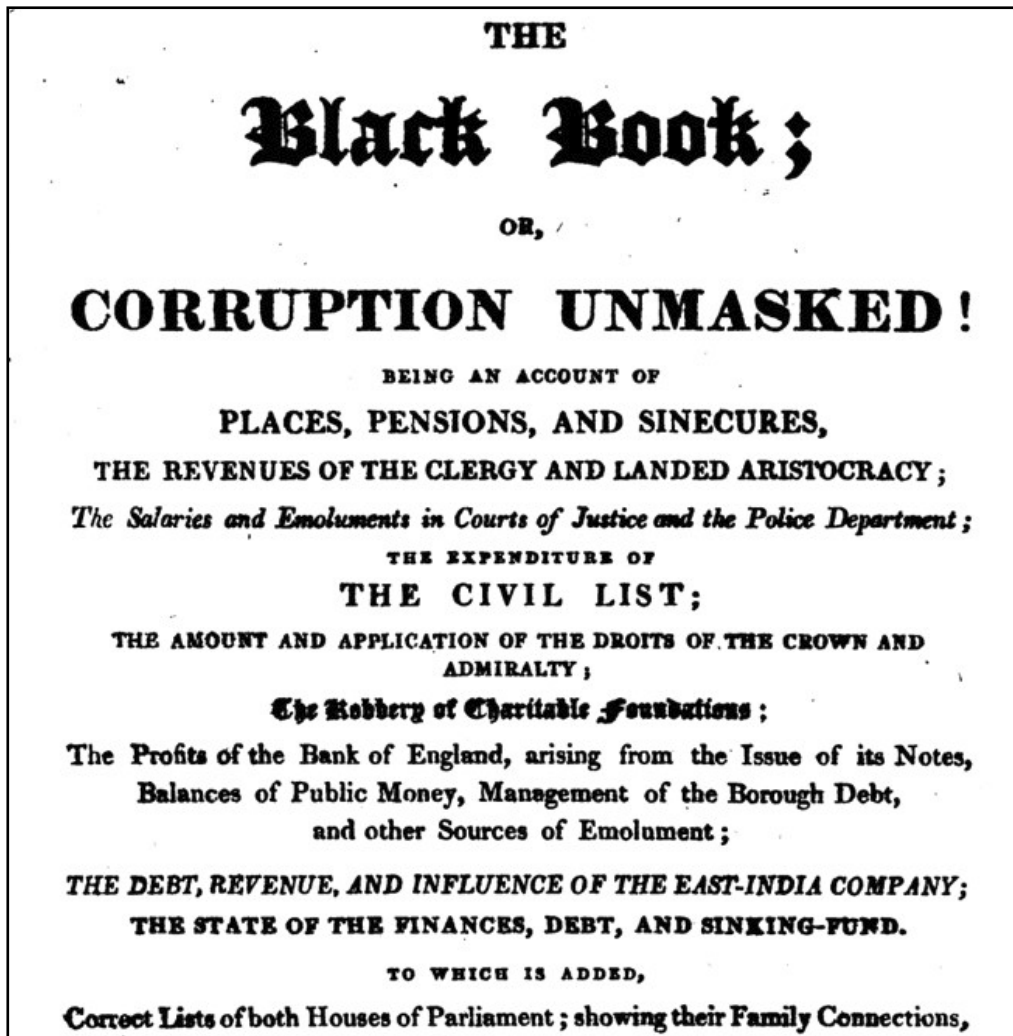


Journal of Liberal

HISTORY



Corruption unmasked

Ian Cawood

The *Black Book* and the reform of public life in early 19th-century Britain

Alistair Lexden

Lloyd George and the Versailles Treaty

David Dutton

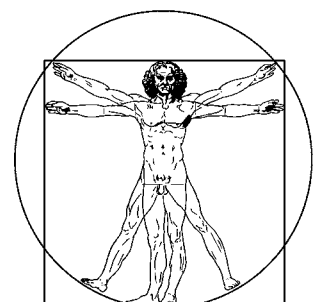
A Liberal for all seasons? Percy Alport Molteno, 1861–1937 (Part 1)

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Liberalism in the United States Meeting report

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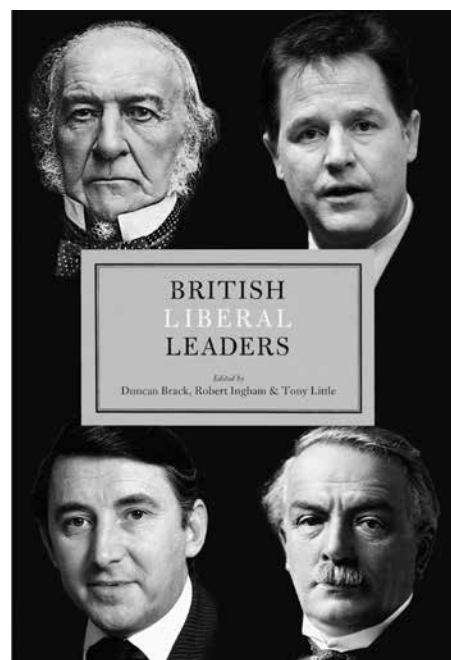
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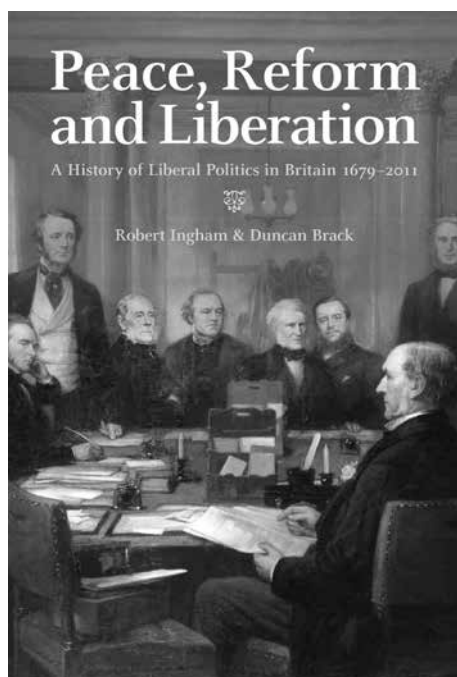
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Journal of Liberal History

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

ISSN 1479-9642

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Subscriptions

An annual subscription to the *Journal of Liberal History* costs £25 (£15 unwaged) (print) and £45 (online). This includes membership of the History Group unless you inform us otherwise. Non-UK subscribers should add £10.00.

Institutional subscriptions (online) are available for £60.

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Cover design concept: **Lynne Featherstone**

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

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

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Liberal Democrat History Group

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

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

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Liberal History News

Winter 2021–22

Sir Peter Ustinov

Last year, 2021, was the centenary of the birth of Sir Peter Ustinov. This is a man who made a difference. As a performer versatile enough to be an actor and an entertainer, he delighted in numerous productions on stage and screen. As a creator, he was a writer and director, who was often a force behind those numerous productions. And then there was Peter Ustinov the inspirer, an ambassador and campaigner.

As a man of social conscience and charitable disposition, he was a natural

and lifelong Liberal. He voted for the Liberal Party and then the Liberal Democrats, throughout his life. His autobiographical and other biographical appraisals record his liberalism from his precocious school years, in debates and activities. Throughout his travels, he extolled the virtues and values of Liberalism. Even in the US during the height of the McCarthy witchhunt, he noted: ‘the different meaning for that noble word “liberal,” which in America has become dissociated from its essential humanism and

sense of equity, and now apparently means a kind of embryonic commie, a nuisance who asks embarrassing and subversive questions’.

For reasons of natural individuality and cross-party unity, he never joined the party, but he openly supported it. As recently as the 1990s he described himself during an election as ‘an Ash-down man!’ ‘I have always been a Liberal, but a militant Liberal, I don’t see why the central position should be reticent, just because it is central. The position in the centre is always the most

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](https://www.instagram.com/LibHistoryToday).

December

21 December 1905: Speaking at a great party rally at the Albert Hall Prime Minister Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman launches the Liberal campaign for the 1906 general election. In a letter to Charlotte Campbell Bannerman, the PM’s wife, Thomas Buchanan, Liberal MP for Perthshire East, wrote, ‘to say what a first rate speech Sir Henry made ... The Hall is an impossible one for the human voice. But at the beginning he got the audience ... his hearers knew that he was on the Radical Road, and they were with him and cheered him all the way. It was a great occasion for him and he fully rose to it ...’.

January

12 January 1906: The first results in the 1906 general election are announced. The first constituency to declare was Ipswich. ‘Ip Ip Ip Ipswich’ ran a placard for the radical newspaper *The Star* as the Liberals recorded their first gain. The following day Lancashire polled and out of the 56 seats declared, 29 went to the Liberals, 12 to Labour and 1 to the Nationalists, leaving the Tories with just 14. Amongst the casualties was Unionist leader Arthur Balfour, who lost at Manchester. One of the new Liberal Manchester MPs was Winston Churchill, who emerged victorious in a contest with future Tory Home Secretary William Joynson-Hicks. Speaking at the Reform Club on the day of his election Churchill declared, ‘Do protectionists think that after 60 years Manchester cannot tell truth from falsehood and has forgotten the work of Cobden and Bright or that Lancashire is asleep and would be false to her traditions? We have given the new Government a splendid send-off and the Liberal army will march on without a pause to a complete triumph.’

February

13 February 1906: The House of Commons meets for the first time following the Liberal election victory. The scale of the Liberal triumph was all too evident, with 399 Liberal MPs crowding the government benches, joined in the division lobby by 82 Irish Nationalists and 29 Labour MPs. 318 of the 670 members were elected for the first time with 157 Nonconformists – the largest number in a parliament since the time of Cromwell. Amongst the new Liberal MPs elected were future cabinet ministers Edwin Montagu, Charles Masterman, Alfred Mond and John Simon, and authors Hilaire Belloc and A.E.W. Mason. During the day MPs were sworn in and Mr Speaker Lowther was re-elected, following which the House adjourned until the King’s Speech on 19th February.

difficult to defend. The truth is often in the middle of things. It is there I look for it and never at the extremes.'

This quote reveals his political stance and his personal attitude. His centre ground was a broad one, his journey on it a progressive one, but though open to radical ideas, it was the farther extremes that he disliked intensely.

'No extreme fascinates me. I think it's all wrong because it's all so easy ... there's nothing more exhilarating for a certain clot-like mentality than the sounds of boots marching all together and you're all part of the machine ... it's the isolated voice which can't even be heard in the crowd which is the most vital of all.'

Ustinov's voice was used with great effect and with significant results in the political, social, and charitable fields. The second UNICEF Ambassador, after the great American entertainer Danny Kaye, and before the great actress Audrey Hepburn, Ustinov worked in a voluntary capacity for that organisation for several decades, in all continents. He is honoured on their website even now. It was his internationalism that was at the heart of his Liberalism. President of the World Federalist Movement, he believed the world's shared problems required, often, shared solutions. He would have had much to say and contribute during the current pandemic! Indeed many of his efforts as a Goodwill Ambassador were dealing with such, more local versions of viruses as well as hunger and poverty.

We think of the phrase a 'liberal lion', and utilise it in our language (e.g. Peter Barberis, *Liberal Lion: Jo Grimond, A Political Life* (2005)). It is certainly merited in the life and work of Sir Peter Ustinov. At Christmas time we can enjoy his performances in lighter films. He made three films for Disney; 'Blackbeard's Ghost' is perhaps the best known. But it was in the cartoon 'Robin Hood', as the voices of the lions, Prince John and Richard, that he excelled.

I have for a few years, since its early foundation, been a member and writer at the Ustinov Prejudice Awareness Forum which he inspired, and which has been formed online by his son, the



artist Igor Ustinov who, with dedication, continues his legacy. The Ustinov Prejudice Awareness Forum is part of the wider Ustinov Network that works in several countries. Sir Peter began this aspect, originally as a project to study and understand prejudice, at Durham University where he was Chancellor. As a man of multiple countries in his lineage, it was a project dear to him. I am now coordinating activities and devising new ideas and projects for the Forum, and working for them with enthusiasm in this cause. It is one worth donating to (<http://www.ustinovforum.com/articles/perforum>).

Lorenzo Cherin

History Group meeting videos

Thanks to the coronavirus pandemic, all Liberal Democrat History Group meetings since summer 2020 have been online. The video recordings of all those meetings are now available via the History Group's website (<https://liberalhistory.org.uk/resources-type/>

[ldhgmeetingrecordings/](https://liberalhistory.org.uk/resources-type/)) and Youtube channel (https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCOSDXWakuXKEzY_u9F7mV-A). This includes:

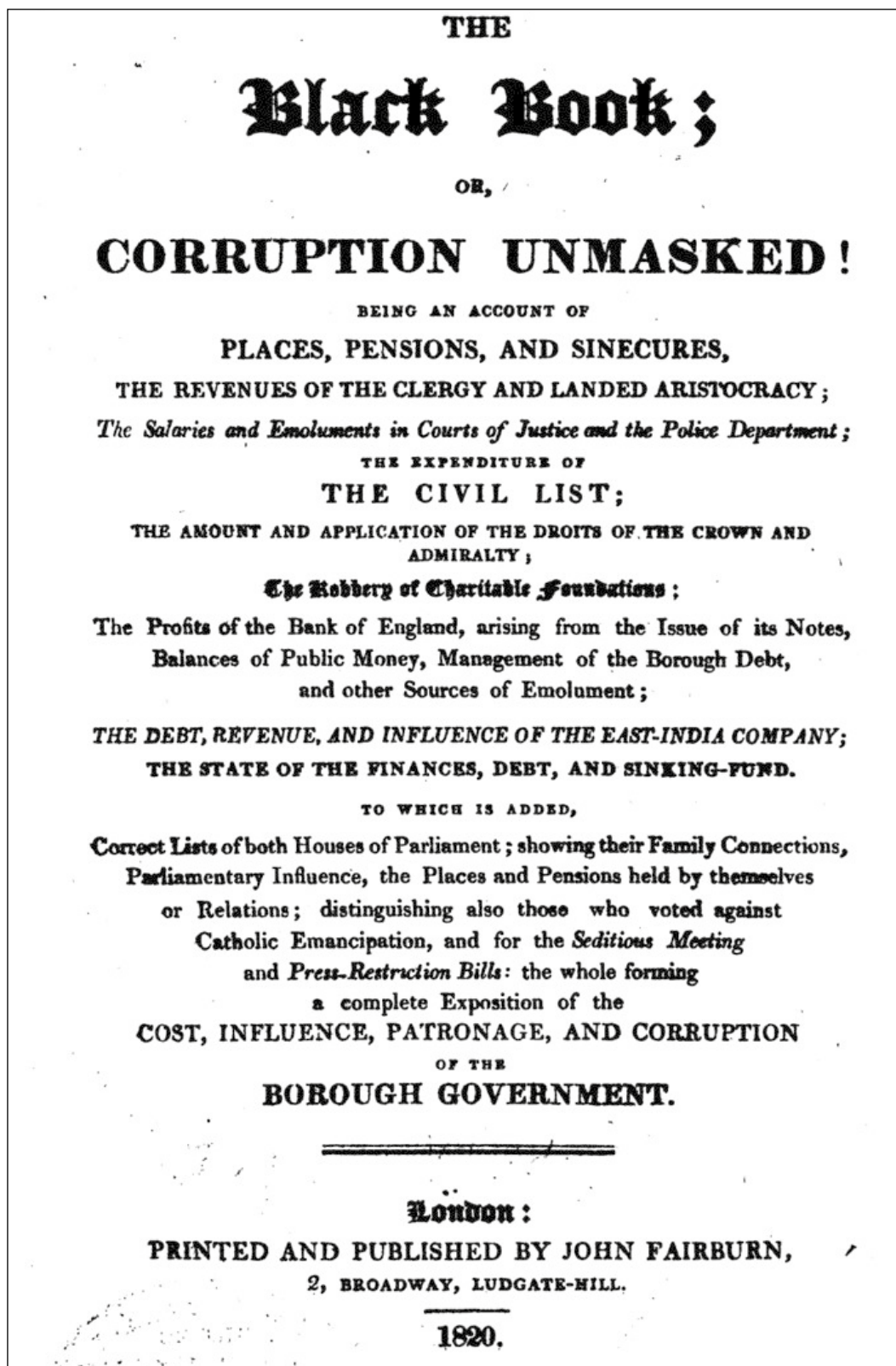
- General Election 2019: Disappointment for the Liberal Democrats (8 July 2020)
- Liberals with a radical programme: The post-war welfare state, Beveridge and the Liberal Party 75 years on, with Professor Pat Thane and Dr Peter Sloman (26 September 2020)
- Asquith vs Lloyd George, with David Laws and Damian Collins MP (1 February 2021)
- Back from the dead: the Liberal Party in the 1950s, with Lord William Wallace of Saltire and Mark Egan (19 March 2021)
- Liberalism in the United States, with Helena Rosenblatt and James Traub (6 July 2021)
- The two Davids: Steel versus Owen, with Sir Graham Watson and Roger Carroll (17 September 2021)

The videos are also available from the individual meeting pages in the Events section of our website.

Corruption and political reform

Ian Cawood traces the story of an exposé of establishment nepotism and venality 200 years ago, which reanimated the movement for parliamentary reform and contributed to the roots of Liberalism and to modern definitions of corruption and standards in public life.

The *Black Book* and the Reform of Public



Frontispiece of the first edition of *The Black Book* (1820).

Life in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain

TWO HUNDRED YEARS ago, a remarkable exposé of the nepotism and venality at the heart of the entire British establishment caused a sensation and not only reanimated the movement for parliamentary reform in the wake of Peterloo, but also helped to shape the principles of good governance, appointment on merit and the independence of the Civil Service, which some historians have suggested amounted to a ‘liberal revolution in government.’¹ It has largely been forgotten by political commentators and dismissed by academics, but popular attitudes towards the purpose and the ethics of government were re-appraised by this book and the other works of its author. This article will attempt to outline the contribution of this work to the roots of liberalism in Britain and to modern definitions of corruption and the standards of public life.

Trust in the machinery of the British state was at a low ebb in the decades after the Napoleonic wars. Attacks on ‘old corruption’, wherein the politics of Britain was perverted to suit the needs of the rich and powerful, condemnations of institutional sclerosis, and denunciations of unpatriotic leadership, became familiar refrains in British political discourse until the 1850s.² Although most historical focus in this period has been placed on the ultimately disastrous campaign of mass meetings, led by the radical agitator Henry Hunt, which culminated with the massacre at Peterloo, it was at the same time that the ideas of Jeremy Bentham began to influence political thinking in Britain.³ When he suggested that the purpose of governance was to benefit ‘the common good’, he offered a constructive alternative to romantic notions that there once existed an ideal ‘ancient constitution’ that needed to be restored, which most radical writers in post-war Britain, such as William Cobbett, claimed.⁴ Bentham also rejected Tom Paine’s idea of ‘natural rights’ as ‘nonsense on stilts’: hopelessly idealistic and potentially anarchic. Instead, Bentham’s concept of the ‘greatest happiness of the greatest number’ led him to define a new attitude towards ethics in public life. He condemned ‘efficiency to bad purposes, coupled

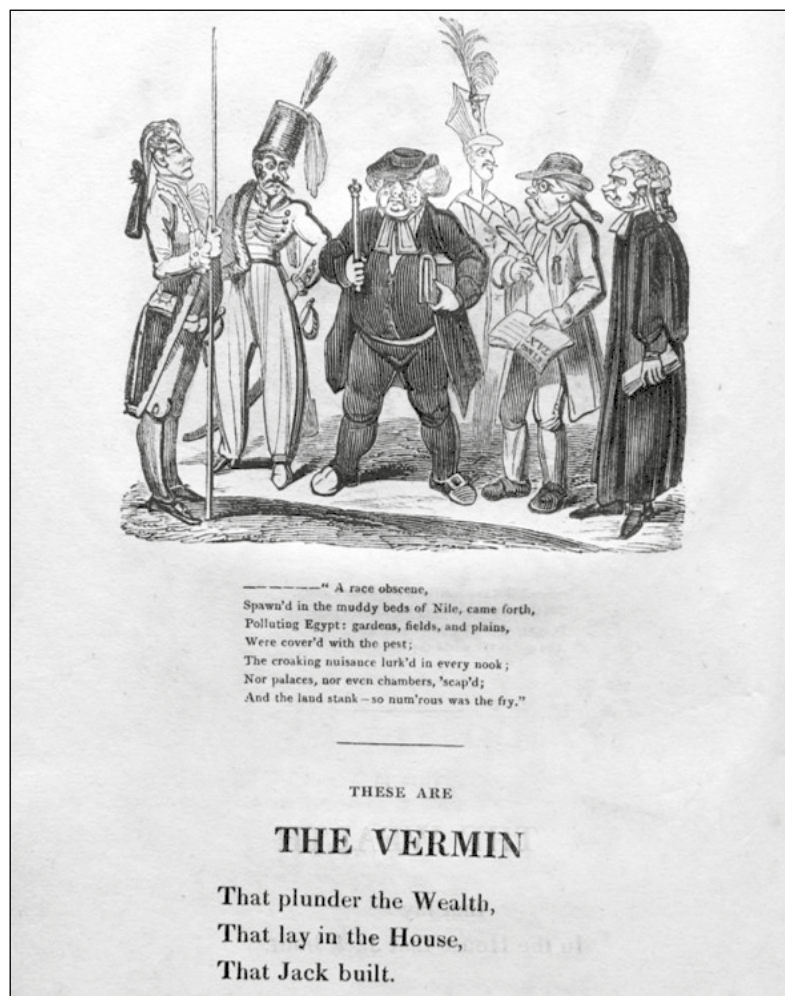
with inefficiency to good ones.’⁵ In a pamphlet in 1810, Bentham quoted Burke’s demands for ‘industry, zeal and fidelity’ in the public service as he attacked the way in which ‘the decayed nobility’ had captured the apparatus of the state and set it to enrich themselves.⁶

The only anti-corruption campaigner of the early nineteenth century who appreciated Bentham’s critique was John Wade, a self-educated, former wool-sorter about whose early life nothing is known, but who rose to national prominence as the founding editor of *The Gorgon* (1818–1819), which, in the first lines of the first page of its first edition, in May 1818, declaimed ominously that ‘corruption has not yet encountered a more formidable and dangerous enemy.’⁷ Wade wrote widely on trade cycles, legal and social issues and history and social development.⁸ In the *Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals*, Robert Zegger comments:

Mindful that radical agitation was too often a matter of empty rhetoric, Wade sought to provide a solid basis of facts and elucidated what he considered the truths of political economy and utilitarian doctrine.⁹

Wade’s greatest impact came with his 1820 exposé of corruption and self-interest, the *Black Book* (with a *Supplement* added in 1823 and then revised and updated as the *Extraordinary Black Book* in 1831 at the height of the crisis surrounding the debates on the reform bills), which E. P. Thompson described as ‘greatly superior to any other Radical investigation of the kind.’¹⁰ Wade’s publication drew on a satirical trope dating back to Thomas Middleton’s *Black Book* of 1604, but one which had recently been revived as a record of government embezzlement. *Le Livre Rouge*, the register of supposedly secret accounts of the Bourbon family, had been released in 1790 and had seriously undermined the legitimacy of the French monarchy.¹¹ The publication in December 1809 of P. F. McCallum’s *The Livre Rouge, A New and Extraordinary Red Book*, which claimed that £92,929 11s 4d had been spent from the Civil List on pensions

Trust in the machinery of the British state was at a low ebb in the decades after the Napoleonic wars. Attacks on ‘old corruption’, wherein the politics of Britain was perverted to suit the needs of the rich and powerful, condemnations of institutional sclerosis, and denunciations of unpatriotic leadership, became familiar refrains in British political discourse until the 1850s.



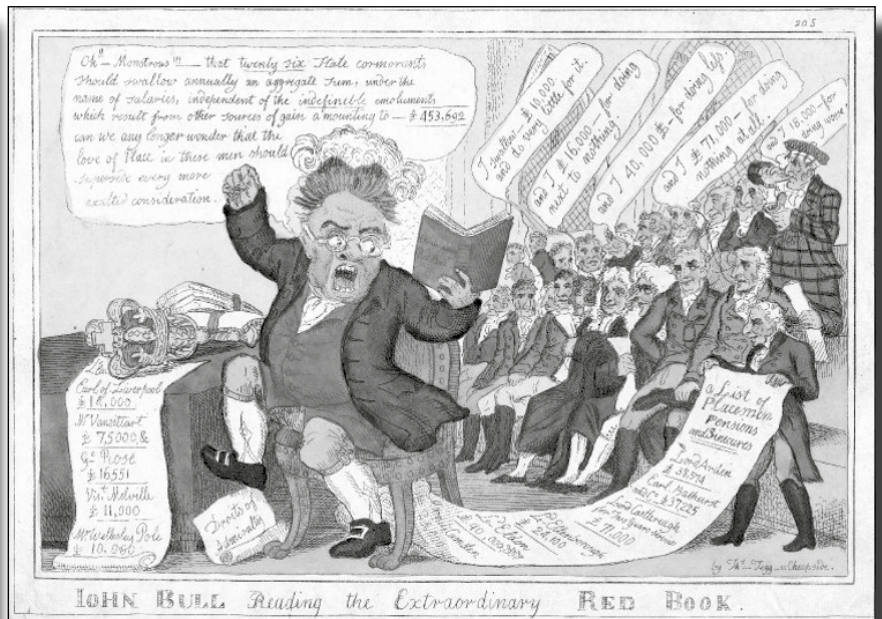
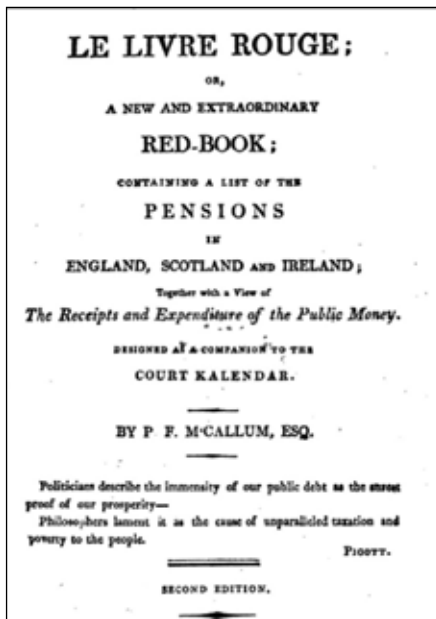
to aristocratic clients, instigated this detailed taxonomy of corrupt practice in British political debate.¹² Despite McCallum's death in 1812, the *Extraordinary Red Book* was anonymously revised and expanded in 1816 and extensively advertised in the leading London newspapers.¹³ The fame of this second volume became increasingly embarrassing to a government facing the mass protests in the years following the Napoleonic Wars. It swiftly captured the public imagination, featuring in satirical cartoons such as those of William Elmes and J. Lewis Marks. Its principal accusations were presented in William Hone's sequel to *The Political House that Jack Built*, his 1820 pamphlet, *The Political 'A, Apple-Pie,' or, the "Extraordinary Red Book" Versified*, which was illustrated by George Cruikshank.¹⁴ The work did not go unchallenged, however, with a comprehensive rebuttal of 'the contemptible work', anonymously published in the *New Monthly Magazine* in April 1817 and reproduced in loyal Tory newspapers, which laid out the 'palpable misstatements', 'artful and specious misstatements' and 'mass of mistakes' which the author claimed would 'undermine the safety and peace of the country.'¹⁵ In response, 'a new, corrected and

Plate from William Hone, *The Political House that Jack Built* (1819).

enlarged edition' of the *Red Book* was published in November 1818.¹⁶

Wade's *The Black Book or Corruption Unmasked*, first appeared as a series of pamphlets but, following the success of Hone's pamphlet, it was published as a single volume in 1820. The work was published anonymously to escape sanction under the Blasphemous and Seditious Libel Act which, in the aftermath of Peterloo, toughened the law on anti-government and anti-clerical publications. Wade's writing was regarded as so dangerous by the authorities in Warwickshire that the Birmingham booksellers, John Osborne and George Ragg, were charged and found guilty of seditious libel against the Church for publishing 'Part 12' of the *Black Book* and sentenced to two months imprisonment at Warwick assizes in March 1820.¹⁷ At the sentencing of Osborne, the prosecutor accused Wade of attempting 'to demoralize the lower orders' and attributed 'a number of crimes in the county of Warwick' to his influence.¹⁸ This was condemned as unjust in many publications, on the grounds that Wade's book made no worse criticisms than those contained in Jeremy Bentham's 1818 *Church of Englandism and its Catechism Examined* and that the actual publisher of the *Black Book* was not charged.¹⁹ No further prosecutions followed, however, and the attorney general and solicitor general gave their opinion that bringing a criminal prosecution for libel would be difficult against an anonymous publication and would produce unwanted publicity for the reformers' cause at a tumultuous time.²⁰ By 1822 the *Black Book* and its supplements were being openly advertised once again.²¹

Wade's chief target was the solipsistic behaviour of the elites that had, in his opinion, failed to uphold the public good in its civic role. His book listed positions without work, pensions without service, and appointments without competition, which, he estimated, cost the nation £1,373,490 a year.²² His chief targets were the royal family and the aristocracy, but he also turned his ire on the legal forces of London, those who misused charitable endowments, bankers, the Church of England, the East India Company and even the Lottery, as it destroyed 'the morals and industrious habits of the people.'²³ At this stage, Wade placed little faith in the opposition carrying out reform as he believed that 'the two parties, Whig and Tory are ... confederated to plunder and delude the public; their quarrels and animosity arise merely from the division of the spoil.' He cited the Whigs' behaviour as soon as they had grasped the instruments of state in 1807 in



support of his claim that they demonstrated ‘equal greediness for the fat emoluments of office.’²⁴ His anti-elitism was confirmed when he scathingly defined the word ‘aristocracy’ in his satirical 1821 *Political Dictionary* as follows:

Aristocracy has become a sinecure order, swallowing enormous revenues, without discharging any necessary duties, so that the name is now almost synonymous [sic] with abuse, prejudice, imbecility, and the absence of every qualification useful or ornamental.²⁵

Wade believed that corruption was so institutionalised in Britain by 1820 that he defined the term as ‘the constitution as by law established.’²⁶ As he announced in the first edition of *The Gorgon* in 1818, ‘we hate the present infernal system of corruption and injustice and our sole object is to effect either its reform or overthrow.’²⁷ He was not calling for violent insurrection, however, and instead used the pages of the journal to call for a boycott of taxed commodities to starve the corrupt system of its sustenance, claiming that the working man had sacrificed ‘two thirds of his patrimony’ to a ‘vile oligarchy’.²⁸ In this way, his critique overlapped that of critics of ‘Old Corruption’, who also claimed that the taxation of consumer goods was a central plank in the parasitical system, even while he derided Cobbett as ‘a fool’ and Hunt as a ‘coward’ and a ‘brazen-faced booby.’²⁹ As well as the abolition of the sinecures, pensions and useless offices, Wade also called for specific reforms such as free nondenominational education, universal suffrage (which included women) and legal reform, the latter of which was also taken up by the Edinburgh

Left: frontispiece for the second edition of the *Red Book* (1810)
Right: ‘John Bull Reading the Extraordinary Red Book’ by William Elmes (1816)

Whig, Henry Brougham, who had been drawn into Bentham’s orbit.³⁰ Brougham, armed with Wade’s data and Bentham’s ideas, became the political figurehead of the anti-corruption campaign in the 1820s, as Robert Stewart has described.³¹

Wade is important in the development of the critique of corruption as he rejected much of the Radicals’ constitutional antiquarianism and challenged the establishment using modern terms such as ‘political economy’ and ‘general’ or ‘public utility’, stating that ‘the principle of Utility is consonant to human nature, when we adhere to it there is no danger either of error or inconsistency.’³² He was also one of the first journalists to invoke the concept of ‘public opinion’, which was a term that indicated the educated and professional classes.³³ In his later *Extraordinary Black Book*, he commented ‘public opinion, not parliament, is omnipotent; it is that which has effected all the good which has been accomplished and it is that alone which must affect the remainder.’³⁴ He is probably most notable as the journalist whose work attracted both middle-class and working-class support, being funded by both Francis Place and Jeremy Bentham.³⁵ Wade was the first author to use the term ‘middle class’ in the title of a work.³⁶ Wade initially regarded the middle classes as complicit ‘journeymen’ or at least, apathetic in the face of the oppression of the working man and, as editor of *The Gorgon*, had called for an alliance ‘of the PRODUCTIVE CLASSES of the community.’³⁷ In early editions of the *Black Book* he continued to castigate those middle-class enablers of corrupt aristocrats in the Church and the Law for having ‘acquired their wealth and importance under what is denominated the Pitt

A Summary Statement of Sinecure Offices, Pensions, and Reversions, exclusive of Allowances to Naval and Military Officers and their Relatives, on account of Naval or Military Service:—

Royal Family	£365,000
Pensions granted by Parliament as Compensation for eminent Public Services	93,990
Pensions limited by law to £95,000	63,000
Pensions paid out of the Scotch Civil List	85,588
Pensions, Ireland	92,048
Sundry other Pensions, paid out of 4½ per cent. Duties, &c.	58,248
Pensions of the nature of Compensation for the Loss of Offices in England	12,020
Ditto in Ireland	89,245
Pensions in the nature of Superannuations for Services in the Public Offices	97,271
Total Value of Sinecure Offices	356,556*
Total Amount of Offices, granted in Reversion, and of Pensions on the Irish Pension-List for more than one life	140,524
Grand Total	£1,373,490

When the reader has reflected on this enormous sum, which excludes all salaries, properly so called, and allowances for naval and military services, let him turn to the extract from Mr. Preston, where it is asserted, that every eighteen pounds abstracted in this manner from the people, deprives 5 persons of sustenance; whence it follows, that 381,525 persons are deprived of sustenance by Pensioners and Sinecurists alone!!!

**COMPARATIVE STATEMENT
OF THE
Salaries of different Officers
IN
AMERICA AND ENGLAND.**

AMERICA.		ENGLAND.	
President	£5090	King	£120,000
Vice President	1000	Prince Regent	595,000

Extracts from the original *Black Book* (1820)

system.³⁸ In the aftermath of Peterloo, when some factory owners had sided with the magistrates and the yeomanry against the peaceful protesters, they had, to Wade's mind, 'lent their aid to stifle the complaints of misery and famine by the sabre, the bayonet and the dungeon!'³⁹ After his encounters with Bentham and other utilitarians such as Henry Bickersteth, however, Wade was increasingly willing to believe that the middle classes, especially those engaged in business, would eventually have 'sufficient virtue, sense and courage to come forward to frustrate the diabolical machinations of the Executive Government.'⁴⁰ He was, like Adam Smith before him, hopeful that 'the frugality and good conduct' of the majority of those who lived on wages and profits, rather than rents, would prove sufficient to enable them to make common cause against the aristocratic foe.⁴¹

The response of the middle-class press after 1819 seemed to indicate that Wade's hopes were well founded. Firstly, *The Times*, which had denounced the holding of the meeting at St Peter's Field on 19 August 1819, nevertheless used the superb eyewitness account of the massacre by its reporter, John Tyas, to acknowledge the 'dreadful fact' that:

nearly a hundred of the King's unarmed subjects have been sabred by a body of cavalry in the streets of a town in which most of them were inhabitants, and in the presence of those Magistrates whose sworn duty it is to protect and preserve the life of the meanest Englishman.⁴²

The inquests into deaths of the victims of Peterloo roused further anger from the newspaper and it refused to be cowed by threats from the government. Its position moved closer to that of the Whig opposition and it used the 1820 Divorce Case against Queen Caroline (for whom Henry Brougham led the legal defence) to rally popular support against the government.⁴³ With the support of the *Manchester Guardian* (founded in response to Peterloo), the *Glasgow Chronicle*, the *Liverpool Mercury*, *The Scotsman* and the *Leeds Mercury*, *The Times* arguably shifted public opinion to a more critical position, in which the accusations of the *Black Book* were far more likely to be believed.⁴⁴ In the opinion of Robert Peel, the years after Peterloo saw the 'tone ... [of] public opinion' becoming 'more liberal ... than the policy of the Government.'⁴⁵

The first *Black Book* is quoted by the historian Philip Harling as evidence of the perpetuation of the long-standing 'Old Corruption' critique alongside the *Red Books*, Richard Carlile's *The Republican* and William Benbow's *A Peep at the Peers*. As Kevin Gilmartin has explained, however, Wade's work took the radical critique of the unreformed establishment beyond rhetoric and employed 'modern textual and statistical procedures to dissect and classify the aristocracy's system of outdoor relief.'⁴⁶ The *Black Book* was explicit in its identification of the sources of the corruption which dominated the British state – the monarchy, the aristocracy, the Church and the Law had all been perverted by self-interest and indolence and, consequently, government had been reduced to 'a mere arena for aristocratical contention.'⁴⁷ Like the previous *Red Books*, Wade's book provided details of the places, pensions and sinecures of the establishment, but Wade cast his net far wider than previous cataloguers of corruption. He

identified that the 'principal offices of the army, revenue and navy and ... every department of the government' were as significant as loci of elite power and abuse as the aristocratic control of land, church patronage and the parliamentary system. He did not deny that many held positions within the bureaucratic state owing to 'talents and industry', but he concluded that too many:

condescend to fill the lucrative situations of clerk, registrar, messenger, usher, or receiver, and carry bags and wands at the tail of those whose ability alone has made them their superiors, and to whom they are compelled to pay this homage, as a penalty for their own imbecility.⁴⁸

In place of the needs of the elite, Wade asserted the vital interests of 'the community'.⁴⁹ Wade claimed, in terms consistent with most contemporary utilitarians and modern liberals, that 'it is the legitimate object of good government to prevent the extremes of luxury and indigence, and spread equally through all classes the bounties of nature'⁵⁰ One may question the accuracy of his figures (although most of the named individuals were indeed guilty of using their public office to accumulate private wealth) or the relative significance to the Exchequer of such expenditure, but Wade had managed to publicly articulate an alternative mission statement for government and its ancillary services,

which more suited the needs of the modern society that was emerging in Britain at this point in its history.⁵¹

Wade's work was highly valued by radicals, even by Hunt, who read extracts from the initial pamphlets in the series of public meetings which culminated in the disaster at St Peter's Fields in 1819, which Wade described in his *Political Dictionary* as 'Butchery'.⁵² Hunt even extolled Wade's book in an interview with the *Gazette de France* later that year, claiming that the *Black Book* would 'unmask and brings before the public ... all the ministerial corruptions'.⁵³ It was worn in the hatbands of radicals, as colliery manager, John Buddle, reported to Henry Philpotts, the unpopular canon of Durham Cathedral and future Bishop of Exeter.⁵⁴ In the opinion of Clayson, Frow and Frow,

No longer were radicals restricted to the use of rhetoric when attacking contemporary abuses. *The Black Book* gave hard evidence of many evils inherent in the undemocratic political system of the age.⁵⁵

It quickly became seen as 'the Reformers' Bible ... the sacred volume of English politics'.⁵⁶ The *Black Book* was revised in five editions in total as the Reform campaign developed, selling over 50,000 copies.⁵⁷ Wade also produced more scholarly texts on banking which led to him being offered a place on the permanent staff of *The Spectator* in 1828.⁵⁸ Next, Wade examined

Illustration (author unknown) on the flyleaf of the first edition of *The Extraordinary Black Book* (1831), showing John Bull (the typical Englishman) being tied down like Gulliver in order to be abused and tormented by his enemies, which include the Crown, the Army, lawyers, an official who has his head stuck in one of John Bull's pockets, the Church, and MPs holding a sword over his head. Caption: "Twas your zealous want of sense, and sanctified impertinence: Obligated the State to talk about, and turn you root & branch all out.'

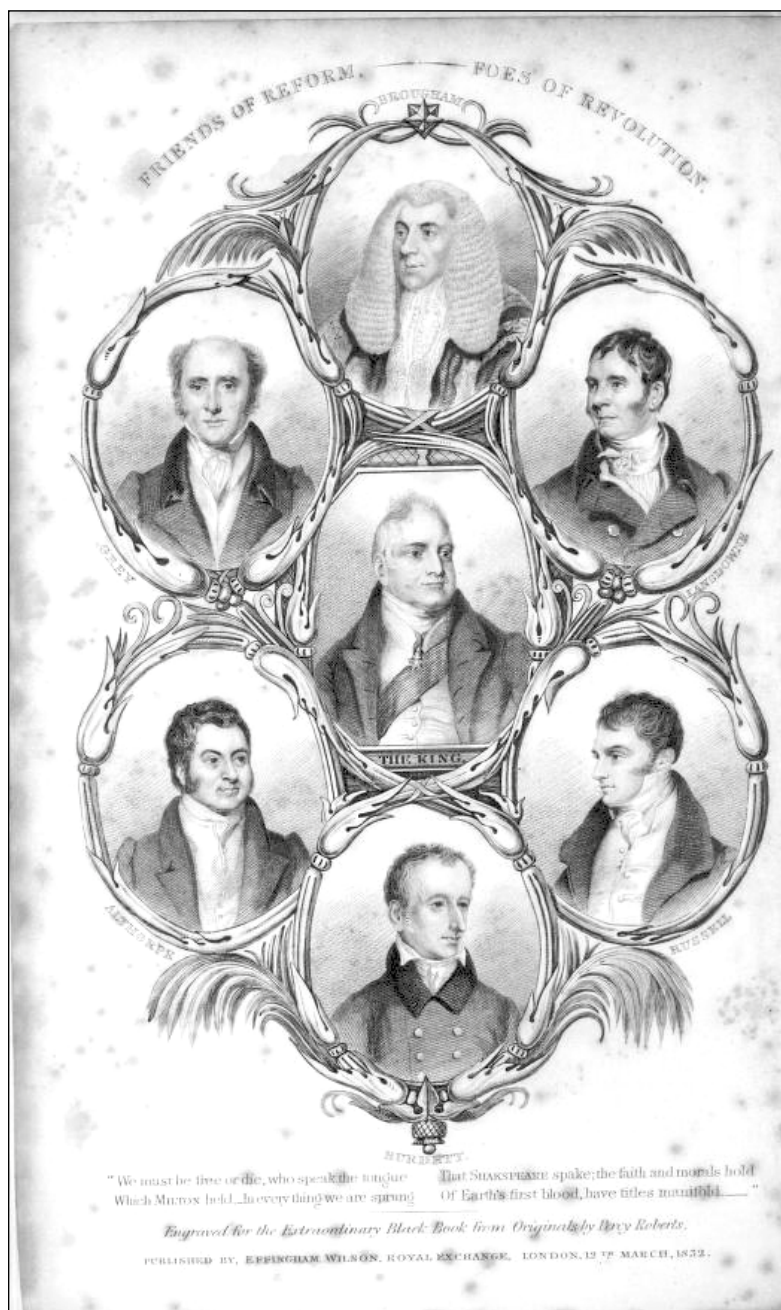


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the misuse of charitable trusts in his 1828 book *An Account of Public Charities in England and Wales* and established that, in fact, the chief agent of malpractice was the established Church, which reanimated Henry Brougham's long-standing campaign against the abuse of these foundations.⁵⁹

After the Whig takeover of government in 1830, the *Black Book* was considerably modified and retitled the *Extraordinary Black Book*. Although historians have never differentiated between the two books, the focus of Wade's work had shifted, and with it, the definition of corruption in British political discourse. Wade began to turn his criticism on the inability of public bodies to carry out their duties owing to the venal culture of their appointees. To the wasteful sectors of the economy he had identified in 1820, he now added 'municipal corporations, companies, guilds and fraternities' and castigated the lack of true representation in the unreformed House of Commons. In the second edition of the revised work, published in March 1832, the principal cause of a corrupt culture among the elite was identified as the established church, rather than the royal family, now that the hated Prince Regent was dead. It dedicated 137 pages, two chapters in all, to accusations of corruption in the Church of England.⁶⁰ Wade challenged the appropriation of money by the Church 'for their own use' instead of using it for educating the people.⁶¹ He also argued that reform of the Church would 'benefit the many, and only temporarily injure the few'.⁶² He noted that 'to the Church of England in the *abstract*, we have no weighty objection to offer; and should be sorry to see her spiritual functions superseded by those of any other sect'.⁶³ Wade also maintained a distinction between the 'rich pluralists' and the 'working clergy' when he described the curates of the Church as a 'useful and meritorious order which performs nearly the whole service of the national religion'.⁶⁴ But he castigated the cathedral authorities, reminding his audience of Bishop Philpotts's support for the magistrates in Manchester at the time of the Peterloo massacre, a passage which was picked up by the ultra-radical *Poor Man's Guardian* at the height of the Reform Crisis in 1832 and reprinted under the heading 'Bishop Fill Potts! Alias Fill Bags!!'⁶⁵

Philip Harling has stated that although there is 'a good deal of truth in Wade's charges of corruption, he often relied on outdated information in order to convey the impression that official "abuses" cost the British taxpayer far more than they actually did'.⁶⁶ This may be true, as the earnings of individual clergy and



the wealth of the Church's assets were not made public, but Wade's evidence that the church was failing in its primary duty of spiritual care, was not that of salaries and land values. He claimed that, out of 10,801 clergy in 1811, over half (6,311 or 58 per cent) were non-resident.⁶⁷ In reality, the parliamentary returns of 1813 indicate that Wade actually underestimated the extent of the problem, as these give a figure of 6,375 non-resident clergy out of 10,558 parishes (60 per cent). When the figure was revisited in the 1832 edition of Wade's book, using more reliable figures from the 1827 diocesan returns, there was little improvement: out of 10,533 clergy, 6,120 (58 per cent) were still not resident.⁶⁸ As Matthew Andrews concludes, 'while many of [Wade's] accusations ... were exaggerated, they were not without foundation'.⁶⁹

Illustration on the flyleaf of the second edition of *The Extraordinary Black Book* (1832): 'Friends of Reform – Foes of Revolution' (a very different tone from the illustration in the first edition)

The figures Wade gave of the Church's finances were widely reprinted across the British press and quoted in a succession of reform meetings. They even provoked a reaction in Scotland where *The Scotsman* questioned Wade's depiction of the Kirk as 'a model of economy' in 1832 and asserted that 'he is not aware that our Establishment, in some of its parts, makes a tolerable approximation to the one he has so well described!'⁷⁰

The fundamental truth of Wade's accusations is accepted by many historians of the Church. John McNeil wrote of a 'flood of evils with which the Church was infested in the early nineteenth century' and observed that:

the historical importance of the *Black Book* has little to do with the question of its reliability. Its importance lies in the success with which it focused attention on the abuses of the time, making it impossible for the intelligent Englishman to overlook.⁷¹

Similarly, Geoffrey Best contends that the 'scale of ... pluralities and sinecures' may have been exaggerated but that they were 'bad enough, in all conscience.'⁷² The accusations were discussed in the press as the new Whig government contemplated ecclesiastical reform. *The Sun* quoted Wade's book to question the accuracy of the Bishop of London's defence of Church finances in the House of Lords, when Blomfield actually referred to the *Black Book* on the floor of the chamber.⁷³ *The Morning Chronicle* used it to substantiate Lord Brougham's accusation of nepotism against Bowyer Sparke, the Bishop of Ely.⁷⁴ *The Scotsman* stated that the *Extraordinary Black Book* 'ought to be in the hands of all Reformers' and quoted the Book's statistics, concluding that they proved the Church of England to be 'the most inveterate and implacable enemy to the people's rights.'⁷⁵ It was Wade's expose of the failings of the Church leadership, as well as those in other public offices, which brought a less theological definition of corruption into the public debate, as what he was describing was the first instance what is the accepted definition of corruption in modern society – 'the misuse of public office'.⁷⁶

The radicalism of Wade's criticism of the establishment owed far more to methods of opposition adopted by critics of the French ancien régime and moderate revolutionaries of 1789 than most of the other contemporary British radicals' attacks on the establishment. This parallel is apparent, not because Wade promoted violence, but because he supported the concept of the popular will. He was a rare

example of an actor in the British political sphere of the 1820s motivated by the same ideas of the Radical Enlightenment (to use Jonathan Israel's term) as stirred the leaders of the Third Estate in 1788–89, such as Sieyès, Mirabeau, Condorcet and Volney.⁷⁷ Wade was after all, a journalist, like the Third Estate's leaders in 1789 and the similarity of tone, language and argument between Sieyès' famous 1789 pamphlet, *What is the Third Estate?*, and Wade's writing is striking. Wade, like Sieyès, employed what William Sewall has termed a 'rhetoric of social revolution' by challenging the power and privileges of the aristocracy and seeking to harness the energy of bourgeois resentment for the cause of liberal political reform.⁷⁸ Wade's lament that the aristocracy had 'swallowed up not only the rights of the people and the prerogatives of the Crown, but also the immunities of the Church' was foreshadowed by Sieyès' complaint that 'la prétendue utilité d'un cadre privilégié pour la service public, n'est qu'une chimère.'⁷⁹ Like the revolutionaries of 1789, Wade believed that, once provided with true information as to the misgovernment of their nation, the public's anger would prove irresistible and lead to dramatic political change. The priorities of government would subsequently be reset to benefit the bulk of the population rather than the venal elites who had seized control of it. It is an ethic which still motivates serious journalists in all liberal democracies and one which places them in danger in illiberal states.

As the Reform Crisis unfolded in 1831, large passages of Wade's text were reprinted in newspapers as varied as the *Caledonian Mercury*, the *Windsor and Eton Express*, the *South-Eastern Gazette*, the *Chester Courant*, the *Southern Reporter and Cork Commercial Courier*, and even *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle* (which quoted Wade's condemnation of the inequitable Game Laws).⁸⁰ Wade was invited to write for the *Morning Advertiser* under the byline 'by the editor of the *Extraordinary Black Book*'.⁸¹ Radical newspapers, such as the *Leicester Chronicle*, promoted it to its readership, encouraging the poor 'to club their pennies and their twopences to purchase it as a common stock ... [as] it is the very master-key to lay open all the sources of our present misery.'⁸² *The Morning Chronicle* exhorted 'any disinterested man, be he Lord or be he Commoner' who had 'a rational doubt' on the need for parliamentary reform, 'we say to him again and again, read the "Extraordinary Black Book."⁸³ During the febrile 'Days of May' while the fate of the third Reform Bill hung in the balance, a meeting in Devizes

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heard that those who defended the constitution 'should look to the hundreds of millions paid to civil and military officers ... and also to the extraordinary black book [sic].'⁸⁴ Although the figures may have been deliberately inflated, the way in which the *Black Books* symbolised the popular anger with the establishment was palpable. Linda Colley sees Wade's undeniably popular book as crucial in questioning the integrity and ethics of the entire ruling order at this turning point in British history.⁸⁵

In his new text, Wade did not entirely spare the political establishment, however. The Whig leadership largely wanted a return to what they considered the essential qualities of the British constitution, perverted, in their view, by decades of Tory rule. This limited their reforming zeal to the removal of the most notorious examples of 'rotten' and 'pocket' boroughs, the overturning of the Tory monopoly of patronage on public appointments and the introduction of some small degree of elected local government. Suspicion grew that all the Whigs really wanted was access to the trough of patronage, long denied to them, and that they would continue to maintain the culture of nepotism, jobbery and venality as soon as they took office; the memory of the disappointed hopes of Grenville's 1806 ministry still tarnished confidence in the Whigs' altruism and commitment to substantial reform. Wade had previously castigated the party thus in his *Political Dictionary*:

Alas, the poor Whigs the incorrigible Whigs. They have been proscribed from office sixty long years – for the last twenty they have been pulling for places and pensions like children for sugar plums – and now they talk of enlightening and reclaiming us. This is too much.⁸⁶

Even the most out-spoken Whig statesman on the issue of corruption, Brougham, was noted for his 'most virtuous, undeviating consistency' under the entry for 'Irony' in Wade's *Dictionary*.⁸⁷ In the first edition of *Extraordinary Black Book* in 1831, although Wade acknowledged that 'we have seen nothing to throw suspicion upon the integrity of the Lord Chancellor, he supplied a long list of historical Whig misappropriations of state assets, attacking their 'profligacy and rottenness of their public principles.'⁸⁸ He attacked the Whigs for targeting the monarchy, when it was the abusive system of aristocratic privilege that was the enemy.⁸⁹ He described 'the whole system of the Whig-school' as 'void of public principle ... a mere scheme for the monopoly of power and emolument.'⁹⁰ And he

targeted their failure to reform the worse cases of sinecure in his new list of infamy, as in the case of the Duke of Argyll's appointment as Lord Keeper of the Great Seal of Scotland in 1830, with a salary of £1,850 p.a.:

Come gentlemen Whigs...! You have declared the days are past when government depends on patronage for support. Now to the proof: here is a complete sinecure, having no duties whatever attached to it; – why did you not cut it off on the resignation of the Duke of Gordon?⁹¹

He held the Whigs' feet to the fire of public opinion by asking directly 'will the Whigs, now that they are in power, enforce those plans of economy which they made [in opposition] ... or will they resort to some subterfuge ... [to preserve] sinecures as a source of patronage for themselves?'⁹² Nevertheless, Wade was prepared to allow the new government the chance to prove themselves worthy of the nation's trust and singled out Joseph Hume, James Graham, Henry Parnell, and, to some extent, even Earl Grey himself, for qualified approval, alongside that given to Lord Brougham.⁹³ Wade's ultimate measure of whether the Whigs had acknowledged 'the wishes and the wants of the community' was 'the one great question of PARLIAMENTARY REFORM.' If the Grey administration would pass a substantial reform bill, 'whatever has been alleged of their aristocracy, hollowness and selfishness will vanish in thin air.'⁹⁴ In the 'Dedication to the People', he expressed his ambiguous view of the new government succinctly: 'we have hope, but no confidence.'⁹⁵

By March 1832, however, a very different tone was heard. A frontispiece was inserted to the second edition of the *Extraordinary Black Book* with portraits of the leading Whigs under the heading 'Friends of Reform; Foes of Revolution' (and Henry, now Lord, Brougham, the Lord Chancellor, at the top of the illustration). Wade noted in his preface that 'we are told ... intelligence, not patronage, is to form the pivot of public authority' and added optimistically, 'we wait in hope to see it practically realized.'⁹⁶ And in the 'Address to the New Edition' he developed his view of the Whig government:

In our dedication [to the first edition] we expressed a want of confidence in the Whig Ministry. In the interval, they have gained in our esteem. They mean well, but the difficulties they have to surmount are great. Arrayed against them are all the interests

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identified with public abuses and which have so long flourished by the ruin of the country.⁹⁷

Wade went on to praise the Whig record in Ireland, Brougham's reform of the 'Augean stable of judicial abuses', and he noted that 'they have even touched their own salaries' and this had, in Wade's view 'conciliated the esteem of the People.'⁹⁸ He finished with a warning, however: 'so long as Ministers pursue national objects, they will be supported', but he added, ominously, 'while we seek for them popular aid, it is, we repeat, an aid accompanied with unceasing vigilance.'⁹⁹

The political anger in Britain was stimulated by a sense of injustice and betrayal of the unspoken social contract between rulers and ruled – which explains the depth and the scale of the popular fury unleashed by Wade's revelations. Bentham himself described the country after two and a half decades of Tory rule in 1828, as 'cold, selfish, priest-ridden, lawyer-ridden, lord-ridden, squire-ridden, soldier-ridden England.'¹⁰⁰ It was at the peak of the *Black Book's* fame that Thomas Carlyle referred to the press as 'the true church of England' as only they seemed capable of censuring the establishment for their moral failures.¹⁰¹ The influence of daily newspapers such as *The Times* and the *Morning Chronicle* was still developing at this stage in history, and it is to cheap single publications, written for a wide audience such as the *Black Book* that Carlyle was referring to at this point. The term 'Black Book' consequently became popularly established as a synonym for the exposure of corruption, cited in 'Captain Swing' letters and still used in an exposé of malpractice among public health officials at the Local Government Board as late as 1873.¹⁰²

Wade's book had clearly lost some of its potency in the aftermath of the Great Reform Act and the Whig reforms of the Church and local government, however. He produced a final edition in 1835, but unlike previous ones it struggled to sell, being advertised in *The Times* in April 1836 as reduced in price from a guinea to ten shillings.¹⁰³ Wade himself attempted to adapt his writing to a new situation, writing a *History of the Middle and Working Classes* in 1833 and then a complete *British History, Chronologically Arranged* in 1839, but he found it hard to carve out a place in the literary establishment thereafter, despite continuing to write leader columns for *The Spectator*.¹⁰⁴ To save him from penury late in life, he was, ironically, awarded a pension of £50 by Lord Palmerston in 1861.¹⁰⁵ He died in Chelsea in 1875 as the middle-class

campaign for the reform of public institutions, which he had begun, had been partly realised in centralised administration under Palmerston and Gladstone and was now focused on the reduction of abuse in local government, most particularly in the City of London.¹⁰⁶

This growing attention to the weight of public opinion in Britain coincided with a cultural change, largely as a result of the impact of evangelicalism, the rise of religious Nonconformity, and an increasingly vocal and economically powerful middle class. These groups prized merit, service, responsibility and accountability and no longer tolerated the gross misuse of Crown patronage, private connection and the sale of public office by the aristocratic elites of Britain,¹⁰⁷ as the enormous popularity of Wade's books made clear the cultural gulf between the elite and the newly emerging culture of the provincial 'middling sort'.¹⁰⁸ As Michael Brock succinctly explains, 'the system was increasingly in ill repute not so much because it was growing more corrupt, but because more was known about its corruption.'¹⁰⁹ The perception that corruption had become endemic in British civic institutions and needed to be excised was, finally, the point at which aristocratic Whigs, Edinburgh philosophers, Benthamite journalists, industrial entrepreneurs, evangelical Tories, Nonconformist dissenters and working-class radicals united in the 1820s. Without the discourse of corruption, originated by Cobbett and then defined, identified and articulated by Wade, it is unlikely that sufficient united pressure could have been brought to bear on a parliament and a monarch reluctant to reform, and to initiate, not merely a shift in political power, but also the cultural transformation of the role of the state and the nature of its institutions which began in 1832.

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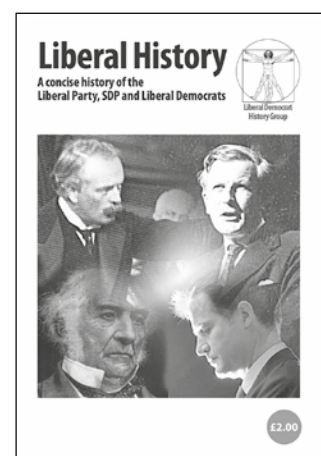
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Lloyd George

Text of Lord Lexden's address to the Lloyd George Society at the National Liberal Club on 25 November 2019, to mark the centenary of the Treaty of Versailles.

Lloyd George and the



The British Empire delegation in June 1919; Lloyd George behind desk, centre-left

THERE ARE CERTAIN words in the political lexicon which always evoke unfavourable reactions. Appeasement, an entirely neutral term in the 1930s, is perhaps the most obvious, blackened, it seems, for ever by the backlash against Neville Chamberlain's foreign policy, or more accurately one element of that policy – deterrence through rearmament, now conveniently forgotten, being the other – in 1940 after the outbreak of war.

Versailles does not come far behind it, when connected with the peace treaty of June 1919,

signed at the half-way point of the Paris peace conference which opened in January that year, rather than with the glory of King Louis XIV, the longest reigning monarch in European history (the queen will overtake him if she lives until 2024).

A century after it was signed, the generally accepted view of the Treaty of Versailles remains that it was a gigantic mistake, so savage and vindictive that it paved the way for the rise of Hitler, and so led directly to the Second World War. According to this view, the

The Versailles Treaty

decisions taken at the Paris peace conference could not have been more certain to produce another world war than if that had been their actual intention.

Germany, so it is argued, was deliberately and cruelly humiliated. The victors – France, Britain and the United States – seized its colonies and large parts of its territory in Europe, imposed disarmament, and, above all, sought to keep it economically enfeebled through reparations – exorbitant payments ostensibly extracted to pay for the damage caused by war.

All this was justified because Germany and its allies were held solely to blame for the conflict's outbreak in 1914. This, as many in the English-speaking world and Germany came to believe, was grossly unfair because Germany had not actually started the war; rather Europe as a whole had in Lloyd George's words 'slithered over the edge', heedless of the catastrophe to come. That became the standard interpretation.

Much is forgotten or overlooked in this widely held view. For example, France had not declared war on Germany; rather Germany had invaded it as part of its war plans to defeat Russia and its ally in the West. In the four years of war, France suffered huge human and material loss; the highest proportion of men of military age killed of any country except Serbia, and the devastation of the northern departments that had contained much of French industry and its coal mines.

The entrenched popular view is increasingly at odds with that of the professional historians. In recent decades they have modified the accepted versions of Germany's innocence of war guilt in 1914, and of the injustice of the Versailles Treaty. There is now a broad consensus among them that the peace terms were not as harsh as they have been widely portrayed, and that the road to the rise of Hitler was not predetermined in 1919.

Few people seem to have been listening very closely to the historians in this year of the Versailles Treaty's centenary. They have a formidable rival. Nothing written since 1919 has come close to making an impact similar to that of a short book with a very dry title published in that year. *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* by John Maynard Keynes was an instant best-seller and has been in print ever since. It denounced the Versailles Treaty as 'one of the most outrageous acts of a cruel victor in civilised history', and predicted another conflict 'before which the horrors of the late German war will fade into nothing.' Few were inclined to dispute his assertion that it was a 'Carthaginian' peace. Nor were they impressed by the comment of the American general who said: 'Well, we don't have much trouble from Carthage these days.'

Keynes later retracted some of the book's more strident conclusions, and apologised to Lloyd George, with whom he had worked closely during the early stages of the peace conference, for the much quoted portrayal of him as an amoral Welsh wizard. But the damage was done. A century on, it still remains, impeding a proper appreciation of the Versailles Treaty and of Lloyd George's role in it.

There are, I think, two points above all which need to be kept firmly in mind in relation to the Versailles Treaty.

First, Germany had been defeated, but not vanquished. The circumstances in 1919 were utterly unlike those of 1945 when the Third Reich was completely destroyed in both East and West. The First World War ended without the great majority of Germans experiencing their country's defeat at first hand. Except in the Rhineland, they did not see occupying troops. This created the central difficulty. With pride in their armed forces largely undiminished, anything beyond mild peace terms was bound to stir great resentment among Germans to which

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Lloyd George and the Versailles Treaty

the Weimar political leaders long before the rise of Hitler would inevitably give expression. For the victorious allies, however, conscious of the pain and cost of the war, a settlement consisting wholly of mild terms was impossible. So Versailles was never going to be a treaty which could slip into relatively benign historical memory, like the Congress of Vienna in 1815.

The second point is this: the power of the victorious allies to devise a new European settlement – indeed a new global order that the visionary Woodrow Wilson sought – which at first glance seems immense, was in fact severely limited. They had no armies in Central and Eastern Europe where an array of new states came suddenly into existence. Many of these states had to fight desperately to maintain their independence, unaffected by anything going on at the peace conference. Paris and Versailles were far-away places of which they knew nothing, until they despatched delegations to get the results of their victories ratified. Beyond them lay Russia racked by civil war between the Bolsheviks and their opponents. The peace conference cast around in vain for a firm Russian policy. For Lloyd George in particular, these severe constraints on the work of the conference proved immensely frustrating, as he strove to advance the largely moderate agenda which he brought to it.

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On 11 January 1919, Lloyd George bounded with his usual vigour on to a British destroyer for the Channel crossing to France. Beneath ‘the snow-white hair of a patriarch’ gleamed ‘the sparkling eyes of youth’, in the words of the veteran parliamentary reporter, Frank Dilnot, who had followed his career closely and with admiration.

Throughout the conference, which brought around a thousand people together from all parts of the globe, he would display the energy and resourcefulness which were among the central features of his magnetic character. He was almost constantly in good humour. Lord Robert Cecil, son of the great Tory leader, Lord Salisbury, and a fervent proponent of the League of Nations, wrote: ‘Whatever was going on at the conference, however hard at work and harried by the gravest responsibilities of his position, Mr Lloyd George was certain to be at the top of his form – full of chaff intermingled with shrewd though never ill-natured comments on those with whom he was working.’

His fertile mind brought forth endless schemes and ideas, large and small. Asked how

Britain could come more quickly to France’s aid if she were attacked again, Lloyd George said he would get a Channel tunnel built, reviving a proposal that had come before Gladstone’s cabinet in a rather desultory way in 1885. He mentioned it several times to the French during the conference.

At the outset, the British delegation told him of their worries that telephone calls were being tapped. ‘We’ll use Welsh,’ he told his private secretary, A. J. Sylvester. ‘That will confound our interested listeners.’ Thereafter, according to Sylvester, ‘the British delegation to the peace conference was able to transmit all their messages over the telephone to London and receive replies from Downing Street or the Foreign Office with secrecy assured.’ Who would have thought that a number of Welsh speakers were to be found at the heart of the British government a hundred years ago?

The conference was not well planned or well organised. Huge progress was in the end secured in just six months by concentrating all major decision-making in the hands of the so-called Big Three: Clemenceau, Woodrow Wilson and Lloyd George. It was not a happy band. Lloyd George successfully charmed the high-minded but vain American president, expressing full support for Wilson’s idealistic ventures, especially the League of Nations, though he was not surprised that it was unable to become the central guardian of a peaceful world order that Wilson intended.

But neither of them could get on good terms with the quarrelsome, irascible Clemenceau, whose ardent French patriotism consumed him. Harold Nicolson, a rising young star among the professional diplomats at the conference and, like Keynes, a bitter critic of its results, witnessed Clemenceau’s rudeness to Lloyd George. On one occasion, Clemenceau said to him, ‘You have told me seven lies this morning. This is the eighth.’ Whereupon Lloyd George got up and seized him by the scruff of the neck; Wilson had to separate them.

During the peace conference, Lloyd George combined flexibility of method with marked consistency of aim. Perhaps alone of the three great peacemakers, he had firm, practical, long-term objectives for the future of Europe as a whole – East and West – for which he worked with patience and resource, though inevitably without complete success. As Bismarck once said, facts are stronger than the will of men, and, as I mentioned at the outset, circumstances imposed limits on what anyone in Paris, however determined and skilful, could hope to achieve.

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The criticism of him that can be fairly made has been summed up by Ken Morgan: 'His political position was sufficiently unassailable for him to take the lead in educating the public in the economic facts of life with regard to a settlement. He failed to do so.'

He was subject to unfair criticism, to which of course he had long ago in his career become used. At Paris he was accused of wanting to crush Germany through punitive measures to which he was said, quite wrongly, to have committed himself during the December 1918 election. That accusation has echoed down the years of the century that has now elapsed. But at no point during that election did Lloyd George endorse the notorious statement made by the businessman turned Tory politician, Eric Geddes, that Germany should be squeezed until the pips squeaked. Lloyd George did not intend to allow any squeaking, though it is true that he did little to discourage others from anticipating that shrill sound. The criticism of him that can be fairly made has been summed up by Ken Morgan: 'His political position was sufficiently unassailable for him to take the lead in educating the public in the economic facts of life with regard to a settlement. He failed to do so.'

At the peace conference, Lloyd George was the most zealous advocate of moderation on the central issues relating to Germany, with which the peacemakers had to deal. At the final meetings of the ill-assorted triumvirate in June 1919, he strove hard, though admittedly with results that often disappointed him, to revise and soften the terms to be offered to Germany. His underlying aim never deviated: Germany's political system must be rebuilt along new democratic lines and the country given the central place it deserved in European and wider international affairs.

At the same time, of course, he was vigilant as the champion of British interests. He could not have survived as one of the most powerful of all prime ministers if he failed to safeguard and extend the nation's role and influence in the aftermath of victory. He was determined to retain Britain's ascendancy in the Near East with its abundant supplies of oil, whose enormous economic significance was now beginning to be fully realised for the first time. He swiftly secured acceptance of Britain's claims to the German colonies in Africa.

He was firm, too, in support of Britain's traditional right of search on the high seas which had been vital in sustaining the naval blockade of German ports that had contributed so signally to the Allied victory. He countered the new doctrine of freedom of the seas advanced by the United States as a means of challenging British dominance. Rivalry between Britain and America with its visceral, and ever-growing, hostility to the British Empire was one of the less noticed undercurrents at the Paris peace conference. It would grow in significance as the years passed.

In 1919 Lloyd George was profoundly conscious of the importance of the Empire. In his war memoirs, he extolled the indispensable contributions made by the Empire's troops during the conflict. Many at the time tended to lay particular emphasis on the loyalty shown by the Dominions. He gave as much, sometimes more, weight, to other parts of the Empire, notably India, whose large forces on the Western Front he rightly judged to have been indispensable. He doubted, however, whether India would ever be able to run its own affairs, while in the Dominions wide responsibilities could continue to be devolved. 'Home Rule for Hell', a heckler once cried at one of his meetings. 'Quite right', he retorted, 'let every man speak up for his own country'.

In Paris, European issues inevitably claimed most of his attention. Throughout he was an advocate of leniency. He argued that the statesmanlike course would be to try to build up the economies of the new nations of central and eastern Europe, victors and vanquished alike, so that trade and economic prosperity could be restored. He criticised the exaggerated claims of the money to be obtained from Germany made by the French finance minister, Klotz, 'the only Jew who knows nothing about money', as he was disrespectfully known.

Lloyd George also spoke up for moderation in relation to Germany's new frontiers. He believed that large German-speaking populations in places like the Rhineland, Danzig and Upper Silesia should remain under German control. He worried about the consequences of making them minorities in the new states that had suddenly come into existence. There were others that could have been added usefully to his list: for example, the Sudetenland whose three million Germans became part of Czechoslovakia, creating the difficulty that Hitler was to exploit so ruthlessly nineteen years later, unimpeded by the Slovaks who resented Czech dominance in the state. Poland had no greater success in integrating its large German population.

Five years later, Lloyd George uncannily predicted the terrible catastrophe that would overtake Europe in the following decade. 'I cannot conceive any greater cause of war', he said in 1924, 'than that the German people, who have certainly proved themselves one of the most vigorous races of the world, should be surrounded by a number of small states, many of them consisting of people who have never previously set up a stable government for themselves, but each of them containing large masses of Germans clamouring for reunification with their native land.'

Lloyd George and the Versailles Treaty

In the quest for a new European order, Lloyd George was often wiser and more far-sighted than his colleagues. He deserved his laurels.

At the peace conference, Lloyd George drew the main elements of his German policies together in a notable memorandum composed one weekend in March at Fontainebleau. Germany, it asserted, would always be a first-class power, and this should be openly recognised. Reparation payments should be strictly related to Germany's ability to pay. German-speaking populations should not be placed against their will under French or Polish rule. While the Kaiser and other wartime leaders should be brought to trial, the German people should not be made international scapegoats.

How Lloyd George enjoyed teasing George V about the prosecution of his cousin, the Kaiser. Where would the trial be held, the king asked? O, Westminster Hall probably. Where would he be imprisoned? The Tower of London would be the obvious place, said Lloyd George. In the event of course the Kaiser remained safely in his Dutch refuge, drinking English tea and reading P. G. Wodehouse.

Lloyd George's fellow peacemakers had little sympathy with his calls for greater generosity towards Germany over the creation of new frontiers, or with his predictions of grave trouble ahead if the original plans were not revised. He secured no more than the recognition of Danzig as a free city and a plebiscite in one of the many disputed regions, Upper Silesia. In truth, here as elsewhere, there was little the great men in Paris could do in practice. As a leading British military figure noted, over so many areas 'the Paris writ does not run.'

Lloyd George was also unable to carry the day with his bold, imaginative schemes for dealing with the most vexed of all the issues with which the peacemakers were concerned: the payment of reparations by Germany – and also by its allies, though they have been forgotten in most accounts – in accordance with precedent going back centuries. An expert American expert wrote: 'The subject of reparations caused more trouble, contention, hard feeling, and delay at the Paris peace conference than any other point of the Treaty.' The way this vexed question was settled gave the unyielding German opponents of the treaty their strongest, enduring argument. No one ever found a way of successfully countering the assertion that the payment of reparations inflicted the gravest damage on the German economy.

Everything would have utterly different if Lloyd George had been heeded at an early stage. France and Britain ended up demanding large reparations because they had heavy debts to repay, chiefly to the United States. Guided

by Maynard Keynes with whom he later fell out so spectacularly, Lloyd George told his fellow peacemakers that the priority should be the rebuilding of the German economy. The pre-war powerhouse of Europe – with which Britain had done so much business and which was the main destination for its tourists – must recover that role in the interests of them all. The Allies should fix a reparations bill well within Germany's ability to pay, and encourage its revival, with loans if necessary, to get its economy going again.

'The economic mechanism of Europe is jammed', Lloyd George told President Wilson. 'A proposal which unfolds future prospects and shows the peoples of Europe a road by which food and employment and orderly existence can once again come their way will be a more powerful weapon than any other for the preservation from the danger of Bolshevism of that order of human society which we believe to be the best starting point for future improvement and greater well-being.' In that spirit the French minister for commerce and industry drew up a detailed plan for a new European economic order based on the pooling of resources by its nations. In 1919 nothing came of it, but the vision remained: the French minister's assistant was Jean Monnet. A century ago there were glimpses of Europe's one true destination if lasting peace was to be found: union among its states.

Any successful scheme for Europe's economic renaissance after the First World War depended on the United States, just as it did after 1945. Lloyd George, again following Keynes's advice, made his most radical proposal: the cancellation of the debts that the Allies owed each other, which would open the way to reasonable reparation payments by Germany. The proposal was rejected. Unlike in 1945, the Americans told the Europeans that they must work out their own salvation.

But if a way of avoiding large reparation payments could not be found, parliament and public opinion would insist that Britain had a significant share. Lloyd George succeeded in keeping a specific sum out of the Versailles Treaty, but neither he nor anyone else could prevent the bitter wrangling over the amount, and how it should be paid, during the years that followed, poisoning international relations.

And, after all the agony, was Germany crippled by reparations? The German historian Jürgen Tampke has recently estimated that in the end some two billion gold marks were paid – a tiny fraction of what Hitler would later spend on rearming. Even if that estimate is too low,

the total was almost certainly less than what France, with a much smaller economy, paid Germany after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71.

Margaret MacMillan concludes in her masterly study, *Peacemakers*: ‘the picture of Germany crushed by a vindictive peace cannot be sustained.’ Yet, to return to the impact of Keynes’s work, nothing could shake the fixed German belief, increasingly echoed among the victorious allies, that it was vindictive. As so often, perception was at odds with reality.

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Finally, may I touch briefly on the Near East, that other truly tragic legacy of the Paris peace conference, which inflicted grave damage on the reputations of France and Britain? The only woman to play a part in the conference, Gertrude Bell, who knew the region like the back of her hand, wrote at the time: ‘They are making such a horrible muddle of the Near East. I confidently anticipate that it will be much worse than it was before the war. It’s like a nightmare in which you foresee all the terrible things that are going to happen and can’t stretch out your hand to prevent them.’

The main elements of tragedy are all too familiar. Secret pacts were concluded and then cancelled amidst much rancour. Promises were made to the Arab leaders who rose up against the Ottomans, only to be subsequently dishonoured. As we know to our bitter cost, the Arab world could never forget its betrayal, keeping for ever in sharp focus what seemed to them the most flagrant example of Western perfidy, the Zionist presence in Palestine, of which Lloyd George, that lover of the Old Testament, was an ardent supporter. Lord Curzon, a coalition colleague for whom Lloyd George had little regard, seems to have been one of the few who cared about what might happen to the Arabs of Palestine. ‘What’, he asked, ‘is to become of the people of the country?’ Chaim Weizmann predicted a contented and prosperous Asiatic Belgium. He achieved with British help an Asiatic Ulster with even deeper hatreds on its narrow ground.

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On 28 June 1919, the Treaty of Versailles was signed. On the following day, Lloyd George returned to London, arriving at Victoria Station, accompanied by his mistress and outstandingly efficient secretary, Frances Stevenson. She recorded in her diary:

D. had a wonderful reception at the station... & to crown it all, the King himself, with the Prince of Wales, came to the station to meet him. The people at court tried to dissuade him from doing so, saying that there was ‘no precedent for it’. ‘Very well’, replied the King, ‘I will make a precedent.’... Everyone threw flowers at D. & a laurel wreath was thrown into the Royal carriage. It fell on the King’s lap but he handed it to D. ‘This is for you’, he said. D. has given it to me... I know better than anyone how well he deserves the laurels he has won.

Posterity, heavily influenced by Keynes, has been reluctant to give its endorsement to that loyal verdict. But in the quest for a new European order, Lloyd George was often wiser and more far-sighted than his colleagues. He deserved his laurels.

Alistair Lexden is a Conservative peer and Chairman of the Conservative History Group, contributing regularly to its annual Conservative History Journal. He is working on an extended version of an article, ‘The Man Who Enriched – and Robbed – The Tories’ in the June 2021 edition of Parliamentary History about a corrupt Conservative Party Treasurer, Horace Farquhar, who sold peerages for Lloyd George. A short paperback is planned for 2023.

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Liberal ideology

David Dutton traces the political voyage of one MP through the changing currents of Liberalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Part I: 1861–1914.

A Liberal for All Seasons? Percy

IN THE EXTENSIVE literature devoted to the problems of the British Liberal Party in the first half of the twentieth century, insufficient attention has perhaps been paid to the simple difficulty of retaining men and women of considerably differing outlook and ideology contentedly within the same political movement and organisation. Being a broad church is regularly and rightly extolled as a prerequisite of party-political success. No political movement is likely to secure power in Britain unless it can appeal to a significantly wide (and, almost by definition, divergent) spectrum of opinion. But the further this diversity is stretched, the greater the resulting potential for disaffection, alienation and disintegration. Even if actual disintegration is avoided, the consequences for electoral support are inevitably damaging. Quite simply, voters are disinclined to back a patently divided and internally disputatious party. Thus, the self-same broad-church characteristic, deemed essential for victory at the polls, risks, if taken too far, the destruction of the party itself.

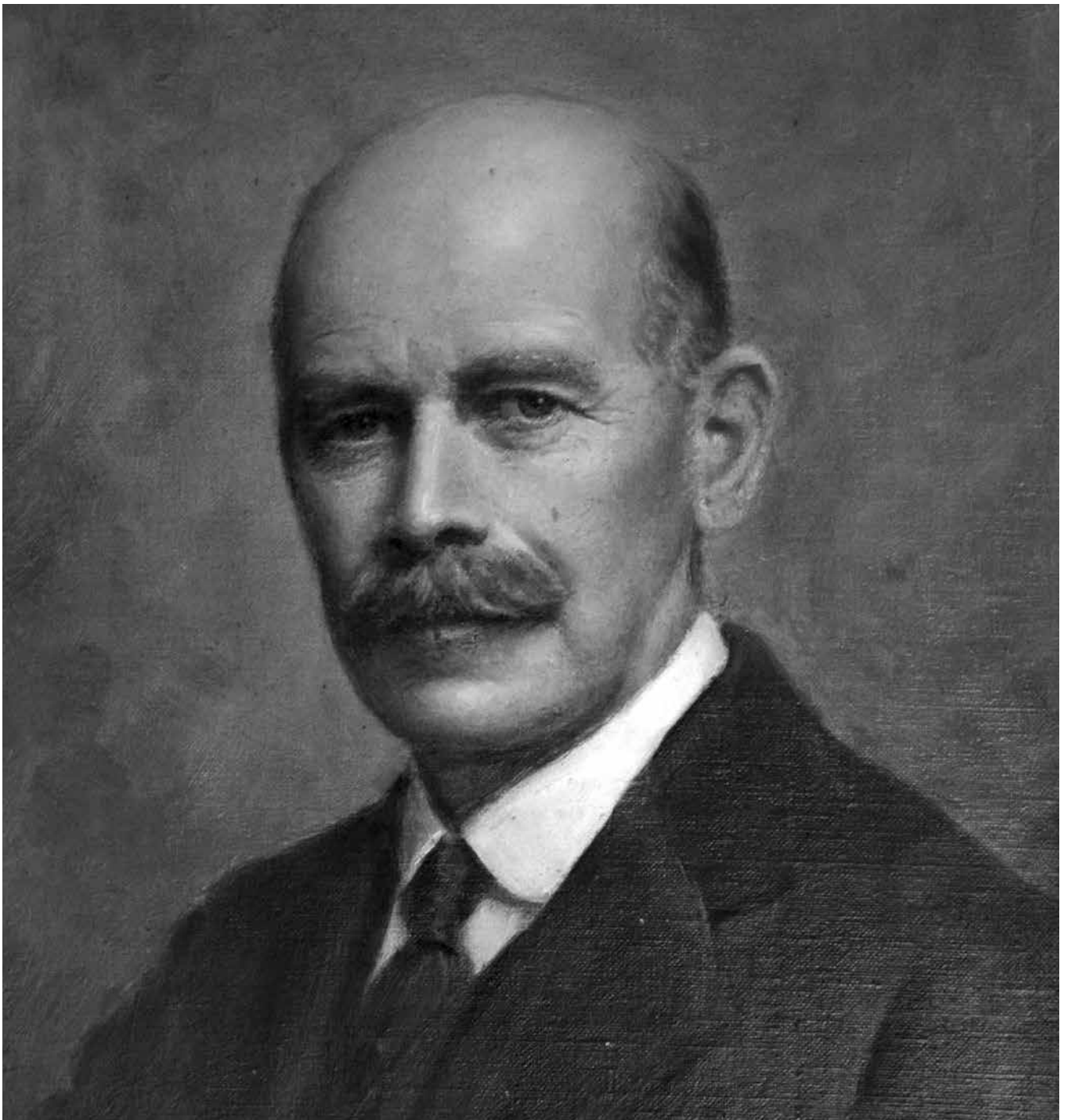
The Liberal Party has certainly exhibited such strains and tensions, with serious consequences for its long-term strength and viability. The career of Percy Molteno, Liberal MP for Dumfriesshire, 1906–18, offers an interesting prism through which to examine these issues. He was active in the affairs of British Liberalism for around four decades. Yet for only a relatively brief interlude, straddling the turn of the century and coinciding in practice with the party leadership of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, was he genuinely at the heart of the Liberal movement. For the bulk of his career, Molteno's concerns were more with what he considered the errant course charted by the party to which he unfailingly claimed allegiance than with the activities of his declared opponents in other political movements.

Locating Molteno's position within the broad Liberal church is not a straightforward task. Certainly, the simple and traditional descriptions of 'left' and 'right' are of limited value.¹ If it was of the Liberal Left to oppose British involvement in the South African War of 1899–1902, to strive to prevent Britain's declaration of hostilities against Germany in August 1914, and to vote against the introduction of conscription two years later, then Molteno ticks all the necessary boxes. But if it was of the Liberal Right to espouse Gladstonian principles a generation after the death of the Grand Old Man, to oppose female enfranchisement, to champion an unadulterated vision of Free Trade and small government through the inter-war era, and to support the appeasement of Nazi Germany, then Molteno's credentials were equally impeccable. He could credibly maintain that his views remained remarkably consistent over his entire career; it was the party which had deviated from the true faith. But, according to those who disagreed with him, his ideas failed to adapt and evolve in the face of dramatically changed circumstances.

Molteno, whose family was South African but of Italian origin, was born in Edinburgh on 12 September 1861.² The location of his birth, resulting from his father's decision to visit Britain at that time, formed an emotional bond with Scotland that became important in shaping his later political career. Molteno's early years were divided between South Africa and Britain at a time when the politics of the two were becoming increasingly intertwined. His contacts with South African politics, where his father, John Charles Molteno, had served as the first prime minister of Cape Colony,³ enabled him to speak of the subcontinent with knowledge and authority to those he befriended in Britain. After school in South Africa, he read mathematics and law at Trinity College, Cambridge, and

Percy Alport
Molteno,
12 September 1861 –
19 September 1937
(painting: [https://
www.moltenofamily.
net](https://www.moltenofamily.net))

Alport Molteno, 1861–1937



A Liberal for All Seasons? Percy Alport Molteno, 1861–1937



was subsequently called to the Bar at the Inner Temple. He practised law in Cape Colony for several years before moving to Britain. There, in September 1889, he married Bessie Currie, the daughter of a prosperous shipping magnate, and gradually worked his way through the management of the Castle (later Union Castle) shipping line, eventually becoming company chairman. This company had for many years held a leading position in the carrying trade between Britain and South Africa.

He moved easily and naturally from the politics of South Africa, where his father was firmly in the progressive tradition, to the British Liberal Party. Molteno had spent his childhood in a home where politics, business and finance were discussed with total freedom. He revered his father and unhesitatingly followed his liberal example. Second only to his father in the influence exerted on the young Molteno's development was his father's friend and his own future father-in-law, Donald Currie. The latter was a zealous supporter of Gladstone, who sat for a time as an MP in the Westminster parliament. Though he later became a Liberal Unionist, Currie remained close to Gladstone personally. Even as an undergraduate at Cambridge, where he, in a Union debate, opposed a motion of no confidence in Gladstone's government, Molteno's political views were already firmly fixed. A Cambridge contemporary recalled 'one of the most whole-hearted Liberals that I have ever known'.⁴ Molteno owed his strict moral code to

his upbringing, rather than to religion. While his father was brought up as an Anglican and his mother was a practising member of the Dutch Reformed Church, there is nothing in his writings to suggest that Molteno was ever himself interested in religious questions.

His early associations and friendships indicated the type of Liberalism with which he felt at home and to which he would remain faithful for the rest of his life. Meeting John Morley, who had served in Gladstone's third and fourth administrations, in December 1897, Molteno recorded: 'He is a very fine character. His is the type of Liberalism I most admire and would be most disposed to follow.'⁵ A few months later, an encounter with Robert Reid, the future lord chancellor, Lord Loreburn, left him equally impressed. As Molteno's biographer explains:

From that time onwards . . . Robert Reid was one of the few political leaders whom Molteno trusted. The confidence was mutual. Reid found that he could always rely on Molteno for accurate information and sound advice on South African questions, and Molteno found that Reid, once he was convinced of what was right, was able and ready to give clear and bold expression to their views in Parliament and on the platform.⁶

As Britain and the Boer republics of the Transvaal and Orange Free State moved ever closer

Percy Molteno, late 1870s (left) and (probably) 1890s (right) (photos: <https://www.moltenofamily.net>)

to war, Molteno came to occupy a crucial position in attempts to avert the outbreak of hostilities. ‘Nothing in his life’, suggests his biographer, is ‘more to be admired than his unsuccessful efforts to prevent the Boer War.’⁷ But Britain’s Liberal Party was badly divided on this matter between the Liberal Imperialists, who offered broad support to Lord Salisbury’s Unionist administration, and radicals who believed that the government was pursuing an unnecessarily aggressive and provocative course. Molteno was firmly in the latter camp. He was convinced that the colonial secretary and former Liberal, Joseph Chamberlain, whose true role in the abortive Jameson Raid of December 1895 had been concealed from public scrutiny,⁸ was intent upon a military solution:

The time appears to have arrived when those of us who have known South Africa must speak out in protest against resort to the arbitrament of war, which is now advocated as the solution of the South African difficulties ... [Chamberlain’s] advocacy of drastic methods at the present moment loses force when we recall the fact that he has always, from the first few days after the Raid, attempted to use force in the solution of these difficulties.⁹

Molteno was among the speakers on 10 July 1899 at the first public meeting of the Transvaal Committee, whose purpose was ‘to watch the proceedings of the Colonial Office and to rouse public opinion to prevent a war between the British Empire and the Transvaal’.¹⁰

The more dangerous the international situation became, the more valuable was Molteno’s contribution to Liberal politics. As he explained in July 1899:

I must do anything I possibly can to avert war, regardless of cost to myself or my interests ... I have interviewed several editors and have seen many Members of Parliament; I have now got into touch with Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, the Leader of the Liberal Party. I lunched at his house yesterday and entered most fully into the whole situation. He takes the view, which we do, that nothing but disaster can come of the use of force; but he says the situation is most difficult because action on his part might precipitate a crisis. I am now working with his lieutenants and we are arranging questions in Parliament, the first of which was asked today as to whether the Cape Ministry has been consulted.¹¹

Characteristically, Molteno looked to the example of the Liberal titans of the mid-Victorian era to guide the party of his own day. ‘Would that John Bright were still among us,’ he wrote to Bright’s daughter, ‘to paint in its true colours our treatment of the Transvaal and the present cry for force and violence when every consideration demands prudence, forbearance and patience.’¹²

In the event, it was the Boers who brought matters to a head, issuing an ultimatum at the beginning of October and opening hostilities almost immediately thereafter. This was a tactical blunder on the Republics’ part, not least because it made the propagation of the anti-war case in Britain much more difficult. Molteno, however, was undeterred. He helped fund and was an active participant in the South African Conciliation Committee, to which he contributed several pamphlets. He also wanted the public to be better informed of the circumstances surrounding the outbreak of the war, in particular the activities of Chamberlain and Sir Alfred Milner, the British High Commissioner, and hoped that the Cape Colony parliament would investigate such matters and produce a report. Support for Molteno’s stance came from predictable quarters. Morley ‘is entirely with us on the horror and disgrace of the war and the way in which England’s honour has been sullied’.¹³ But Molteno recognised Campbell-Bannerman’s need to proceed cautiously: ‘Campbell-Bannerman fully understands the position; but he is paralysed. Being the official leader he must indulge in platitudes to avoid breaking up the Liberal Party.’¹⁴ The *Annual Register* for 1900 estimated that sixty-two Liberal MPs backed the Unionist government over the war; sixty-eight could be described, in most cases somewhat misleadingly, as ‘pro-Boers’; with twenty-seven either uncertain or backing Campbell-Bannerman’s efforts to occupy a middle ground. In any case, the realities of parliamentary arithmetic imposed severe limits on what even a united Liberal Party might achieve: ‘The Government have a large majority and they mean to use it brutally if necessary.’¹⁵

The war’s early stages saw the British army, ill-prepared and poorly led by the sometimes-inebriated General Sir Redvers Buller, incurring a series of embarrassing defeats. But the military situation quickly improved in 1900 once the British government despatched reinforcements under Lord Roberts and General Kitchener. Indeed, such was the turnaround that Roberts returned home in October, leaving Kitchener to deal with any residual enemy opposition, while *The Times*, ignorant of the

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skill and tenacity with which the Boers would pursue guerrilla tactics, mistakenly declared that the war was over. British military successes brought Molteno scant comfort. He was appalled by the jingoistic enthusiasm with which the country greeted its victories on the battlefield. Its people, ‘hopelessly misled by lies’,¹⁶ had lost their sense of moral compass – ‘the natural result of violent feelings aroused by war, when passion unseats reason and judgment, and men no longer ask whether anything is right or wrong, but only whether it is on their side or not.’¹⁷ Evidence began to emerge of atrocities committed by the British army in its attempts to mop up remaining Boer resistance:

It is indeed all terrible and such as none of us could have believed we would have lived to see under the British flag. My heart beats for all the poor people who have been so monstrously treated under the so-called martial law, and for the poor women and children whose homes have been burnt in such a wicked and uncivilised manner in the Free State, and now for the poor women and children who are being turned out of Pretoria. Ever since the war began it has been like a horrible nightmare and one has felt powerless to stop things or to do much to help.¹⁸

Not surprisingly, the government could not resist trying to reap electoral advantage from the prevailing situation and the country went to the polls in the early autumn. Molteno had been approached by Herbert Gladstone, then the party’s chief whip, about the possibility of standing for North Buckinghamshire. Notwithstanding the provenance of this invitation, Molteno declined, judging the moment was not opportune. He was, in any case, under pressure from his father-in-law to continue to focus on his business career. In all the circumstances, however, the Liberals nationally (though less so in Scotland) performed surprisingly well, with the government’s pre-election majority increasing by just four seats. Molteno observed that ‘those who have taken a strong point of view against the war have come back with renewed courage and confidence’.¹⁹ But he still shied away from a parliamentary career for himself, declaring, revealingly, when approached early in 1901 about the possibility of a candidature in Grimsby, ‘I must advance views which I can never hope to be very popular’.²⁰ Instead, he spoke frequently at meetings of the South African Women and Children’s Distress Fund Committee. Encouragement came in June when, shocked by the first-hand reports of conditions

in southern Africa posted by Emily Hobhouse, sister of the Liberal theorist, L. T. Hobhouse, Campbell-Bannerman dropped all pretence of even-handedness. In a famous speech at London’s Holborn Restaurant, the Liberal leader queried whether the Boers’ distress could be brushed aside as the regrettable but inevitable cost of war: ‘When is a war not a war?’ he enquired. ‘When it is carried on by methods of barbarism in South Africa.’ Campbell-Bannerman went on to warn that present government policy would not just result in political antipathy on the part of the Boers but ‘personal hatred and a sense – an ineradicable sense – [of] personal wrong’.²¹ This intervention ended any idea of equivocation on Campbell-Bannerman’s part. ‘Pro-Boers’ such as Molteno could now number the party leader among their camp. By the end of the year Molteno had decided to stand for parliament at the next election.

The war came to an end in May 1902 when the Boers finally accepted terms of surrender. Molteno returned briefly to South Africa, but by the summer of 1903 had opened negotiations with the Dumfriesshire Liberal Association. Robert Reid, the MP for Dumfries Burghs, acted as a valuable intermediary and sponsor, and in September 1903 Molteno was adopted as Liberal candidate. The constituency was held by a Unionist, but a strong radical tradition persisted and Molteno found a ready audience among the farmers, farm labourers and smallholders of the county. The *Dumfries and Galloway Standard* under the editorship of Thomas Watson offered significant support.

Molteno’s approach to political campaigning was straightforward, devoid of frills, but above all open and honest. As a close associate recalled:

At the outset he made it plain that he was opposed in principle to the sort of campaigning which meant attendance at every parish fete or sale of work; and he would make no contributions to anything that savoured of a bribe for votes.²²

Arthur Balfour had succeeded Lord Salisbury as prime minister in July 1902, but it was not long before his government got into serious difficulties, particularly after the resignation of the colonial secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, in October 1903, rapidly followed by that of the lord president, the Duke of Devonshire. Chamberlain now embarked on his last great crusade to convince the country of the merits of tariffs and believed he could best do this from the freedom of the backbenches. At the

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same time, Liberals of all stripes felt encouraged to rally enthusiastically to the defence of free trade. There seemed a genuine prospect of an early general election. ‘The Duke’s defection is very disastrous for Balfour’, judged Molteno, ‘and we may have a General Election at any time.’ This view was widely shared, but perceptively Molteno added, ‘I think Balfour will try to avoid it and trust to something turning up in the meantime.’²³ His prediction proved an accurate description of the prime minister’s tactics. In the event, the government would hang on until December 1905, when Balfour finally resigned, allowing Campbell-Bannerman to form a minority administration before calling a general election at the start of 1906. In the meantime, Molteno had become increasingly active in domestic politics, consistently espousing the traditional doctrines of Gladstonian Liberalism. In June 1904 he spoke alongside Robert Reid at a joint meeting of the Cumberland and Dumfriesshire Liberal Associations to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Richard Cobden, another of the iconic Victorian Liberals whom Molteno revered.²⁴

While there remained political capital to be made from the government’s conduct of the South African war, Molteno had necessarily to broaden his electoral appeal. When Morley visited the constituency to speak on his behalf in November 1903, Molteno took the opportunity to declare his unshaken attachment to the principle of free trade and opposition to any proposal to introduce preferential or retaliatory tariffs.²⁵ The concept of ‘retrenchment’ figured prominently in Molteno’s message at this time. Speaking in December 1904, he focused on the level of government spending:

In ten years our expenditure had been nearly doubled, having been increased by 141 millions. But with all this taxation, unfortunately, we were not even paying our way, our debt having increased by 414 millions in ten years. We were living upon our capital, and the consequences must be disastrous if a stop were not put to this.²⁶

At the election, Molteno faced an untried opponent. The sitting MP, William Jardine Maxwell, stood down and his replacement, J. H. Balfour Browne, though a distinguished lawyer, seemed uncomfortable when dealing with the issue of tariffs, including Balfour’s compromise proposals based on retaliation. In the personal manifesto placed before his electors, Molteno returned to the theme of government spending:

Molteno argued that free trade had added enormously to the British people’s comfort, well-being and happiness. Returning to the protective system that had prevailed sixty years earlier would ‘bring about a state of misery and degradation for our people similar to that from which Cobden, Bright and Gladstone freed them’.

In regard to the expenditure of the country, this has been enormously increased under the late Government. They have failed to carry out those measures of retrenchment which seem to be essential after the expenditure of a great war. Our annual taxation has become so great as to endanger the stability of our finances, the consuming power of the nation, and the maintenance of our trade.

But tariffs offered no remedy for the country’s problems. Molteno argued that free trade had added enormously to the British people’s comfort, well-being and happiness. Returning to the protective system that had prevailed sixty years earlier would ‘bring about a state of misery and degradation for our people similar to that from which Cobden, Bright and Gladstone freed them’. Molteno’s peroration could almost have come from the GOM himself: ‘I believe that free trade, peace and good-will among nations, and retrenchment and reform at home, will confer the greatest blessings upon our people.’²⁷

‘It is unthinkable’, suggested the staunchly Unionist *Dumfries and Galloway Courier*, ‘that ... the hard-headed people of Dumfriesshire will prefer an “undesirable alien” like Mr Molteno to one of the ablest and most distinguished natives of the county in the person of Mr J. H. Balfour Browne.’²⁸ In the event, the electoral pendulum swung decisively in favour of the Liberal Party, not only in Dumfriesshire but across Britain as a whole. The party secured a total of 400 seats in the new parliament, the best performance in its history, while Molteno comfortably defeated his Unionist opponent.²⁹ The member for Dumfriesshire could easily have been swamped in the sea of new Liberal representatives. He was not offered a ministerial appointment. No more than a competent speaker, he was unlikely to make a mark on the basis of his oratory. But Molteno faced the political future with optimism, confident of what his own role and priorities would be. A letter he sent to J. W. Sauer, for long a prominent figure in South African politics, as the scale of the Liberal victory started to emerge, is revealing:

You will see from C-B’s address that he is going to stand no nonsense, and will not have any weak policy of Toryism and water instead of real Liberalism. You may rely on it that I will do all I can to assist in getting a proper Constitution granted [for the Transvaal and the Orange River Colony], and as

Molteno had long feared that the Boer War's abiding legacy would be lasting animosity between Britain and the former republics. Ensuring that the latter were quickly granted a generous measure of internal self-government was, he believed, the way to avoid this outcome.

you will see C-B and our friends Sir Robert Reid,³⁰ Sinclair³¹ and others are well placed to assist.³²

Molteno had long feared that the Boer War's abiding legacy would be lasting animosity between Britain and the former republics. Ensuring that the latter were quickly granted a generous measure of internal self-government was, he believed, the way to avoid this outcome. Even before the last results of the election were confirmed, Molteno felt confident that 'real responsible government will be granted very shortly'.³³ Primary responsibility for developing the new constitutions was entrusted to the lord chancellor, Loreburn, but he relied heavily on Molteno for accurate information and sometimes to offer a corrective to the advice coming from Lord Selborne, whom the out-going Unionist government had appointed governor-general of the Transvaal and high commissioner for South Africa in February 1905. Molteno had the advantage of enjoying not only the trust and confidence of key members of the Liberal cabinet, including Campbell-Bannerman, but also of leading figures in South Africa from both the British and Boer communities.

Responsible self-government was returned to the Transvaal on 6 December 1906 and to the Orange River Colony, restored to its old name of Orange Free State, on 5 June 1907. Critics ranged from the king (privately) to Rudyard Kipling (in the press). For the Unionists, Balfour condemned the government's action as 'the most reckless experiment ever tried in the development of a great colonial policy'.³⁴ More generously, and with greater justification, General Smuts later paid tribute to 'one whose name should never be forgotten ... Campbell-Bannerman, the statesman who wrote the word *Reconciliation* over ... that African scene, and thus rendered an immortal service to the British Empire'.³⁵ Molteno merits honourable mention among the premier's supporting cast. Strikingly, it was an intervention by Molteno that persuaded General Botha, elected under the new constitution as prime minister of the Transvaal, to attend the inaugural Imperial Conference in London in 1907 – a symbolic step which did much to cement the position of the former republics within the imperial system. Nonetheless, the new constitutions involved one great disappointment from Molteno's point of view. His efforts to persuade Botha and Smuts to accept a franchise that included the majority black population were unsuccessful.

In this matter, both the Liberal government and Molteno personally were in difficult positions. The government was guided above all by the quest for reconciliation with the Boers. This, it believed, was dependent upon a timely concession to the former republics of political autonomy within the Empire. Humanitarian feelings towards the non-European population, sadly but perhaps inevitably, took a poor second place to the need to bond together the two European peoples in South Africa. Furthermore, the government felt constrained by Article 8 of the Treaty of Vereeniging, which had brought the war to a close, under which it had been agreed by the then Unionist government that the question of 'granting the franchise to natives will not be decided until after the introduction of self-government'.³⁶ But the constitution of the Cape of Good Hope, established as long ago as 1853–4, was colour-blind. This principle had been sacrosanct to the Cape's first prime minister, John Molteno, Percy's father. There was a financial qualification for the franchise, but no colour-bar. As a result, non-whites had been eligible to vote in quite considerable numbers. A superficially similar system existed in Natal, but in practice numerous restrictions had reduced the black vote there to vanishingly small proportions. By contrast, the constitution of the Transvaal was unequivocal. It stated that 'the people desire to permit no equal standing between the coloured people and white inhabitants, either in Church or State'.³⁷

In relation at least to the fundamental aims of the British government, Campbell-Bannerman's boldness was rewarded sooner than might have been expected. The future Union of South Africa's constitution was hammered out in a series of conventions in Durban, Cape Town and Bloemfontein in 1908–09, with the former Boer republics and the British colonies of Cape Colony and Natal represented as equals. The result was a unanimous decision in favour of union and agreement on a draft constitution. Once again, the absence of a black franchise was a striking feature and, with the benefit of hindsight, it is possible to date the ultimate emergence of the apartheid regime from this moment. But it had soon become clear that any attempt to extend the more liberal franchise of the Cape to the whole of the proposed Union would have led to the Transvaal and Orange Free State walking away from the negotiations. While nothing had been possible in respect of native rights before the restoration of self-government because of Article 8, 'nothing could be done after because there was self-government'.³⁸

It might have been possible for Molteno to move an amendment as the enabling legislation passed through the House of Commons. But, to improve the chances of agreement, a conscious decision had been taken to leave the negotiating process to the South Africans (albeit only those of European heritage), rather than to impose a settlement from London. Molteno regarded the resulting Union constitution as a delicately balanced compromise between the views of the new state's four component units and believed that any late attempt to change it might only wreck the whole edifice. Granted, however, the enormity of the South African tragedy that ensued and in the light of his own father's legacy, there is a strong feeling, not least in the Molteno family itself, that he should have tried, even if failure was the inevitable result. As it was, his only hope was that the injustice done to native Africans would, in time, be recognised and remedied by the Union parliament itself. Yet 'the liberal hope ... that the less repressive official racial attitude of the Cape would somehow miraculously convert the hard-line Transvaal and Orange Free State was soon shown to be a brittle illusion'.³⁹

Molteno's 1906 election manifesto had extolled the virtues of all three components of the famous mantra 'Peace, Retrenchment and Reform'.⁴⁰ But his understanding of 'Reform' was more limited than might be imagined. If he had been at all influenced by the doctrines of the 'New Liberalism', he had no vision of the sort of far-reaching (and expensive) programme of social legislation from which the incoming Liberal government would in time reap lasting fame. Granted his earlier warnings about government expenditure and debt, this could not have been otherwise. The notion of an interventionist state – 'big government' – was alien to Molteno's fundamental beliefs. Nonetheless, as his parliamentary career opened, he did have one clear objective in the realm of social reform. Given the nature of his rural constituency and advised by his farming friend Matthew Wallace, prominent in the Scottish Chamber of Agriculture, Molteno recognised the need for land reform in both England and Scotland. The problems he confronted have a curiously contemporary resonance. Two-thirds of Scotland's landmass, he noted, were held by just 330 individuals; 70 landowners controlled 9 million acres – an area the size of Denmark.⁴¹ Molteno felt strongly about rural depopulation and was convinced that existing laws were serving to denude the countryside of its people. Taking care to master the details of his subject, he worked closely with Sinclair, the Scottish

Secretary, on the Small Landholders (Scotland) Bill. It sought to encourage the formation of small agricultural holdings and was, his biographer suggests, his 'most constructive work in Parliament'.⁴² The measure enjoyed only limited support inside the cabinet and initially fell victim to the Unionist-dominated House of Lords, but was finally passed in 1911, coming into operation the following year. 'It is doubtful whether the bill would ever have got through but for Percy Molteno'.⁴³

Molteno visited South Africa between November 1907 and March 1908. Shortly after his return, Campbell-Bannerman, in poor health for some time, resigned and soon died. He was succeeded by the chancellor of the exchequer, Herbert Asquith. At one level it was an exceptionally smooth transition. Asquith's elevation was uncontested, and he had in practice filled the premier's role for some months before formally taking office. Later, however, it became apparent that the succession marked a significant shift in the balance of power within the governing party, a shift compounded four years later when illness compelled Loreburn's resignation from the Woolsack. Molteno, who regarded the loss of Campbell-Bannerman as 'irreparable',⁴⁴ came to believe that it was now a Liberal Imperialist government presiding over the country's fortunes.⁴⁵ In later years, particularly as his attention turned increasingly to foreign affairs, he felt Campbell-Bannerman's absence with growing intensity: 'Those who are living on his legacies have none of his courage or good sense'.⁴⁶

For all that, Molteno was, initially, prepared to give the new prime minister the benefit of the doubt. Asquith's management of the national finances – ending borrowing for the capital account and reducing the national debt by £47 million – had won Molteno's approval. Of his last (1908) budget he wrote: 'Yes, the Budget is splendid, and is another illustration of our getting by Free Trade all Mr Chamberlain's promised blessings without any of his taxes'.⁴⁷ Molteno was pleased that expenditure had been controlled, leaving Asquith sufficient funds to initiate a scheme of old age pensions. Thereafter, however, his verdicts steadily cooled. His attitude to the first budget of the new chancellor, David Lloyd George's famous 'People's Budget' of 1909, was at best equivocal. While offering general support, he worried about the impact upon the agricultural community. Increased death duties would, he feared, hit the landowning class, 'the financiers of the rural districts', who would have difficulty meeting such charges out of their available

If he had been at all influenced by the doctrines of the 'New Liberalism', he had no vision of the sort of far-reaching (and expensive) programme of social legislation from which the incoming Liberal government would in time reap lasting fame. Granted his earlier warnings about government expenditure and debt, this could not have been otherwise. The notion of an interventionist state – 'big government' – was alien to Molteno's fundamental beliefs.

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resources. More broadly, the budget ‘appears ... to abandon economy as a principle entirely, which I regard as very serious’.⁴⁸ But at least the budget, or more accurately its rejection by the Unionist-dominated House of Lords, brought the simmering question of the upper chamber’s veto power to the forefront of the political agenda. Granted that the Small Landholders (Scotland) Bill had twice suffered at the hands of the unelected House, this was a matter upon which Molteno felt strongly, as an earlier letter to his brother makes clear: ‘It will be impossible to keep up the spirits of our Party if we allow the Lords question to get into a backwater. We have got to act so as to make it the dominant question.’⁴⁹ He wanted to take up reform proposals which Campbell-Bannerman had brought forward in 1907 and he raised the matter directly with Asquith’s private secretary, Vaughan Nash.

The Lords question helped precipitate two general elections during 1910. Molteno’s address for the January contest concluded in familiar terms: ‘I am entirely against militarism and aggression, and I believe that Free Trade, Peace and Goodwill among Nations, with retrenchment and reform at home, will confer the greatest blessings upon our country.’⁵⁰ Molteno was confident about the electoral outcome:

I find the electors are realising the immense issues at stake. We must once and for all clear the pass of an obstruction which has too long barred our way to progress and which has crippled the development and delayed the bringing of happiness to the people of this country.⁵¹

In the event, the Liberals retained their grip on power, but only with the support of Labour and Irish Nationalist MPs. The party’s massive majority from 1906 disappeared and in Dumfriesshire Molteno saw a significant reduction in his own majority.⁵² Nonetheless, he believed that the government now had a mandate to act against the Lords. ‘The feeling in Scotland’, he told the prime minister, was ‘that the issue has been Peers versus People, and the People having won the Peers must be dealt with as the first matter.’⁵³ Asquith, however, was more cautious. The result of the January poll ensured that their Lordships would now have to pass the previous year’s Finance Bill; but action against the upper chamber required a further appeal to the electorate and, in practice, assurances from the monarch that he would be prepared, if necessary, to create sufficient new Liberal peers to ensure the passage of any necessary legislation

through the upper chamber itself. Accordingly, after a constitutional conference failed to resolve the matter by inter-party agreement, the country went to the polls again in December. Though several seats changed hands, the overall result was almost a carbon copy of the January contest; Molteno’s majority remained virtually unchanged.⁵⁴ Finally, in the torridly hot summer of 1911 and with a political temperature to match, the celebrated Parliament Act reached the statute book, abolishing the Lords’ right of veto altogether over financial measures and substituting a delaying power of up to two years for all other legislation.

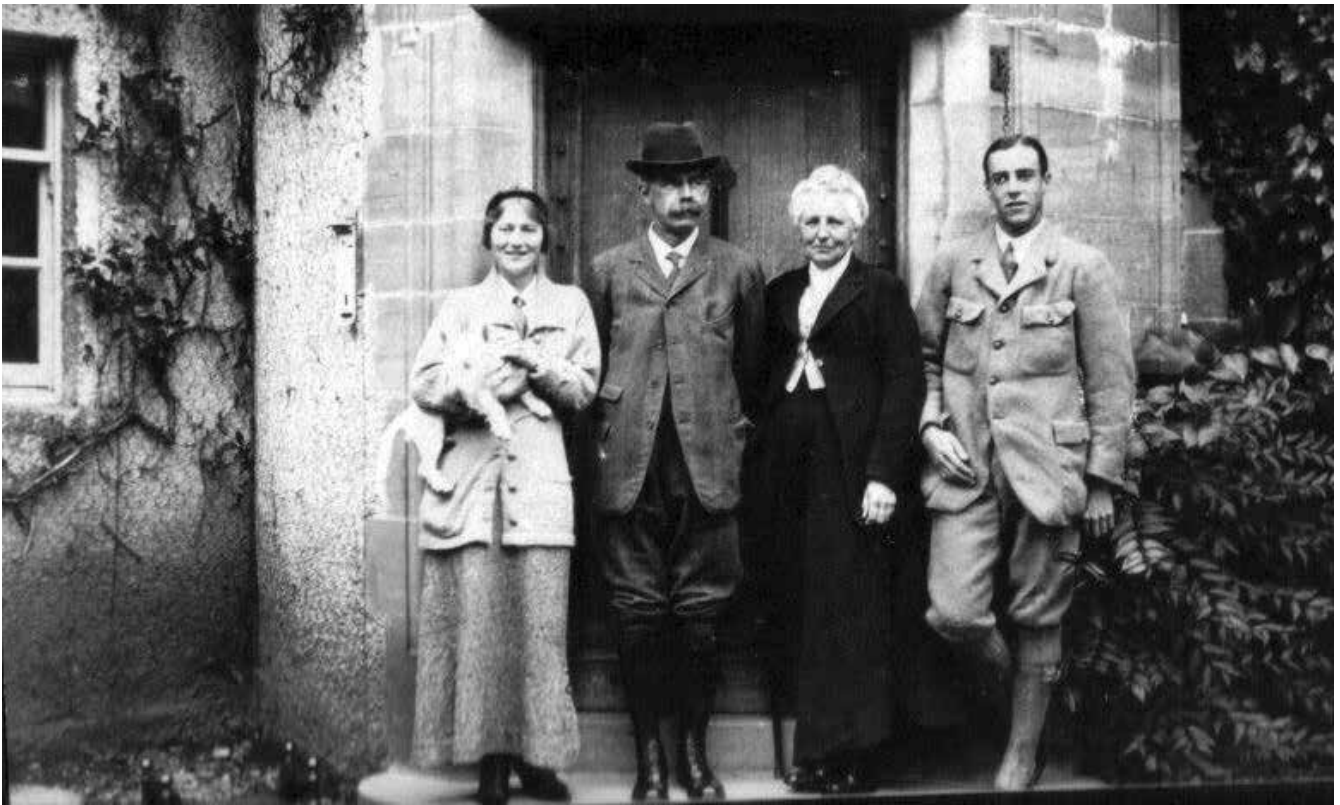
Pre-occupied by South African affairs, Molteno played little part in the parliamentary passage of the National Insurance Bill of 1911–12, but he was annoyed by Lloyd George’s haste in pushing through a complicated piece of legislation without permitting proper scrutiny by the Commons. The use of the guillotine facilitated the passage of 470 government amendments without debate. Lloyd George’s ‘profound mistake’ had, he believed, ‘impaired our position in the country more than anything we have done since 1906’.⁵⁵

By this time Molteno’s focus on domestic affairs was accompanied by a growing concern over the drift of British foreign policy under the stewardship of Sir Edward Grey. A turning point came with Lloyd George’s Mansion House speech of July 1911, in which the chancellor, at the height of the Agadir crisis, warned Germany that Britain would not pursue a ‘peace at any price’ policy if her own vital interests were in play. Molteno was enraged by the content of Lloyd George’s speech and also by the fact that it was delivered outside parliament:

It was very wrong to make an appeal to the public at an after-dinner speech, and to make a threat of war in that manner to a proud nation like Germany ... The way we have been treated is really very wrong. We have left the Government a free hand, and this sort of thing is done. I shall do anything I can to improve our relations with Germany.⁵⁶

Though never close to the chancellor in the past, he now felt ‘a great loss of confidence’ in him for the way his speech had embittered Britain’s relations with Germany.⁵⁷ It was another moment at which the cabinet’s internal balance appeared to tilt. Whatever his faults from Molteno’s perspective, Lloyd George had the pedigree of a prominent ‘pro-Boer’, still seen as a key radical within the administration. Now,

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Percy Molteno and his wife Elizabeth (Bessie) at their silver wedding, with daughter Margaret and son Jervis; Glen Lyon, Scotland, September 1914 (photo: <https://www.moltenofamily.net>)

that assessment might need revision. By late 1911 a group of like-minded Liberals, including Molteno, began to coalesce in the Liberal Foreign Affairs Committee – ‘internal opposition’ would be too strong a phrase – to monitor the government’s activities.⁵⁸ Critics were becoming suspicious that undeclared commitments towards France had been entered into, but kept from the purview of the House of Commons. It seems possible that Molteno was briefed on the reality of the situation by his old friend, Lord Loreburn, who had led opposition to Grey’s foreign policy at two stormy cabinet meetings in November 1911, when the full cabinet became aware for the first time of the extent of Anglo-French entanglement dating back to military conversations in 1906.

If Molteno believed that the cherished goal of ‘peace’ was under threat as a direct result of his own government’s conduct, ‘retrenchment’ too was in constant need of defence. When Lloyd George did manage to produce a budget surplus of £6.5 million for the fiscal year 1911–12, Molteno took steps, including a direct approach to the prime minister, to ensure that, as the law required, this was used to repay government debt. In the field of armaments expenditure, these two pillars of Gladstonian rectitude were closely related. Matters almost inevitably came to a head when Winston Churchill became first lord of the admiralty in October 1911, for he now ‘embraced the cause of naval might as eagerly as he had

[once] retrenchment’.⁵⁹ In the Commons debate on naval estimates in July 1912, Molteno joined around three dozen like-minded Liberals in support of Arthur Ponsonby’s motion, asking the Committee of Imperial Defence to move a reduction. Molteno believed that increased expenditure would be unnecessary if the government were to pursue a different foreign policy: ‘Before we enter upon this endless vista of expenditure we should ask the Prime Minister whether the door is closed to every other means of bringing about a better state of things, whether there are not other methods of reducing armaments and bringing about better relations.’⁶⁰

The following year, when Churchill proposed a further large addition to naval expenditure, Molteno determined to bring pressure on the government. At the end of November 1913 he and Gordon Harvey, MP for Rochdale, issued a statement to about 100 Liberal MPs judged to be in broad sympathy with their views: ‘In the present state of international relations on the Continent [which seemed, despite localised war in the Balkans, more peaceful than for some years] no nation will dare attack us unless provoked beyond endurance; they all desire our friendship.’⁶¹ On 17 December, Molteno led a delegation of radical critics to Downing Street to inform the prime minister of the backbench opposition to Churchill’s proposals. Asquith was emollient but non-committal. He ‘stated that he sympathised fully with

the anxiety ... at the growth of expenditure and that the matter was receiving earnest and constant attention'.⁶² A meeting of supportive MPs under Molteno's chairmanship in February 1914 resolved to place the following motion on the parliamentary order paper: 'That this House deplores the uninterrupted growth of expenditure on armaments and expresses its opinion that in existing conditions there should be no further increase beyond what is involved in present commitments.' Asquith, however, refused to make time for a parliamentary debate.⁶³ The best that Molteno could do was to question Churchill closely in the Commons and propose areas where savings could be made.

Molteno is perhaps best known to history for his participation in the so-called 'Holt Cave', a group of dissident MPs led by his friend, Richard Holt, the member for Hexham, and formed to oppose Lloyd George's 1914 budget. The Cave's purpose and impact have become a matter of some historiographical debate. The notion that it 'clearly defined the limits of the Party's tolerance for social and economic change' is certainly an exaggeration. Still less is it the case that 'the budget debacle of 1914 marked the end of the new Liberalism'.⁶⁴ Ian Packer has rightly suggested that the Cave's members 'represented a kaleidoscope of Liberal opinion and discontents' and that it was 'by no means a straightforward expression of anti-progressive sentiments'.⁶⁵ But in separating Molteno from Holt and stressing that the former's 'objections were specifically focused on spending on the Navy', he perhaps overstates his case.⁶⁶ Holt was also involved in efforts to curb naval expenditure and had joined Molteno's parliamentary campaign to reduce Churchill's estimates. As Dr Packer suggests, Molteno focused his parliamentary interventions on the technical point that Lloyd George was attempting to raise money before determining upon what it should be spent, 'a dangerous innovation in constitutional practice'.⁶⁷ But Molteno's concerns over rising public expenditure were broader than this and it pained him to have 'to listen to attacks from so-called Liberals upon Bright, Cobden and Gladstone because of their economy in public finance ... I certainly never thought I should live to see such a day'.⁶⁸

Holt's contemporary evaluation of his own activities is instructive. He described the Cave as 'really a combined remonstrance against the ill-considered and socialistic tendencies of the Government finance'. Furthermore, he named Molteno as one of the four 'principals' in the Cave in addition to himself. Holt's complaint that 'we have certainly travelled a long way

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from the old Liberal principle of "retrenchment" and I deeply regret it' was one with which Molteno would readily have agreed.⁶⁹ A few months earlier Molteno had spoken to the Scottish Secretary, Thomas McKinnon Wood, bemoaning the fact that the Treasury had become 'a spending department', ceasing to act as a 'guardian of the public purse'.⁷⁰ A humane man, Molteno was not opposed to social reform per se. Certainly, he preferred money to be spent on the welfare of the people rather than on a competitive expansion of armaments and had told his constituents in January 1914 that the arms race would mean 'good-bye to Social Reform'.⁷¹ But improving the lot of the people was never for Molteno the burning issue it was for some of his contemporaries. Not having grown up in Britain and, when he did settle there, living in a restricted and privileged social environment, he was less aware of the poverty and hardships endured by many of his fellow citizens than might otherwise have been the case. Furthermore, as had been apparent when old age pensions were introduced, he could never regard the cost of such measures with indifference. A balance had to be struck and Molteno was convinced that ministers, particularly Lloyd George, had misjudged it. At the height of the Cave's activities and with the government struggling over the parliamentary passage of the bill bringing home rule to Ireland, Molteno thought it 'deplorable that, when we are facing such a difficult problem as Home Rule for Ireland, we should be embarrassed by reckless and improvident finance, and by Ministers like Lloyd George and Churchill playing for their own hands'.⁷² Small wonder that Asquith wrote to his young confidante (and probable lover) Venetia Stanley that the chancellor attributed 'all the trouble to the "Radical millionaires" i.e. Mond, Molteno, de Forest & Co'.⁷³

In such troubled times Molteno could – or so he thought – take comfort from the international situation. As recently as the end of October 1913 he had told his constituents that he had it on good authority that 'our relations with Germany had become most cordial'.⁷⁴ The crisis of July 1914 took Molteno – and most of the country – by surprise. The budget, even the possibility of civil war in Ireland, were suddenly relegated to the second order of political concerns. His task now was to avoid British participation in a potentially disastrous European conflict.

Though history tends to date the crisis which culminated in the outbreak of the First World War from the assassination of

the Austrian Archduke Franz-Ferdinand on 28 June 1914, it was not until the delivery of the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia, nearly a month later, that the enormity of the situation became apparent to Britain's ruling elite. Winston Churchill memorably described the scene when, on 24 July, Foreign Secretary Grey interrupted the cabinet discussion of the deadlocked situation in Ireland to read out the terms of the ultimatum.⁷⁵ Writing to his wife, Churchill declared: 'Europe is trembling on the verge of a general war. The Austrian ultimatum to Serbia being the most insolent document of its kind ever devised.'⁷⁶ For those seeking to prevent the ultimate catastrophe of British involvement in such a war, time was of the essence. As Molteno's biographer later recalled: 'A great many of us, with the support of Bryce⁷⁷ and Loreburn, worked very hard in the short week we had to keep Britain at peace.'⁷⁸

Molteno was at the heart of these efforts. He was one of eleven members of the Foreign Affairs Committee who met on 29 July to endorse a resolution calling upon Britain to act as honest broker in the developing situation in the Balkans, while itself maintaining a stance of strict neutrality.⁷⁹ But the radical dissidents understood that the crucial decisions would be taken inside the cabinet and believed that there were still, despite changes in the ministerial balance since 1908, sufficient numbers of their way of thinking to block British participation in the conflict. Indeed, as late as 29 July the colonial secretary, 'Loulou' Harcourt, was 'certain' he could take 'at least 9' cabinet colleagues with him in resigning.⁸⁰ On behalf of their colleagues, Molteno and Bryce separately visited Harcourt on 30 July. The latter recorded: 'Both s[ai]d they were confident in me and as long as I stayed in Cabinet they w[oul]d assume peace was assured.'⁸¹ It seemed possible that the government itself might collapse if any attempt were made to abandon Britain's neutrality, and Molteno was quick to congratulate John Burns, the president of the Board of Trade, who despatched a letter of resignation late on 2 August.⁸² He would have drawn further comfort had he known that, as late as 31 July, even the prime minister dismissed Serbia as 'a wild little State ... for which nobody has a good word, so badly has it behaved', adding that it 'deserved a thorough thrashing'.⁸³

But events moved rapidly over the first days of August, with France and Germany ordering general mobilisation and Germany declaring war on Russia. Meanwhile, the question of Belgian neutrality came into play. Now, wavering ministers were persuaded to stay their hands or,

in the case of John Simon and Lord Beauchamp, actually withdraw their resignations. On a stance of calculated ambiguity on Britain's part, reinforced by the recognition that the government's collapse would merely produce a Unionist replacement, united in its determination to declare war, Asquith held his querulous cabinet together, although the veteran Lord Morley did join Burns in returning to the backbenches.

As far as Liberal MPs were concerned, the crucial event was Grey's famous speech in the Commons on the afternoon of 3 August. It was a clever though somewhat contradictory statement, taking his audience, selectively, through the evolution of Anglo-French relations since 1906. For many MPs it was the first they had heard of the exchange of letters between Grey and the French ambassador, Paul Cambon, in 1912 or of the agreement of the two countries to concentrate their fleets in defined but separate waters, leaving Britain with responsibility for the Channel and North Sea and France the Mediterranean. Grey still stressed that Britain retained its free hand and was under no binding commitment to France. Skilfully, however, he posed the question of whether 'friendship' entailed obligation. It was up to 'every man [to] look into his own heart and construe the extent of the obligation for himself'. But, Grey asserted, if an enemy attacked France's undefended northern coast, 'we could not stand aside and see this going on practically within sight of our eyes ... looking on dispassionately doing nothing!' Only now did Grey reveal that in these circumstances he had, on the previous day, given Cambon a pledge of naval support. Reinforcing his argument with news of the imminent threat to Belgian neutrality, guaranteed by the Powers including Britain in 1839 – quoting from a Gladstone speech of 1870 must have been designed to appeal to Liberals of Molteno's persuasion – Grey concluded that remaining neutral would deprive Britain of respect in the international community and damage her fundamental interests.⁸⁴

'Interests and honour', writes Douglas Newton perceptively of Grey's speech, 'were carefully interleaved to the last.'⁸⁵ Grey's oratory changed many Liberal minds. But until recently too many historians⁸⁶ have followed misleading contemporary assessments to conclude that the foreign secretary had effectively put an end to radical dissent, allowing the political nation to enter the war united. Among contemporaries, Christopher Addison, Liberal MP for Hoxton, judged that Grey had 'satisfied all the House, with perhaps three or four exceptions, that we were compelled to participate'.⁸⁷

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A Liberal for All Seasons? Percy Alport Molteno, 1861–1937

Colonel Repington, the generally well-informed military correspondent of *The Times*, even suggested that Germany's ultimatum to Belgium overcame the 'whole spirit of "Gladstonian Liberalism"' which 'hated war like the plague' and enabled the entire country to enter 'the war wholly united and in a good cause'.⁸⁸ Similarly, Kate Courtney, sister of Beatrice Webb, concluded that 'the German violation of Belgian neutrality [which followed within hours of Grey's speech] was the rock on which all the anti-war feeling was shipwrecked'.⁸⁹

Yet perceptive observers noted some significant qualifications to this picture. The positive reception of Grey's speech owed much to the enthusiastic endorsement of Unionist MPs who, following post-1910 by-elections, now constituted the largest party in the House. Annan Bryce, Liberal MP for Inverness, suggested that during the course of the speech 'there was not one single cheer from this [Liberal] side of the House. The whole of the cheering came from the other side'.⁹⁰ Charles Trevelyan, who resigned from junior office at the Board of Education, confirmed that 'very few [Liberals] ... cheered at all, whatever they did later, while the Tories shouted with delight'.⁹¹ The voice of dissent had its chance to be heard when, with some reluctance, the Speaker agreed to an adjournment debate that evening. The Commons was now 'allowed a little shadow puppetry, giving the mere appearance of a democratic decision for war'.⁹² Before the debate opened, 22 members of the Foreign Affairs Committee, including Molteno, approved a resolution to be released to the press: 'After hearing Sir Edward Grey's statement [this meeting] is of opinion that no sufficient reason exists in present circumstances for Great Britain intervening in the War and most strongly urges His Majesty's Government to continue negotiations with Germany with a view to maintaining our neutrality'.⁹³

Sixteen radical Liberals spoke in the evening debate in support of peace and British non-intervention. Molteno's contribution was among the most trenchant and persuasive.

The government, he insisted, particularly a government that had come into power as one of peace, had 'no right to plunge this country into war for anything short of our own vital interests'. By reminding the House of the repeated assurances given, not only by Grey, but also the prime minister, that Britain was under no obligation to support France in war, he came close to questioning the honesty of the government's two leading ministers:

We are now told that our obligations, though not obligations of Treaty or of agreement, are so strong and so binding that we shall be compelled to take up arms in defence of France. I complain that we, who are supporters of His Majesty's Government, should have been led into this state of false security on this most vital and important question.

Furthermore, the decision for war should not be taken by a small group of ministers. Anticipating the call for the 'democratic control' of foreign policy that would grow over the ensuing years, Molteno complained:

This is a continuation of that old and disastrous system where a few men ... wielding the whole force of the State, make secret engagements and secret arrangements, carefully veiled from the knowledge of the people, who are as dumb cattle without a voice on the question.

Inevitably, Molteno looked to his pantheon of Liberal heroes to support his case. 'As to this horrid "balance of power"', he told the House, 'which one would have thought had been disposed of by the eloquence of Cobden and Bright, it would be absurd for me to say anything more where their voices have not succeeded.' The government must not 'abandon even the last shred of hope before we are committed to this frightful struggle'. But he worried that nothing would satisfy Grey short of war. 'That was the impression given to us by the language of the Foreign Secretary'.⁹⁴

It was, though, too late. In the absence of a German response to Britain's ultimatum, the two countries found themselves at war on 4 August. That war would be a watershed for Britain, for the Liberal Party and for Percy Molteno himself.

David Dutton contributes regularly to the Journal of Liberal History. He recently accepted a commission to write the history of the South of Scotland Lawn Tennis Championships. Part Two of this article will be published in Journal of Liberal History 115 (summer 2022).

- 1 For a helpful discussion of the problems of applying 'left' and 'right' designations in the context of Liberal politics, see the special issue of the *Journal of Liberal History* ('Liberals of the Right?'), 47 (Summer 2005), especially I. Packer, 'The Career of John Morley: From Left to Right?' pp. 16–21.
- 2 The Moltenos had come to prominence in the politics and society of Milan as long ago as the twelfth century.
- 3 Molteno wrote his father's biography, *The Life and Times of Sir John Charles Molteno* (London, 1900).
- 4 F. W. Hirst, *Man of Principle: The Life of Percy Alport Molteno* (unpublished biography), p. 131. The biography is available in galley proof form on the Molteno family website at www.moltenofamily.net/biographies/a-man-of-principle-the-life-of-percy-molteno-m-p-by-francis-hirst. Hirst never gave his work a title, but the one adopted by the Molteno family has been used in this article. Extracts from Molteno's letters and diaries appear by kind permission of Mr Robert Molteno, great nephew of Percy Molteno, who has also offered numerous helpful comments and suggestions, particularly in relation to Percy's family background.
- 5 Molteno to brother, James, 21 Dec. 1897, cited in Hirst, *Man of Principle*, p. 215.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 219.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 231.
- 8 For Chamberlain's involvement in the Raid and the subsequent Committee of Inquiry, see D. Judd, *Radical Joe: A Life of Joseph Chamberlain* (London, 1977), pp. 195–201 and J. S. Marais, *The Fall of Kruger's Republic* (Oxford, 1961), pp. 94–5.
- 9 *The Times* 10 Jul. 1899.

- 10 S. Koss, *The Anatomy of an Anti-war Movement: The Pro-Boers* (London, 1973), p. 4.
- 11 Molteno to sister, Betty, 4 Jul. 1899, cited in Hirst, *Man of Principle*, p. 232.
- 12 Molteno to Mrs Clark, Jul. 1899, cited in *ibid.*, p. 240.
- 13 Molteno to sister, Caroline, 17 Nov. 1899, cited in *ibid.*, p. 252.
- 14 Molteno to brother, Charlie, 23 Mar. 1900, cited in *ibid.*, p. 267.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 Molteno to ‘a friend’, 22 Jul. 1900, cited in *ibid.*, p. 272.
- 17 Molteno to brother, Charlie, 1 Jun. 1900, cited in *ibid.*, p. 271.
- 18 Molteno to ‘a friend’, 22 Jul. 1900, cited in *ibid.*, p. 272.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 275. In fact, ‘pro-Boer’ Liberals had performed less well than Liberal Imperialists; P. Readman, ‘The Conservative Party, Patriotism and British Politics: The Case of the General Election of 1900’, *Journal of British Studies* 40, 1 (2001), pp. 137–9.
- 20 Molteno to T. Wintringham, 22 Jan. 1901, cited in Hirst, *Man of Principle*, p. 283.
- 21 The speech is reproduced in D. Brack and T. Little (eds.), *Great Liberal Speeches* (London, 2001), pp. 211–14.
- 22 Sir Matthew Wallace cited in Hirst, *Man of Principle*, p. 312.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 314.
- 24 *Dumfries and Galloway Standard and Advertiser* (hereafter *Standard*) 8 Jun. 1904.
- 25 Hirst, *Man of Principle*, p. 314.
- 26 *Standard*, 3 Dec. 1904.
- 27 *Standard*, 10 Jan. 1906.
- 28 *Dumfries and Galloway Courier and Herald*, 17 Jan. 1906.
- 29 Full result: P. A. Molteno (Liberal) 4814; J. H. Balfour Browne (Unionist) 3431. For the election more generally, see A. K. Russell, *Liberal Landslide: The General Election of 1906* (Newton Abbot, 1973).
- 30 Reid’s elevation, ennobled as Lord Loreburn, to the Woolsack was one of Campbell-Bannerman’s most important appointments in terms of asserting his own authority and resisting a potential power grab by the leading Liberal Imperialists.
- 31 John Sinclair, formerly Campbell-Bannerman’s parliamentary private secretary, was now appointed Secretary for Scotland. Molteno had already befriended him, and his support proved important for Molteno’s plans.
- 32 Molteno to Sauer, 15 Jan. 1906 cited in Hirst, *Man of Principle*, p. 321.
- 33 Molteno to brother, Charlie, 25 Jan. 1906, cited in *ibid.*, p. 322.
- 34 Hansard, H.C. Debs. (series 5), vol. 162, col. 84.
- 35 K. Hancock, *Smuts: The Fields of Force* (Cambridge, 1968), p. 518.
- 36 N. Mansergh, *The Commonwealth Experience*, vol. 1 (London, 1982), p. 105.
- 37 *Ibid.*, p. 79.
- 38 *Ibid.*, p. 106.
- 39 D. Judd and P. Slinn, *The Evolution of the Modern Commonwealth 1902–80* (London, 1982), p. 26.
- 40 In 1859 John Bright had declared: ‘I am for “Peace, retrenchment and reform”, the watchword of the great Liberal party thirty years ago.’ The campaign of the Radical MP, Joseph Hume, in the 1820s against extravagant government expenditure had caused ‘retrenchment’ to be added to ‘peace and reform’. The phrase was used by Earl Grey in 1830 and again by Gladstone in 1880. R. B. McCallum, *The Liberal Party from Earl Grey to Asquith* (London, 1963), pp. 68–70.
- 41 Hirst, *Man of Principle*, p. 347.
- 42 *Ibid.*, p. 311.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 383. The passage, contents and subsequent history of the act are considered in L. Leneman, ‘Lowland Land Settlement in the Twentieth Century’, *Scottish Historical Review*, vol. lxxvii, no. 184 (1988).
- 44 Hirst, *Man of Principle*, p. 337.
- 45 It would be wrong to suggest that radical, non-interventionist Liberalism was now excluded from Asquith’s cabinet. As late as the crisis of July 1914, it seemed initially possible that up to half that body’s membership would oppose participation in war against Germany. But increasingly the key posts in the government were in Liberal Imperialist hands.
- 46 Hirst, *Man of Principle*, p. 375.
- 47 Molteno to constituent, 12 May 1908, cited in *ibid.*, p. 350.
- 48 *Ibid.*, p. 358.
- 49 Molteno to brother, Charlie, 6 Jan. 1909, cited in *ibid.*, p. 353.
- 50 *Ibid.*, p. 364.
- 51 Molteno to Merriman, Dec. 1909/Jan. 1910, cited in *ibid.*, p. 370. Molteno’s words clearly recall the ‘obstruction theory’, identified by some historians as the means by which nineteenth-century Liberal leaders, especially Gladstone, secured party unity behind campaigns designed to remove obstacles to further progress. See, in particular, D. A. Hamer, *Liberal Politics in the Age of Gladstone and Rosebery* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 134–5, 324–6.
- 52 Full result: P. A. Molteno (Liberal) 4666; W. Murray (Unionist) 4091. For the election more generally, see N. Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People: The General Elections of 1910* (London, 1972).
- 53 Molteno to Asquith, 7 Feb. 1910, cited in Hirst, *Man of Principle*, p. 366.
- 54 Full result: P. A. Molteno (Liberal) 4708; W. Murray (Unionist) 4146.
- 55 Molteno to Lord Channing (Liberal MP for Northamptonshire East, 1885–1910), 11 Oct. 1912, cited in Hirst, *Man of Principle*, p. 400.
- 56 Molteno to N. MacMillan, 11 Dec. 1911, cited in *ibid.*, p. 385.
- 57 *Ibid.*, 18 Dec. 1911, cited in *ibid.*, pp. 385–6.
- 58 Z. Steiner, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War* (London, 1977), p. 141.
- 59 T. Morgan, *Churchill: Young Man in a Hurry 1874–1915* (New York, 1982), p. 315.
- 60 Hansard, H.C. Debs. (series 5), vol. 41, cols. 1428–9.
- 61 Hirst, *Man of Principle*, p. 416.
- 62 S. Koss, *Sir John Brunner: Radical Plutocrat 1842–1919* (Cambridge, 1970), p. 264; *The Spectator*, vol. 111 (1913), p. 1066.
- 63 Hirst, *Man of Principle*, p. 419.
- 64 B. B. Gilbert, ‘David Lloyd George: The Reform of British Landholding and the Budget of 1914’, *Historical Journal*, xxi (1978), p. 141.
- 65 I. Packer, ‘The Liberal Cave and the 1914 Budget’, *English Historical Review*, 442 (1996), p. 621.
- 66 *Ibid.*, p. 631.
- 67 *Ibid.*, pp. 626, 631; Hirst, *Man of Principle*, p. 425.
- 68 Molteno to Provost Halliday, late Jul. 1914, cited in Hirst, *Man of Principle*, p. 427.
- 69 Liverpool Record Office, Holt MSS, 920 DUR 1/10, diary 19 Jul. 1914.
- 70 Molteno diary, 12 Feb. 1914, cited in Hirst, *Man of Principle*, p. 419.
- 71 *Ibid.*, p. 418.
- 72 Molteno to brother, Charlie, 8 Jul. 1914, cited in *ibid.*, p. 428.
- 73 M. and E. Brock (eds.), *H. H. Asquith: Letters to Venetia Stanley* (Oxford, 1985), p. 89. Alfred Mond was Liberal MP for

- 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

Report

Liberalism in the United States

Evening meeting, 6 July 2021, with Professor Helena Rosenblatt and James Traub; chair: Layla Moran MP

Report by **Neil Stockley**

THE MEETING'S CHAIR, Layla Moran opened the meeting by confessing to an 'insane fascination with American politics'. She also noted how different liberalism in the United States often seems from the British version. In America, she suggested, the word 'liberal' often seems to be used almost as an insult. The meeting sought to trace the origins and core beliefs of American liberalism from the colonial era, through its triumphs and crises in the twentieth century to more recent developments.

Helena Rosenblatt, professor of history at the Graduate Center, City University of New York, contested the very notion of an 'early American liberalism'. We are used to hearing that liberalism is an Anglo-American tradition, she said, with many people citing John Locke, J. S. Mill and Adam Smith as its 'deep English roots'. According to this familiar account, liberal ideas were transported to the American colonies during the Enlightenment and found a place in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. The new nation then set about exporting liberalism to the world. But this account, she was clear, was a 'complete myth'.

Professor Rosenblatt explained that liberalism first appeared in the early nineteenth century, in reaction to the French Revolution. The word 'liberalism' was coined in 1812 and its leading theorists were Madame de Stael and Benjamin Constant. They had four central concepts: the rule of law; civic equality; constitutional representative government; and individual rights, among which freedom of religion and of speech and assembly were most prominent.

Otherwise, she asserted, liberalism 'was never a codified set of principles, cast in stone'. The early liberals argued

over almost everything, Professor Rosenblatt said, including the merits of laissez faire, free market economics versus government intervention in economy, where they found no consensus. They also disagreed over who should have the vote and female suffrage. 'Liberalism was not one thing,' she maintained, 'it was contested from the very beginning, continued to be contested over its history and also evolved over time.'

This early liberalism was considered 'very French', she added, which many saw as dangerous, because it was 'so revolutionary'. In the early nineteenth century, liberalism was a pejorative word, which its opponents depicted as synonymous with atheism, anarchism, permissiveness and 'too much freedom'. Nineteenth century popes went so far as to call liberalism 'devil worship'. As a result, Madame de Stael and Constant avoided using the term. Nevertheless, this first, 'French moment' of liberalism lasted a few decades.

Professor Rosenblatt then described the second, 'German moment', which arrived in the middle of the nineteenth century. As urbanisation brought endemic poverty and disparities in wealth, a group of German political economists began to question whether laissez faire, free market ideas worked in practice. They advocated government intervention in the economy to alleviate unemployment, along with state provision of health, education and other social services. The Germans' contribution to liberalism had been largely forgotten following the two world wars, but it was nevertheless significant, Professor Rosenblatt argued, as their ideas were disseminated widely around the world, including to the United States. In Britain and elsewhere, self-described 'social liberals'

or 'liberal socialists' called for government action to increase 'the capacity' of poor people and 'enable them to be truly free'.

This last development was important because, as Professor Rosenblatt pointed out, the nineteenth century liberals were not democrats. Constant and de Stael, for instance, did not agree that women or poor people should have the vote, on the basis that they did not have sufficient income, the time, the property or the education to consider the common good. The 'social liberals', or 'New Liberals', responded that the state should act, to enable poor people to improve their material situation.

Others, who called themselves 'classical' or 'orthodox' liberals, rejected such thinking. They advocated a small state with little or no government intervention in the economy and on the latter point, became increasingly radical. The American philosopher John Dewey spoke of 'two streams of liberalism', with one favouring government intervention and social legislation and another advocating laissez faire economics.

The third moment, in the early twentieth century, was what Professor Rosenblatt called 'the Americanisation of liberalism'. As the United States also became more industrialised and urbanised, massive disparities in wealth and income developed. The Republican progressives, from 1912 onwards, and then the Wilsonian Democrats, after 1917, argued that government should take on a larger role in the economy and society. The latter group soon defined themselves as 'liberals'. A liberal approach to foreign policy also emerged. In his 1917 'peace with victory' speech, President Woodrow Wilson spoke 'for liberals and friends of humanism'. Later, he claimed that 'liberalism was the only thing that could save civilisation from chaos'.

The two streams of liberalism continued to exist in the United States. Herbert Hoover, who presided over the 1929 stock market crash and the onset of the Great Depression, claimed that his 'small government' policies represented true liberalism. Hoover resented the way his successor,

Franklin D. Roosevelt, described his own New Deal as a liberal programme. Hoover eventually conceded the argument, leaving FDR to become, as Professor Rosenblatt put it, 'an icon and embodiment of American interventionist liberalism'. When Henry A. Wallace nominated FDR for re-election at the 1944 Democratic National Convention, he used the word 'liberal' fifteen times to describe the president and called him 'the greatest liberal in the history of the United States'.

Even so, Professor Rosenblatt was clear that American liberalism, like that found in other countries, had no codified body of ideas. American liberals, she said, had at different times been pragmatic reformers, centrists and incrementalists as they faced new challenges. What they all had in common, she said, was 'a belief in progress, science, enlightenment, truth and an openness to different perspectives'.

Professor Rosenblatt concluded by discussing why liberalism was perceived as an Anglo-American tradition, with the French and German contributions largely forgotten, as well as being synonymous with individual rights and property rights. She pointed to the two world wars, when it was necessary to remind Americans why they were fighting and making sacrifices. The rationale needed to be as different as possible from Nazism and later, during the Cold War, liberalism had to be distinguished from any form of socialism.

Journalist and author James Traub picked up the story with a brisk account of post-FDR, post-Second World War American liberalism. He explained that the foundation in March 1947 of Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) by the historian Arthur Schlesinger, the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr and the labour official Walter Reuther as a liberal, anti-communist organisation marked the beginning of 'Cold War liberalism'.

Schlesinger's 1948 book, *The Vital Center*, became the movement's unofficial founding text. It sought to carve out a new space 'between the abyss of totalitarianism and the jungle of private enterprise' and warned that 'the wish for equality cannot allow us to

be beguiled by totalitarianism and the wish for individual liberty cannot allow us to descend into social Darwinism.' Schlesinger's central assertion was that communism was not an over-zealous version of socialism but a form of totalitarianism equal in evil to fascism. Communism was also much more dangerous, Schlesinger argued, because it appealed to 'romantic left-wing ideals of human equality and social justice'. The context for this anti-totalitarian liberalism, James Traub explained, was the growing appeal of communism to many intellectuals and artists, as shown by the rise of many leftist 'Popular Front' groups.

James Traub illustrated the story of Cold War liberalism using the political career of Hubert Humphrey, vice chair of the ADA and crusading, progressive mayor of Minneapolis in the mid-1940s. In breaking the communist stranglehold over the Minnesota Farmer Labor Party and forming a new party, he had already put Schlesinger's strategy into action. In early 1948, Humphrey, now a candidate for the US Senate, agreed to a request from the ADA leadership to champion a progressive civil rights platform, including anti-lynching and fair employment laws, at the forthcoming Democratic National Convention. The ADA saw civil rights as one of the unfinished moral issues that the New Deal had not addressed, because southern Democrats were so powerful in the Senate. They also recognised that Henry A. Wallace's newly founded Progressive Party, which had a strong civil rights platform, threatened to peel away liberal votes and allow the Republicans to win the presidential election.

Defying the party establishment, Humphrey 'gave the greatest speech of his life' in favour of the civil rights plank. He and his ADA colleagues won the vote, in part, James Traub explained because the big city bosses recognised that black voters, having migrated to the northern cities where their voting rights were not challenged, were now a crucial electoral bloc in key states such as New York, Pennsylvania and Illinois.

In civil rights, Cold War liberalism now had a defining issue that combined

its now-established commitment to social justice with an anti-communist crusade. James Traub argued that the Cold War was really a struggle of ideas which, Humphrey and his colleagues contended, the United States could only win by showing that 'democracy worked better'. Such was the key theme of Humphrey's speeches over the following decade.

James Traub stressed that post-war American liberalism differed from the 'free market' version in that it advocated both the market economy and 'social democracy'. The latter was exemplified by President Harry Truman's 'Fair Deal', which increased federal spending on health, education and housing. 'But what makes American liberalism so distinctive and what gives it both its heroic as well as tragic aspects is the way it's tangled up with the issues of race and the Cold War and thus America's place in this global struggle,' James Traub argued.

The Cold War liberals made little progress during the 1950s, however. Southerners in Congress continued to stymie civil rights bills and the public simply did not buy Humphrey's argument that America could prevail in the Cold War by proving its commitment to social justice at home. In other ways, James Traub suggested, liberalism almost became part of America's DNA during this prosperous decade. Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Republican president, accepted the New Deal and liberals mostly accepted the market economy, even if they sought to tame its worst excesses.

In 1961 John F. Kennedy became president, but he saw the civil rights crusade as 'a loser', James Traub said. Whilst he may have been something of a 'Fair Deal' liberal, Kennedy's main domestic issue was the promise of a tax cut. In any case, his real priority was foreign policy where Kennedy had 'a romantic vision of what prevailing against the Soviet Union would mean'. He introduced the Civil Rights Act in June 1963, but only after Americans had seen terrible violence in Birmingham, Alabama, when the local public safety commissioner, 'Bull' Connor, set dogs on peaceful demonstrators. James Traub argued forcefully that the

Report: Liberalism in the United States

protests and sacrifices of Martin Luther King and other civil rights activists, rather than Humphrey and his colleagues, were the decisive drivers in the passage of the Civil Rights Act, which Kennedy himself did little to promote.

James Traub recounted how the mid-1960s saw 'the second high point of liberalism' as Lyndon Johnson rolled out his 'Great Society'. Congress passed the Equal Opportunities Act, the Voting Rights Act, Medicare, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and Johnson set up programmes such as the Jobs Corps and Head Start. As Humphrey observed, liberals 'achieved in the 1960s the ADA resolutions of the 1950s'.

This new dawn of post-war American liberalism proved to be short-lived, however. James Traub recounted how, at the 1968 presidential election, Humphrey, 'the incarnation of liberalism', was not just defeated by Richard Nixon, but 'abandoned by the left, rejected by the ADA and despised by many people in the white working class'. He offered two explanations for this reversal of fortune.

First, the Great Society showed that paying targeted rather than universal benefits presents its proponents with great political difficulties. In making the case for the New Deal, FDR had been able to appeal to Americans' self-interest, James Traub recalled. Many of the benefits were targeted on unemployed people, but millions were out of work. In selling the Great Society, by contrast, LBJ had to appeal to 'their

conscience', arguing that after generations of neglect, the government now had to help poor people. Moreover, LBJ's war on poverty had what James Traub called 'an inevitable zero-sum aspect' as it involved spending billions of dollars 'to make whole the poor people who had unjustly suffered' that others had to pay for through their taxes. Liberals had to acknowledge that desegregating schools or housing disadvantaged some groups, he said.

James Traub did not exactly spell it out, but there was a racial element to these equations, as white working class and middle-class voters resented some of the programmes that catered mainly to African Americans. He recounted how Governor George Wallace, the Independent Party presidential candidate, told these core Democratic constituencies that the liberal elites were 'gouging you', while hardly ever mentioning race. Wallace also ran against the 'the sixties ... permissiveness ... the kids' and for 'law and order'. For many disenchanted voters, Humphrey came to symbolise these wedge issues, James Traub explained.

Second, he contended that 'the Vietnam War was fought in the name of Cold War liberalism'. The Kennedy and Johnson administrations tried to contain communism in Asia, as their predecessors had done elsewhere. The war also represented what James Traub called the liberals' 'romantic crusade', which was based on the belief that the United States could transform poor countries. Humphrey himself had even

suggested that the United States could establish a 'Great Society' in Asia. All this turned out to be, as James Traub put it very well, a 'tragic illusion'.

The question session started to explore the reasons why 'liberal' has become almost a swear word in American politics over recent decades. James Traub traced this development back to the Reagan era, as liberals sought out new ways of defining themselves, such as the word 'progressive'. I would have liked to have heard more discussion of the crisis of American liberalism in the 1970s and 1980s, and why Reagan's attacks proved so effective, but the Zoom account was suddenly and unexpectedly hijacked by party HQ. For most attendees, the meeting came to an abrupt end.

A few of us regrouped with the speakers, who were able to finish on a positive note. James Traub believed that liberalism was a set of processes to build a humane society and, even though it was always under attack, he believed that in Joe Biden, America now had the first true liberal in the White House since LBJ. Helena Rosenblatt argued that liberalism had re-invented itself before and needed to do so again, to confront new challenges, such as climate change, automation, data and the rise of China. Liberalism may have huge enemies, she said, but it was a 'fighting faith'.

Neil Stockley is a member of the Liberal Democrat History Group executive.

Think history

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We'd like to do more, but our activities are limited by the number of people involved in running the Group. We would be enormously grateful for help with: improving our website; helping with our presence at Liberal Democrat conferences; organising our meeting programme; publicising our activities, through social media and more traditional means; and running the organisation.

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



Reviews

To be a Liberal

Ian Dunt, *How to be a Liberal* (Canbury Press, 2020)

Review by **Michael Steed**

THIS BOOK IS a bold attempt. Ian Dunt sets out to tackle the current wave of authoritarian, nationalist and populist movements which have successfully dragged the political agenda in their direction, believing that the sword with which to slay the nationalist dragon is a better understanding of liberalism.

The result, it must be said, is something of a mishmash. At points he provides lively potted personal histories of key liberal thinkers, at times little essays on people, such as Oscar Wilde or George Orwell, who attract his interest, while much of the latter part of this lengthy book becomes a general tract for our populist times. Interspersed are skittish asides, from the many misjudgements of King Charles I to the misogyny of Napoleon (with Corsica wrongly identified as Sardinia). If one is to judge a book by the name on the spine. ‘How to be ...’ surely implies some sort of toolkit, or perhaps a busy campaigning Liberal’s guide to what they don’t have time to read themselves. Sadly, it fails to live up to any reasonable reading of its title.

Yet, Dunt offers some inspirational passages, manna for any liberal longing for relief from the illiberalism of so much contemporary political dialogue. His presentation of his key thesis to a Social Liberal Forum webinar in October 2020 was eloquent. Hopefully, he will continue to work at this subject, with hopefully a clearer focus on what he is seeking to achieve.

It is only fair, after this opening, to seek to set out what the book encompasses. It is, essentially, like Gaul, divided into three distinct parts.

The first third consists mainly of the four chapters which offer the potted history of liberal thought, via the contribution of four great thinkers:

René Descartes, John Locke, Benjamin Constant and John Stuart Mill – but, no, Mill’s great contribution is made secondary to that of his great love, Harriet Taylor. That reflects Dunt’s challenging approach, and his strong feminism. All his liberal heroes have interesting emotional and sexual lives, which interplay with how they interpret the world. The neat alternation of French and British writings is interrupted by chapter three (‘Awakening’) focusing on the Putney debates of 1647, which the later Tony Benn used to quote as a source of his inspiration. The history of political thought can be heavy with sources and often rather dry; Dunt’s version is certainly not that – footnote-free (like the whole book), he is not writing for an academic audience.

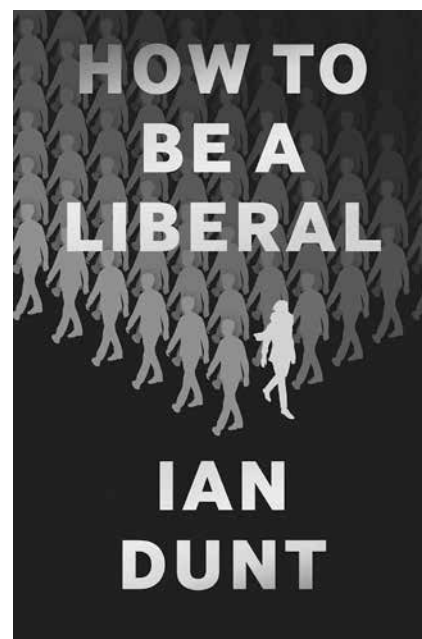
We then move to a middle section of four chapters, covering a long twentieth century, in which we see liberalism challenged, then complacently dominant. We start in France of 1894 chapter six (‘Death’), which opens with Dunt’s take on the Dreyfus affair. Dreyfus’s antisemitic persecutors lead to the Nazis (add Stalin to Hitler for balance, and so digress into the persecution of the Kulaks in Ukraine). The Second World War is quickly fought and won, and Dunt speeds on to set out the post-1945 New World Order.

On the whole this is presented as a triumph of liberalism. The problem is that when Dunt writes of ‘liberalism’ as an entity in this period, it is not so much those who follow a particular body of thought as the governing consensus of western democracies in the post-1945 period. This is what others have termed ‘welfare-capitalism’ or the social democratic consensus. Liberalism certainly contributed to welfare-capitalism, but so did (to be alphabetical) Christian democracy,

moderate conservatism, social democracy and socialism – indeed, all the main strands of political thought around in early twentieth-century Europe bar fascism and communism. So when Dunt writes of flaws or divisions in late twentieth-century ‘liberalism’, he is often including in the liberal family what others, who identify or campaigned more specifically as liberals, saw as illiberal.

We see this as Dunt’s long twentieth century ends with the 2008 crash. This part of his tale harks back to Friedrich Hayek. Hayek may indeed, if only as an outlier, belong in the pantheon of liberal thinkers but including Margaret Thatcher’s and Ronald Reagan’s economic policies as part of the liberal story (because they were Hayek-inspired) is rather stretching it. This colours his lengthy coverage of the small part of the twenty-first century we have so far witnessed – the last third of the book focuses very much on contemporary issues.

In this final part, he writes of the illiberal horrors epitomised by the likes of Orban (centre-stage), Trump or Dominic Cummings. We have switched gear. Dunt recognises the illiberal enemy: he is better at defining what he opposes – or, rather, abhors – than what he espouses. ‘Anti-truth’ unites the illiberal triptych of authoritarianism, nationalism and populism. Dunt’s story of liberal thought in previous centuries was highly selective,



picking out key writers to illustrate a complex story – a good simplifying device, if debatable in its selection (e.g. the Franco-Britishness). His discussion of current political debate falls into the opposite trap – he clearly felt the need to dip into all current arguments, so we glide around identity wars, mobilisation of left-behinds, refugees drowning in the Mediterranean, cultural appropriation, Mrs May’s parliamentary travails and so on. The chasing of ephemeral bandwagons and news stories is distracting, especially when he seems, perversely, to feel the need to put the blame on what he calls liberalism.

Thus on page 307, he claims to reveal liberalism’s ‘dirty secret’, the limitation of its concerns to ‘heterosexual white men’. He has entirely missed the role that British and South African Liberals (*sic*) played in the struggles against apartheid, to soak up instead more recent left-wing interpretations of race issues in North America. As for ‘heterosexual’, he harks back to Oscar and to E M Forster but ignores the pioneering role of the British Liberal Party (official support for homosexual law reform in the 1960s and a gay rights mini-manifesto at the 1979 general election). Instead, he sees the struggle for LGBT+ rights as emerging from events in North America and standpoint theory (‘one of the most important ideas in 20th-Century politics’, p. 319).

This impulse to blame liberalism for illiberalism haunts his discussion of nationalism and the popular desire for national identity. His chapter 8 (‘Belonging’) is predicated on the assumption that liberalism has a problem with people’s need for a sense of place or identity. Liberalism, like Catholicism, Islamism or socialism, is certainly universalist in its ambitions. Yet, as the old order of European states and rulers was disrupted by nationalisms in the nineteenth century, most nationalist movements from Norway to Italy saw themselves as liberal. Dunt appears to know nothing of this classic alliance between liberalism and nationalism. Nor is he aware of how political liberalism learned to survive and prosper in Britain during the last

third of the twentieth century through community politics.

What I read as Ian Dunt’s somewhat wobbly view of what constitutes liberalism relates to his central thesis: the internal tension between two rival strands of liberal thought. That tension between its egalitarian (or left) and individualist (or right) wings, or what I rather see as political versus economic liberals, is certainly part of the history of liberalism, and particularly central to the failure of the British Liberal Democrats to make a success of coalition between 2010 and 2015. Dunt says nothing of that: Cameron features, but not Clegg.

The way Dunt has chosen to tell the liberal (rather than Liberal) story reflects his view that weaknesses and division within liberalism have brought the western world to its present sad state, as well as providing the answer to what has gone so wrong. His ten-page summary of this last point at the end of the book would, if political pamphlets were still a main medium of debate, itself make a splendid pamphlet.

Michael Steed is now largely retired and is an honorary lecturer in politics at the University of Kent.

Women MPs, 1997–2019

Iain Dale and Jacqui Smith (eds.), *The Honourable Ladies, Vol. 2* (Biteback Publications, 2019)

Review by Caron Lindsay

THE SECOND VOLUME of Iain Dale and Jacqui Smith’s mini biographies of every woman MP ever elected to the House of Commons was published on 14 November 2019. Within a month it was completely out of date. An unexpected December general election returned a record 220 women MPs but removed our newly elected party leader. This means that five of our current MPs – Daisy Cooper, Munira Wilson, Wendy Chamberlain, Sarah Green and Helen Morgan – are not included.

The 866-page book’s 326 chapters cover every woman elected between May 1997 and August 2019, written by a wide range of academics, journalists, writers, politicians and political commentators. It was due to go to print in early August 2019. On Friday, 2 August, Jane Dodds was elected in the Brecon and Radnorshire by-election. I ended up being asked to write her profile and by the following Monday had completed the 400 words of the last chapter.

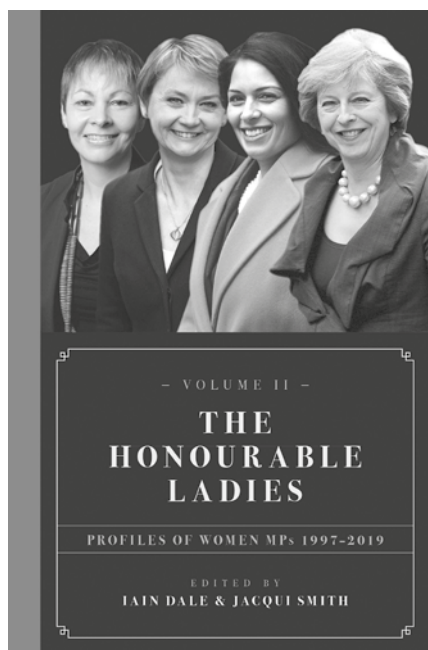
The format is the same as the first volume: biographical basics followed by a narrative and, often, a thoughtful

appraisal of the women’s time in parliament and beyond. I like the variations in style which are inevitable with so many contributors.

It’s hard to believe that Theresa May only entered Parliament in 1997. Conservative MP Tracey Crouch’s essay would be described as frank in diplomatic terms as she set out the former prime minister’s failure to manage Brexit. There is also a cracker of a quote from our Tim Farron who stood against her in Durham North-West in 1992.

Rachel Reeves’ portrait of her friend Jo Cox, the only female MP to be murdered, is poignant and sensitive. We associate her with issues of international development and Syria, but Reeves describes her work to get tackling loneliness on the political agenda.

The pairing of writer to subject is in some cases challenging and interesting. Lynne Featherstone, the architect of the same-sex marriage legislation, writes about Sarah Teather, who famously voted against the measure, although she recently expressed her regret for doing so. Lynne captures their disagreement with candour but



is generous about Sarah's contribution as a minister, particularly in standing up for her principles, which made her unpopular with Nick Clegg and Danny Alexander.

Lynne's own chapter is written by Layla Moran who reminds us that the idea of communal bikes for hire in London came from Lynne and that she was one of the first MPs to use the internet to engage people via her blog.

Olly Grender's bright and optimistic portrait of Jo Swinson, written just

days into her leadership is particularly heartbreaking to read when you know how that unfolded. Her achievements for gender equality, particularly shared parental leave, will bring lasting benefits for women. One thing she could have mentioned was Jo's prolific use of social media to engage. She was one of the first MPs to really take to tweeting from the Chamber.

Lib Dem peer Liz Barker made three contributions. Her profile of Jenny Tonge takes a balanced view of the controversies surrounding her and highlights the independent spirit that challenged the whips. Her second, of Sandra Gidley, reminds us of the heady days of her success in the Romsey by-election and also that Sandra campaigned for the medical use of cannabis. Although progress has been made, Christine Jardine and others continue to strive to get this prescribed for constituents. She also writes about Democratic Unionist, Emma Little-Pengelly, highlighting her tweeting a more supportive reference to Pride than you would expect from someone of her party.

We all remember Jo Swinson taking her baby Gabriel into the Commons Chamber and the events which led to proxy votes being given to MPs

on maternity leave, but she was not the first Lib Dem MP to make life easier for parents. Jenny Willott secured the right of breastfeeding mothers to use the 'nodding through' procedures to vote if they were on the parliamentary estate.

The women elected in 2015 take up 200 pages of profiles. Sadly, not one of them is for a Liberal Democrat. It was only after the snap general election of 2017 that Christine Jardine, Layla Moran and Wera Hobhouse joined the team and Jo Swinson was re-elected. Four more women joined us during that parliament: Sarah Wollaston, Heidi Allen and Luciana Berger via Change UK, and Antoinette Sandbach who lost the Conservative whip after voting against a no-deal Brexit.

Sarah Wollaston's independence of spirit struck me as very liberal. Journalist Jo Phillips writes of her refusal to become a parliamentary private secretary because it would mean that she would be bound to speak in favour of government policies.

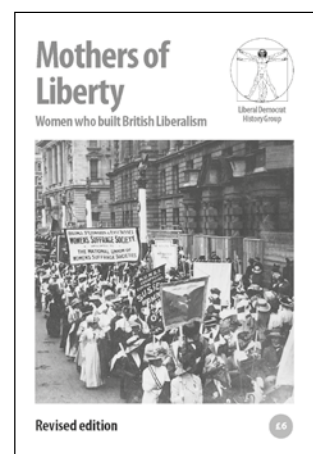
Luciana Berger's profile is dominated by the anti-Semitism she faced in the Labour Party, but I was a bit disappointed that her parliamentary work on issues such as food poverty, on

Mothers of Liberty Women who built British Liberalism

Even before they gained the right to vote and to stand for election, women played many key roles in the development of British Liberalism – as writers and thinkers, campaigners, political hostesses, organisers and, finally, as parliamentary candidates, MPs and peers.

The new edition of this booklet from the Liberal Democrat History Group contains the stories of the women who shaped British Liberalism – including Mary Wollstonecraft, Harriet Taylor Mill, the suffragist leader Millicent Garrett Fawcett, the first woman Liberal MP Margaret Wintringham, Violet Bonham Carter, Megan Lloyd George, Nancy Seear, Shirley Williams and many more. With a foreword by Jo Swinson.

Available at a special discounted rate for *Journal of Liberal History* subscribers: £5 instead of the normal £6. Order via our online shop (www.liberalhistory.org.uk/shop/) or by sending a cheque (to 'Liberal Democrat History Group') to LDHG, 54 Midmoor Road, London SW12 0EN (add £1.50 P&P).



Reviews

which she was persistent and right, was not mentioned.

Common themes throughout the book include modernising the House of Commons, various criticism of the appalling term 'Blair's Babes' used to describe the Labour MPs elected in 1997, and the many ways the political agenda has been changed by these women. Back in 1997, nobody really spoke about mental health and the idea of state-funded childcare was nowhere, yet now both are mainstream. Women like Wera Hobhouse and Maria Miller have changed the law on upskirt-ing and revenge porn. Jess Phillips's

sombre annual reading of the women who have been killed as a result of domestic abuse shows that there is so much more to do.

This volume and its predecessor are great for research purposes or simply to dip in and out of to find out about the diverse achievements of our women MPs. You can only scratch the surface in a book of this size, and it provides a good platform to find out more.

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

the Habermasian notion of the public sphere to our understanding of how titles were used in Preston. One strength of his work is its ability to recreate a palpable sense of how the newspaper was read in Preston by its 'walking tour' approach to locations in the town where newspapers would have been accessible. By piecing together evidence from a variety of archival material, including oral history recordings and diaries, Hobbs not only tells us who read the local newspapers being published in Preston, but where those papers were read – and how that changes in the period of study. The focus on locations is purposeful because 'the places of newspaper reading ... are concrete evidence of the importance of newspapers, including local newspapers, in people's lives; they were willing to rent, repurpose and even erect purpose-built structures where newspapers could be produced, bought, read and discussed' (p. 68). Thus we see increasingly grand locations for reading local newspapers spring up in a growing Preston alongside increasingly grand locations for the newspapers themselves, particularly after the abolition of compulsory Stamp Duty in 1855. This process also emphasises how communal newspaper reading was in the 1850s because newspapers were expensive and cost the equivalent of an hour's wage for a working man; Hobbs compares the

The local press and Victorian culture

Andrew Hobbs, *A Fleet Street in Every Town: The Provincial Press in England, 1855–1900* (Open Book Publishers, 2018)

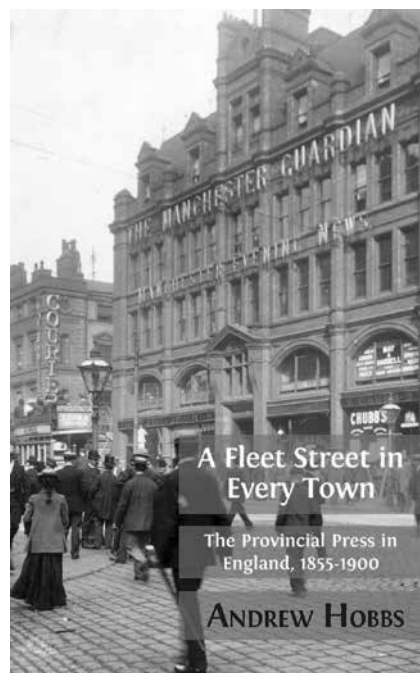
Review by Rachel Matthews

IT IS PERHAPS not surprising that the decline in the reach and scope of the local newspaper in recent years has sparked a resurgent interest in this section of the media, which has been so often passed over in favour of studies of the so-called 'national press'. This makes studies of the local newspaper comparatively rare, and studies of the local newspaper reader, such as this, even rarer. Hobbs's *A Fleet Street in every Town* is, therefore, a welcome addition to the literature on the local newspaper.

This work is ambitious in scope and aspiration, making claims, as it does, to the centrality of the local press to Victorian culture. This is the local newspaper as 'multi-dimensional; a material, cultural, economic and social phenomenon; it places newspapers in their most significant context, and it brings out the centrality of the newspapers to the nineteenth century reading experience' (p. 34.) Focusing on the case study of Preston, Lancashire, this book begins to reclaim the place of the local newspaper in the political and cultural lives of everyday people. While local titles have been too easily

dismissed as unimportant by scholars of the press, Hobbs is persuasive in the case he makes for the aggregate influence of the local newspaper, their ability to inform 'vibrant, argumentative' (p. 23) political participation at a local and national level and their role in creating a sense of place and local identity. Indeed, it is doubtful that the national press, as it is understood today, existed in Victorian England, with London papers circulating in the capital and south-east more than across the country as a whole. In doing so, Hobbs draws on an increasingly popular notion of a media 'ecosystem' to outline how the local newspaper fitted into the overall flow of news and information in Victorian England and to demonstrate its centrality to those flows.

His analysis shifts from the study of national politics as 'done' by powerful people, to concentrate on the significance of local debate in the construction of the national political agenda, by focusing on the reading and making of newspapers on a local level. In doing so, Hobbs makes claim for the continued relevance of



process with the way in which audiences might gather at the cinema to recapture the shared experience of local newspaper consumption.

Of course, this sharing also brought the opportunity to discuss and debate the content of the local newspaper, and Hobbs introduces the idea of Stanley Fish's 'interpretive communities' (pp. 27–29), which bring together readers and writers to create a shared understanding, to differentiate between the most active readers who contributed most to meaning making in relation to the local newspaper, perhaps extending

to writing letters, responding to issues in a title and also in competitor newspapers. In doing so these newspapers were part of the 'conversation' within Preston; the 'speakers' included the local newspapers, their readers and even the wider newspaper ecosystem. Significantly, also, part of this interpretive community was Anthony Hewitson, journalist for the *Preston Guardian* and later owner and editor of the *Preston Chronicle*, whose diaries are analysed in the course of this study. The period is one in which local newspapers were often owned and run for

political purpose and both Conservative and Liberal owners would offer financial backing for titles.¹ Hewitson, while not from Preston, was embedded in the community to the extent that his 'emotional geography' (p. 180) was centred on the town. He was also active in both local and constituency politics for the Liberal Party and he was among those Liberal owners of the press who perceived part of their role to be ensuring the availability of useful information to as many people as possible. These owners tended to include more coverage of parliamentary affairs

Research in Progress

If you can help any of the researchers listed below with sources, contacts, or any other information, please pass on details to them. Details of other research projects in progress should be sent to the Editor (see page 3) for inclusion here.

Sir Robert Torrens (1812–84)

I am looking for the papers of Sir Robert Torrens, who was elected to Parliament for the Borough of Cambridge in 1868, representing the Liberal Party. He lived for many years in South Australia, where he developed the land titles system that still bears his name. He moved to England in the 1860s, where he remained until his death (1884). Most of his papers from his 'Australian' period are held in Adelaide (South Australia). But I have been unable to find any repository of his 'UK' papers. Torrens was confident of his place in history, and (in my view) would have ensured that his UK papers and correspondence were preserved for posterity. Yet, despite considerable efforts, I have been unable to find them. *Peter Butt, Emeritus Professor of Law, University of Sydney; peter.butt@sydney.edu.au.*

Russell Johnston, 1932–2008

Scottish Liberal politics was dominated for over thirty years (1965–95 and beyond) by two figures: David Steel and Russell Johnston. Of the former, much has been written; of the latter, surprisingly little. I am therefore researching with a view to writing a biography of Russell. If any readers can help – with records, other written material or reminiscences – please let me know, either by email or post. *Sir Graham Watson, sirgrahamwatson@gmail.com; 9/3 Merchiston Park, Edinburgh EH10 4PW.*

The life of Professor Reginald W. Revans, 1907–2003

Any information anyone has on Revans' Liberal Party involvement would be most welcome. We are particularly keen to know when he joined the party and any involvement he may have had in campaigning issues. We know he was very interested in pacifism. Any information, oral history submissions, location of papers or references most welcome. *Dr Yury Boshyk, yury@gel-net.com; or Dr Cheryl Brook, cheryl.brook@port.ac.uk.*

Emlyn Hooson and the Welsh Liberal Party, 1962–79

The thesis will assess Hooson's influence on the Welsh Liberal Party during this period by paying particular attention to the organisation, policy process and electoral record under his leadership. PhD research at Cardiff University. *Nick Alderton; aldertonnk@cardiff.ac.uk.*

The emergence of the 'public service ethos'

Aims to analyse how self-interest and patronage was challenged by the advent of impartial inspectorates, public servants and local authorities in provincial Britain in the mid 19th century. Much work has been done on the emergence of a 'liberal culture' in the central civil service in Whitehall, but much work needs to be done on the motives, behaviour and mentalities of the newly reformed guardians of the poor, sanitary inspectors, factory and mines inspectors, education authorities, prison warders and the police. *Ian Cawood, Newman University College, Birmingham; i.cawood@newman.ac.uk.*

Liberal song and the Glee Club

Aiming to set out the history of Liberal song from its origins to the days of the Liberal Revue and Liberator Songbook. Looking to complete a song archive, the history of the early, informal conference Glee Clubs in the 1960s and 1970s, and all things related. *Gareth Epps; garethepps@gmail.com.*

Anarchism and Liberalism 1880–1980

Some anarchists were successfully influential in liberal networks, starting with many New Liberal networks around the beginning of the 20th Century. My thesis focuses on this earlier period but I am interested in anarchist influences on liberalism throughout the twentieth century. If any readers can help with informing me of their own personal experiences of anarchist ideas or works in liberal networks or relevant historical information they might have I would greatly appreciate it. *Shaun Pitt; shaunjpitt@gmail.com.*

The 1992 general election

The general election of 1992 was the first contested by the Liberal Democrats, who had been formed from the merger of the Liberal Party and the SDP just four years before. The new party entered the contest buoyed by parliamentary by-election victories, impressive local election results in 1991, and the high popularity of their leader, Paddy Ashdown.

The party fought an effective campaign, but the election result was disappointing: the Liberal Democrats finished with fewer seats and a lower share of the vote than the Liberal-SDP Alliance had achieved in 1987, and the Conservatives unexpectedly won a fourth term in office. Compared to the dark days of the post-merger period, however, when the party had come a distant fourth in the Euro elections in 1989, perhaps the result was not so bad.

Thirty years on, join **Alison Holmes** (1992 General Election campaign co-ordinator for the Liberal Democrats) and **Dennis Kavanagh** (Emeritus Professor of Politics, University of Liverpool and co-author of *The British General Election of 1992*) to discuss the 1992 general election and its significance. Chair: **Lord Don Foster** (first elected as MP for Bath in the 1992 election).

7.00pm, Monday 31 January (following the Liberal Democrat History Group AGM at 6.30pm)
Online meeting, on Zoom: register via the History Group website at www.liberalhistory.org.uk

and to donate more copies of their titles to public reading rooms. Hobbs argues that, far from being ‘banal’, Hewitson’s paper was ‘self-consciously three things at once – a commercial, cultural and political product’ (p. 212).

Hobbs maintains that the second half of the nineteenth century represents a ‘golden age’ (p. 382) for the local newspaper, able to thrive in an environment free from the compulsory Stamp Duty, but before an era of wide-spread consolidation in the newspaper market made it increasingly difficult for owner-editors like Hewitson to operate. The utility of Hobbs’s work is the way in which his forensic analysis locates titles in their wider cultural context and so begins to demand a broader understanding of the role of local newspapers in communities beyond simple conveyer of information. Yet this palpable connection with the community of Preston is possibly also the main weakness of *A Fleet Street in Every Town*; in this instance, Hobbs’s own ‘emotional geography’ seems largely centred on

Preston, working as he did in the town as a local reporter, albeit more than a century later than the period of study. There is no doubt that this insight has generated Hobbs’s granular approach to the Victorian local newspaper market, but the suggestion of a ‘golden age’ also implies that the writer is succumbing to nostalgia. He himself admits that ‘I now realise that I experienced Victorian local journalism myself, when I started work as a reporter in 1984, because later, when I began to study it, so much was already familiar to me’; but perhaps what Hobbs has done is to find the continuities between local newspaper practices in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. What if this was extended to the twenty-first century? The utility of history to the vexed question of the future of the local newspaper is its ability to tell us what changes, and what stays the same, thereby extrapolating understandings which may be obscured. If Hobbs could reflect more on this issue, then his work would be more readily applicable to arguments for the significance

of the local newspaper in contemporary England.

Dr Rachel Matthews is a historian of the local newspaper in England, with a specific focus on the utility of that approach to contemporary understandings of the industry. She is author of The History of the Provincial Press in England, published by Bloomsbury Academic. She is also a former local newspaper journalist. She is currently Associate Head of School – Research at Coventry University. <https://pureportal.coventry.ac.uk/en/persons/rachel-matthews>

1 In this volume, Hobbs disagrees with my own interpretation of the local newspaper as a primarily commercial product, citing political subsidy as one reason to oppose this reading. However, he also outlines the significance of advertising to the overall business model of Victorian local news and ephemerality of the market, marked as it was by the comings – and, significantly, goings – of unprofitable titles. He also agrees that political allegiance was itself part of the economic success of the local newspaper.