

- Swansea Town; Arnold Maurice, Baron de Forest was Liberal MP for West Ham North.
- 74 Hirst, *Man of Principle*, p. 409.
- 75 W. S. Churchill, *The World Crisis*, vol. 1 (London, 1968), pp. 113–14.
- 76 Churchill to Clementine Churchill, 24 Jul. 1914, R. S. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill*, companion vol. ii, part 3 (London, 1969), pp. 1987–8.
- 77 Viscount (James) Bryce (1838–1922). Liberal MP 1880–1906; Ambassador to the United States 1907–13.
- 78 F. W. Hirst to Nicholas Murray Butler, 15 Aug. 1914, cited in D. Newton, *The Darkest Days: The Truth Behind Britain's Rush to War, 1914* (London, 2015), p. 304.
- 79 C. Hazlehurst, *Politicians at War July 1914 to May 1915* (London, 1971), pp. 36–7.
- 80 Harcourt cabinet memorandum, 29 Jul. 1914, cited in Newton, *Darkest Days*, p. 61.
- 81 Harcourt cabinet memorandum, 30 Jul. 1914, cited in M. Webb, 'Lewis Harcourt's Political Journal 1914–16: A New Source for the Liberal Party and the First World War', *Journal of Liberal History*, 87 (2015), p. 49.
- 82 Burns diary, cited in K. Robbins, *The Abolition of War: The Peace Movement in Britain 1914–1919* (Cardiff, 1976), p. 36.
- 83 C. Pennell, *A Kingdom United: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2012), p. 26.
- 84 Hansard, H.C. Debs. (series 5), vol. 65, cols 1809–27.
- 85 Newton, *Darkest Days*, p. 225.
- 86 Important recent exceptions include D. Marlor, *Fatal Fortnight: Arthur Ponsonby and the Fight for British Neutrality in 1914* (London, 2014) and, particularly, Douglas Newton's excellent *Darkest Days*.
- 87 C. Addison, *Four and a Half Years*, vol. 1 (London, 1934), p. 32.
- 88 C. à C. Repington, *The First World War*, vol. 1 (London, 1920), pp. 18–19.
- 89 Pennell, *Kingdom United*, p. 35.
- 90 Marlor, *Fatal Fortnight*, p. 113.
- 91 Trevelyan's 'Personal account of the beginning of the War, 1914', cited in Hazlehurst, *Politicians at War*, p. 64.
- 92 Newton, *Darkest Days*, p. 248.
- 93 *Ibid.*, p. 239; Hirst, *Man of Principle*, p. 436.
- 94 Hansard, H.C. Debs. (series 5), vol. 65, cols 1848–53.

# Letters to the Editor

## Tony Greaves

I am surprised that the richly deserved tributes to Tony Greaves published in the *Journal* (*Journal of Liberal History* 111 (summer 2021) and 112 (autumn 2021)) have not mentioned that he was in effect elected to the House of Lords as a Liberal Democrat representative. Michael Meadowcroft writes that: 'Charles Kennedy ... had the imaginative idea of nominating Tony Greaves as a life peer.' The nomination was certainly made by Charles Kennedy, but the 'idea' came from the panel of potential nominees that was elected by Liberal Democrat conference representatives. (The panel was supposed to tide us over the short period before the expected reform of the House of Lords by the Labour government ...) As I recall, something like a hundred members put themselves forward for election to the panel. Each produced an election address but there was nothing in the nature of a traditional election

campaign. That Tony Greaves topped the poll is the clearest possible demonstration of the esteem in which he was held by the most committed members of the party at that time.

David Cannon

## Shirley Williams (1)

The 'what ifs' in history can be both fun and revealing but they are best based on evidence of what did happen. Unfortunately, Dick Newby's claim that in ducking the Warrington by-election Shirley Williams made 'her biggest political mistake' (*Journal of Liberal History* 112 (autumn 2021)) fails to fit the electoral evidence; there is no good reason to suppose that she would have won where Roy Jenkins failed.

Like many who canvassed for Alliance candidates thirty years ago, I can echo Dick's feeling that Shirley seemed to have more rapport with the

electorate than Roy. Yet while Shirley was able to add 34.8 percentage points to the previous Liberal vote in the November 1981 by-election in Crosby, Roy's score in Warrington in July (+33.4) was essentially similar.

Why? Both constituencies had the significant Catholic presence that Dick suggests as relevant, though they were otherwise very different. On the face of it, Crosby, with more of the professional middle class so attracted to the SDP, and a Labour (rather than Tory) vote to squeeze, was a better prospect than Warrington. Timing points in the same direction. November (following both the further wave of defections after the damaging Benn versus Healey Labour battle and the Alliance victory in Croydon) was an easier time to win than July – as witnessed by the rise in the opinion polls.

One can only conclude that in these two constituencies, at that period, it

was the appeal of the new party and its alliance with the Liberals, or the way it campaigned, that mattered, not its particular star candidate. Shirley, like Roy, would have come close but not won Warrington.

That opens up a rather more significant ‘what if’ in the history of the Alliance: if Shirley had had first go, at Warrington, Roy would probably have been allowed to take on Crosby (and win the by-election), leaving Glasgow Hillhead (a very much easier seat to win) for Shirley the following March. If that was how it had been played out, Roy would almost certainly have lost Crosby in 1983 (as Shirley did – on the national swing in votes, not as Dick Newby implies, because of small boundary changes).

Shirley Williams, however, would have held Hillhead – due to the national depression in the Labour vote, the Alliance could hold that seat with just 36 per cent, while losing lots of others to the Conservatives with higher votes (e.g. Crosby, with 42 per cent). When Roy resigned as leader, she would have been well-placed to challenge David Owen for the succession.

The outcome of a Shirley versus David battle for the SDP’s leadership in summer 1983 must be highly speculative but, given the damage to the Alliance resulting from David Owen’s animosity towards the Liberal Party, one could postulate that the unintended consequence of Shirley’s decision to let Roy take on Warrington was to deprive a more united Alliance of its natural leader at the 1987 general election.

Michael Steed

### Shirley Williams (2)

Lord Newby’s obituary of Shirley Williams (*Journal of Liberal History* 112 (autumn 2021)) was outstanding and captured her long life particularly well. As an ex SDPer elected as Scotland’s (then) youngest Lib Dem councillor in the early 1990s, I was privileged to know her a little during many campaign visits and, in later life, more sociable events in Edinburgh. Her interest in Scotland was hugely appreciated by members, as

was her infectious enthusiasm for a good debate, which never left her. She undoubtedly inspired many younger members embarking on their own political journeys.

Incidentally, a typo refers to the ‘1883–87’ parliament, rather than 1983–87. It did make me wonder what Gladstone would have made of her. I suspect she’d have given him a run for his money on the stump!

Devin Scobie

### The Liberal Party in the 1950s

I would like to give some more background to the events surrounding the recovery of the Liberal Party in the 1950s (see the report of the Liberal Democrat History Group meeting, ‘Back from the dead: the Liberal Party in the 1950s’, *Journal of Liberal History* 112 (autumn 2021)). Coronation Year in 1953 and the ending of wartime rationing in 1953–54 created the illusion of a great new Elizabethan age. This general feeling of optimism was reflected in the Conservative election victory in the spring of 1955. However, weeks after the election, Butler announced that he had got the figures wrong and put taxes back up again in an autumn Budget. Suddenly the Conservative economic miracle was no longer so miraculous.

Then, of course, came the shock of Suez at the end of 1956. That Christmas was the most miserable one can imagine. In 1957 two key English by-elections, at Gloucester and then Ipswich, showed Liberals polling more than a fifth of the vote. Unlike at Inverness the fine Liberal candidates were not benefiting from a great personal vote. Following Gloucester, the BBC did an investigation as to why people were now starting to vote Liberal. The message was that after six years of Labour government and now six years of Conservative government, the post-war years had proved disappointing to many electors, who now thought it right to give the Liberals a chance. This knock-on effect undoubtedly boosted Ludovic Kennedy’s fine campaign in Rochdale, and the gain of Torrington.

At the time the party also had a plan that candidates should be prepared

to nurse a constituency for up to ten years, building on a good result then having a much better chance second time around. One can see this strategy working well at St Albans in recent elections when, following a good result a fine candidate nursed the constituency, concluding this with a victory in 2019.

Richard Pealling

### Austin Mitchell

Bearing in mind your special and excellent issue of spring 2021 (*Journal of Liberal History* 110), which undertook a search for the origins of early Liberalism, with the Peterloo Massacre as a starting point, you may wish to record in your pages the recent death of Austin Mitchell, on 18 August 2021.

Born in 1934, Mitchell was a cheerful and zealous Labour MP who represented Grimsby from 1977 until 2015. He was also the author of *The Whigs in Opposition, 1815–1830*, published by the Clarendon Press in 1967. In some 250 pages it gives a succinct description and analysis of what took place during those fifteen years. Very readable, and based on detailed scholarly research, I would suggest that it remains, even now, a crucial contribution to the studies of that period.

Peter Rowland

### Community politics

Mark Egan pours cold water on the record of community campaigning over recent years: ‘A return to community politics looks no more likely to succeed than a new campaign for Peace, Retrenchment and Reform, the great Liberal slogan of the nineteenth century.’ (Introduction to ‘The Liberal rise in Richmond’, *Journal of Liberal History* 112 (autumn 2021)). Really? I can think of several times in recent decades (most recently 2019) when community campaigners have delivered huge successes up and down the country.

And what does he suggest we do instead? On that he is completely silent ...

Trevor Jones