same capacity in August 1914. Both became frustrated by coastal defence duties in Norfolk so used their connections to seek active service at the Front: Neil embarking for France in September 1914 and Thomas in February 1915. In September 1915, Thomas was killed at the Battle of Loos; Neil was deeply affected by his death.

Because of a lull in hostilities and the birth of his daughter, Neil took leave, arriving back in England in April 1916. He was awarded the Military Cross in June 1916 and saw brief service in the Ministry of Munitions and as Liberal chief whip (about which he declared to Lloyd George that he had 'neither experience or inclination for the office'). He resigned in April 1917 and was awarded with a privy councillorship but returned to Egypt in September. On 15 November, during an assault on the Abu Shushe ridge (site of the Biblical city of Gezer), he was 'shot through the head by machine-gun fire at very close range'. He died of his wounds soon after and was buried at Ramleh cemetery. The poignancy of the best friends' death is not lost on Gibson who ends his biography with:

In the Commons chamber itself Neil's heraldic shield is one of 42 that commemorates each MP

The two Davids: Steel versus Owen

In 1981 the alliance between the Liberal Party and the newly founded SDP was agreed; the two parties would fight elections together on a joint platform with joint candidates. Between 1983 and 1987, however, the working relationship between the Liberal leader, David Steel, and his SDP counterpart, Dr David Owen, became increasingly marked by tension and distrust. Steel became steadily more frustrated at Owen's resistance to joint selection of candidates, and any convergence on policy proposals. The Liberal Party and the SDP clashed over some issues, most notably nuclear weapons. In particular, Owen strongly opposed any long-term moves to merge the two parties.

The clash became painfully obvious during the 1987 general election campaign, when Steel ruled out supporting a minority Thatcher government while Owen was adamant that Labour was unfit to govern. The results of the election were disappointing for both parties. The leadership tensions ultimately wrecked the Alliance.

Discuss what went wrong with **Sir Graham Watson** (Steel's former Head of Office) and **Roger Carroll** (former SDP Communications Director).

17:35 – 18:40 Friday 17 September 2021

This is a fringe meeting at the Liberal Democrats' autumn conference; you must be registered for the conference to be able to participate (you do not need to register separately for the meeting).

killed on active service in two World Wars. The First World War shields are located under the gallery at the opposite end of the Chamber to the Speaker's Chair – Neil's is third of nine to the left of the central doorway and Thomas [Agar-Robartes] is the third of nine to the right of the doorway. So the two 'inseparables' are there still, not far apart, and at the very fulcrum of our parliamentary democracy.

In more ways than one, Neil Primrose was the son of his father. Both were political mavericks – confident speakers and raconteurs yet often outsiders and ambivalent towards their own political careers. Together they shared great intelligence, interests and wealth; they had successes and failures in

business and were passionate towards social change. Paying tribute to Neil in 1917, Lloyd George said that his abilities were 'far above the average' and noted 'in spite of the reserve and shyness which held him back, his future was full of promise'.

This is a meticulously researched and well-written biography. Drawing on extensive archival and newspaper evidence the author (a retired barrister) sharpens his expert focus on all aspects of Neil Primrose's professional and personal life, both aspects portraying a story of unfulfilled promise. It is a biography that was well worth the wait and well deserves a place beside Leo McKinstry's absorbing book on Lord Rosebery.

Paul Holden, FSA, worked for twenty years at Lanhydrock in Cornwall (the ancestral

home of the Robartes family, now a National Trust property) before setting up as a free-lance architectural and social historian. He published and lectured widely including 'A Very English Gentleman: The Political Career of the Hon. Thomas Agar-Robartes MP' in the Journal of Liberal History (Spring 2010, pp. 8–18). Paul is president of the James M. MacLaren Society and the Cornwall Family History Society, chairman of the Diocese Advisory Committee and vice-chair of the Truro Cathedral Fabric Advisory Committee.

- 1 M. Gibson, *Captain Neil Primrose MP 1882–1917* (Wisbech Society and Preservation Trust, 2015).
- 2 Sofka Zinovieff, *The Mad Boy, Lord Berbers, My Grandmother and Me* (London, 2016), p. 43.