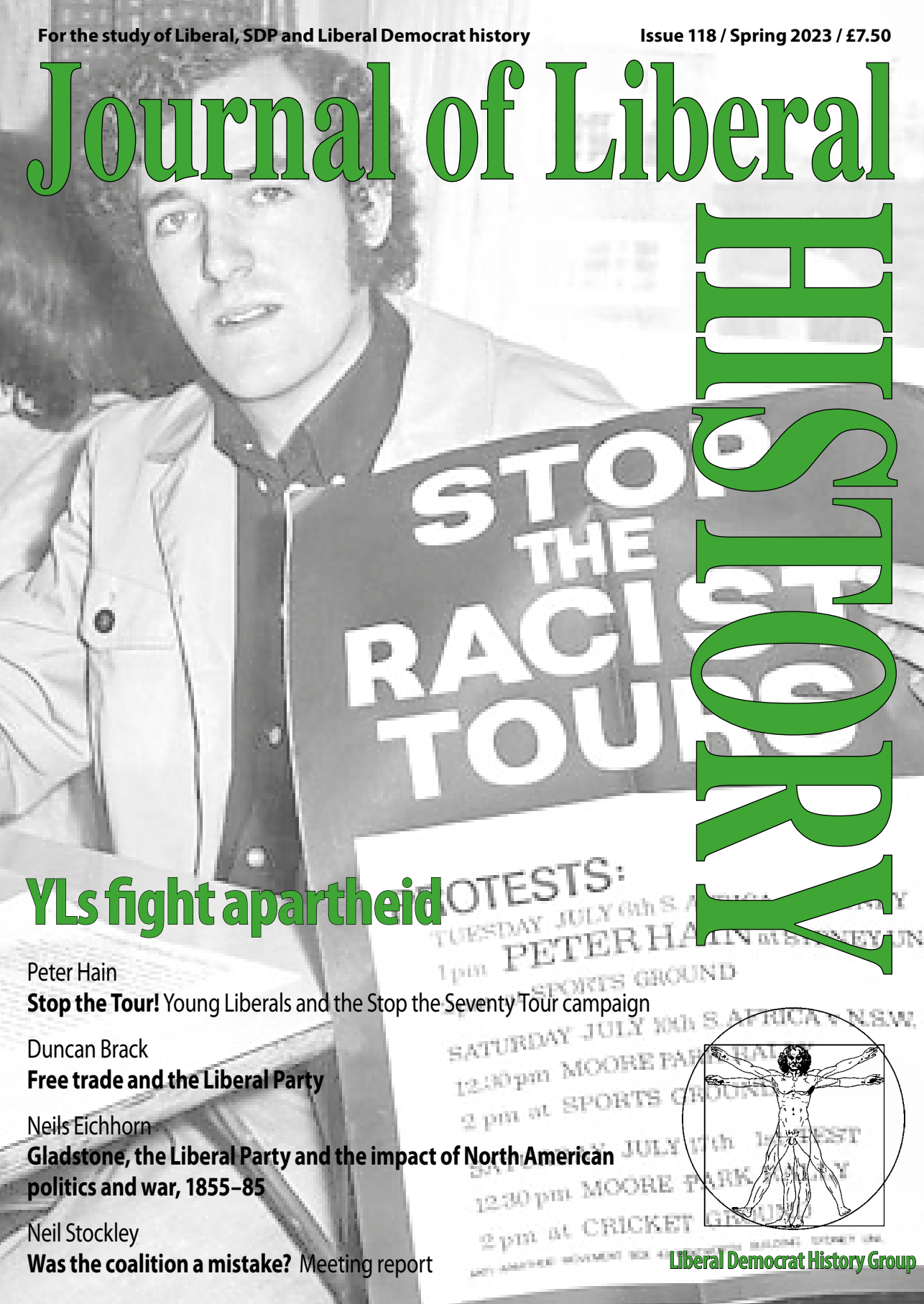
For the study of Liberal, SDP and Liberal Democrat history

Issue 118 / Spring 2023 / £7.50

Journal of Liberal History

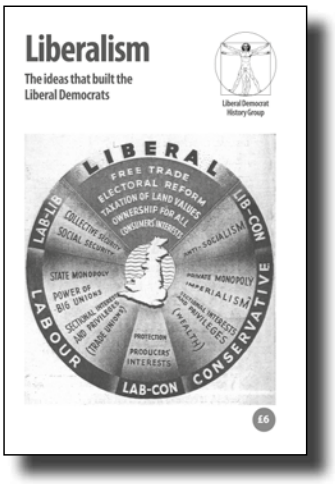


YLs fight apartheid

Liberal Democrat History Group

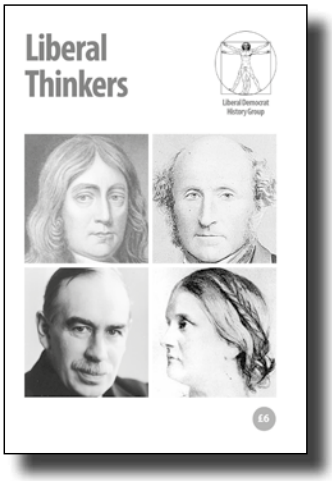
Booklets from the Liberal Democrat History Group

Liberalism
The ideas that built the Liberal Democrats



An accessible guide to the key ideas underlying Liberal Democrat beliefs, including entries on environmentalism, internationalism, the rule of law and community politics, together with contemporary and historic currents of thought, including social and economic liberalism, social democracy, Keynesianism, radicalism and more.

Price: £6. For *Journal of Liberal History* subscribers: £5. Order via our website, www.liberalhistory.org.uk; or by sending a cheque (to 'Liberal Democrat History Group') to LDHG, 54 Midmoor Road, London SW12 0EN (add £1.75 P&P).



Liberal Thinkers

Liberalism has been built on more than three centuries' work of political thinkers and writers and the aspirations of countless human beings who have fought for freedom, democracy, the rule of law and open and tolerant societies.

This History Group booklet is an accessible guide to the key thinkers associated with British Liberalism, including John Locke, Adam Smith, Mary Wollstonecraft, Richard Cobden, John Stuart Mill, L. T. Hobhouse, John Maynard Keynes, William Beveridge and many more. This second edition updates some of the entries in the first (2014) edition, and adds one new entry in place of one of the previous ones.

Price: £6. For *Journal of Liberal History* subscribers: £5. Order via our website, www.liberalhistory.org.uk; or by sending a cheque (to 'Liberal Democrat History Group') to LDHG, 54 Midmoor Road, London SW12 0EN (add £1.75 P&P).

Journal of Liberal History

Published quarterly by the Liberal Democrat History Group.

ISSN 1479-9642

Editor: **Duncan Brack**
Deputy Editors: **Tom Kiehl, Dr James Moore**
Assistant Editor: **Siobhan Vitelli**
Archive Sources Editor: **Dr J. Graham Jones**
Biographies Editor: **Mark Egan**
Reviews Editors: **Dr Eugenio Biagini, Dr Ian Cawood**
Contributing Editors: **Graham Lippiatt, Tony Little, Dr York Membery**

Patrons
Dr Eugenio Biagini; Professor Michael Freeden

Editorial Board
Dr Malcolm Baines; Dr Ian Cawood; Dr Matt Cole; Dr David Dutton; Peter Hellyer; Dr Alison Holmes; Dr J. Graham Jones; Dr Tudor Jones; Caron Lindsay; Tony Little; Professor Nancy LoPatin-Lummis; Michael Meadowcroft; Dr Tim Oliver; Dr Ian Packer; Dr John Powell; Dr Stéphanie Prévost; Jaime Reynolds; Dr Kathryn Rix; Dr Emma Sanderson-Nash; Dr Iain Sharpe; Dr Michael Steed; Dr Seth Thevoz; Lord Wallace of Saltaire

Editorial/Correspondence
Articles, book reviews and letters are invited. All articles submitted will be peer-reviewed. Contributions should be sent to **Duncan Brack** (Editor) at journal@liberalhistory.org.uk. All articles copyright © *Journal of Liberal History*. All rights reserved.

Subscriptions
An annual subscription costs £25 (£15 unwaged) (print *or* digital) or £45 (£30 unwaged) (print *plus* digital). Non-UK subscribers add £20.00 for print subscriptions. Institutional subscriptions (print plus digital) are £60.

Subscribe via www.liberalhistory.org.uk, or send a cheque (to 'Liberal Democrat History Group') to **Andrew Pinnock,** 10 Peaseland Close, Cleckheaton, West Yorkshire BD19 3HA; email: subscriptions@liberalhistory.org.uk.

Published by the **Liberal Democrat History Group**, 54 Midmoor Road, London SW12 0EN

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

May 2023

Issue 118: Spring 2023

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.

Subscribers' code for discounts in the History Group online shop: mbr924

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

Liberal History News
Spring 2023

Editorial

Welcome to the spring 2023 edition of the *Journal of Liberal History*, which now completes a year of publication in the new smaller format. We hope readers like the new size; we'll be giving you an opportunity to provide feedback through a reader survey soon.

This issue contains two main articles: Peter Hain's memories of his involvement, as a Young Liberal, in anti-apartheid campaigns, and an examination of the influence of North American politics on British Liberals in the second half of the nineteenth century. We also continue our new 'Introduction to Liberal History' series: primer articles on key periods, personalities, policies and approaches. Here we cover the topic of free trade. Suggestions for other topics are very welcome.

Finally, please note our appeal for help on page 6. The Liberal Democrat History Group needs a new organiser for our series of discussion meetings; if you think you can offer some time, please do get in touch .

Duncan Brack (Editor)

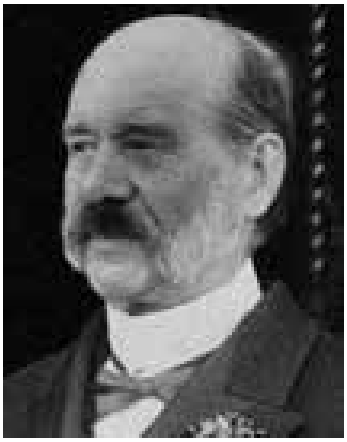
Frederick Horniman

Frederick Horniman, the nineteenth-century Liberal MP, hit the headlines last year – more than a century after his death – when the museum which bears his name became the first UK government-funded institution to agree to repatriate historically significant artefacts to their place of origin.

The Horniman Museum, which he founded, handed over a number of objects, including two sixteenth-century Benin bronze plaques ransacked from what is now Nigeria, to a representative of the country's museum service. Coincidentally, the Horniman was also named Museum of the Year by the Art Fund.

Despite never reaching the upper echelons of the Liberal Party, Horniman (1835–1906) was typical of a number of Liberal MPs of the era in being a businessman with a social conscience who believed in giving something back to society – an act reflected in his case in the bequeathing of his eclectic collection of artefacts from around the world to the country.

Born in Bridgwater, Somerset, the son of Quakers,



Frederick Horniman (1835–1906) in 1897 (© National Portrait Gallery, London); Emslie Horniman (1863–1932) in 1898

his father John invented a tea-packaging machine, and when the selling of tea in sealed packets proved profitable, he established the tea business Horniman & Co, and the family moved to Croydon.

On leaving school at 14 Frederick Horniman joined the increasingly successful family business, and on his father's retirement in 1868, he and his brother took over the family firm. By 1891 it was described by the St Stephen's Review as 'the biggest tea firm in the world'.

At the same time, the by now wealthy Horniman was travelling widely – to India and beyond – and collecting rare objects, as well as 'those illustrative of natural history, arts, and handicrafts from all over the world,' on an ever-increasing scale. By 1890 his collection filled his Surrey House, Forest Hill home so he opened it as a free museum to the public for three days a week.

Five years later, he became Liberal MP for Penryn, Falmouth and Flushing, representing it until his death in 1906. He was, by all accounts, an 'active' MP and helped secure the passage through Parliament of a bill abolishing the rector's rate which, he argued at a meeting in 1897, had been 'a noxious impost' on the borough since the reign of Charles II.

Outside politics, his great passion remained his collection. By 1897 electric lighting had been installed in Surrey House and the collections on display included birds, butterflies, Egyptian antiquities, coins, manuscripts, porcelain and oriental ethnography. Indeed it proved so popular with visitors that Horniman decided to demolish the existing museum and build a purpose-built new one in its place.

Four years later, the new Charles Harrison Townsend-designed building, consisting of two large galleries and a distinctive tower – which has been described as 'a masterpiece of English free-style architecture' – was completed at a cost of £40,000. Shortly afterwards it was presented, with the collections and 15 acres of gardens, to the London County Council which Horniman considered representative of 'the people of London'.

Horniman's son Emslie was not just an enthusiastic collector of arts and 'curiosities', like his father, but followed his lead politically too. In 1906 he was elected Liberal MP for Chelsea, though he lost it to the Conservatives in 1910. The following year he donated a public park – known ever since as Emslie Horniman's Pleasance – in Kensal Town (then part of Chelsea) to the London County Council. Furthermore, on his death in 1932 he gave £10,000 to the LCC to build an extension to the Horniman Museum.

Father and son may have lived during the British Empire's zenith and been men of their time, but one hopes that given their progressive views, had they been alive today they would have approved of the Horniman Museum's trailblazing actions in repatriating historically significant artefacts to their country of origin.

York Membery

We need a Meetings Organiser

The Liberal Democrat History Group is looking for a new organiser for our discussion meetings. The role involves:

- Identifying topics for our meetings – usually four a year, two at Liberal Democrat conferences and two in the National Liberal Club or, sometimes, Parliament.
- Identifying and approaching potential speakers.
- Organising the meetings – booking the venue, liaising with speakers, working with the *Journal* editor and our website coordinator to organise publicity.

You need to be an organised individual. A general knowledge of Liberal history will help, but you don't need to be an expert – you'll have plenty of help from the History Group's executive committee and meetings group.

Interested in learning more?, Contact the Editor, **Duncan Brack** (journal@liberalhistory.org.uk) – we would love to hear from you.

Richard Cobden: Manchester Citizen to 'International Man'

Richard Cobden (1804–65) is usually remembered as a leader of the Anti-Corn Law League, which campaigned for free trade in food during the 'hungry forties', but his public career embraced far more.

He was a supporter of educational reform, press freedom, and extension of the vote. He was a leading figure of the international peace movement, a critic of British foreign policy, and an opponent of slavery and imperialism. However, before he became the 'international man', Sussex-born Cobden was an active Manchester citizen: a contributor to local societies and leading campaigner behind the establishment of Manchester's first elected municipal council.

Richard Cobden (1804–65), ca. 1860 (© National Portrait Gallery, London)

Manchester Central Library is hosting an exhibition tracing Cobden's life, career, and legacy from 5 April until 30 June. It is part of a project led by Leeds Beckett University and the University of East Anglia and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, which is making thousands of Cobden's letters available online and using his correspondence to develop teaching materials around the theme of active citizenship.

Further details can be found at: https://manclibraries.blog/2023/03/27/richard-cobden-manchester-citizen-to-international-man/

Anthony Howe

Corrigendum

Our apologies for the slight error that crept into John Smithson's letter in *Journal of Liberal History* 117 (winter

Letters to the Editor

2022–23) – which itself was written to correct an error in the report of the History Group's meeting on 'The Two Davids: Owen versus Steel' in issue 115 (summer 2022)!

The letter stated that Simon Hughes MP summed up the debate on the amendment to the defence motion at the Liberal Assembly at Eastbourne in 1986. In fact he spoke in the middle of the debate; it was Michael Meadowcroft MP who summed up for the amendment.

Lincoln Liberal Club

I've just been to historic Lincoln for the weekend and was saddened to see the local Liberal Club boarded up and derelict (see photo).

Given its state of disrepair, the handsome red brick building dating back to the 1890s, must be under threat of demolition. I just wondered if anyone locally knows the state of play? Hopefully it can be saved.

York Membery

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**.

March

2 March 1852: Amidst fears that the Corn Laws may be reintroduced by the newly formed Conservative administration lead by Lord Derby, a meeting is held in Manchester to revive the Anti-Corn Law League. The meeting is addressed by Cobden, Bright and Milner-Gibson and £27,700 is raised within half an hour. In the House of Commons Bright repeatedly challenged Disraeli, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to state the government's policy on protectionism but the Chancellor, fearful of the fragility of the government's position, refused to oblige.

April

3 April 1908: Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman resigns as Liberal Prime Minister. After signing his resignation letter to King Edward VII, Campbell-Bannerman says to his private secretary Vaughan Nash, 'That's the last kick my dear fellow, I don't mind. I've been Prime Minister for longer than I deserve'..

May

11 May 1940: Churchill forms his all-party coalition government. Liberal leader Sir Archibald Sinclair becomes Secretary of State for Air. Other Liberals joining the government include Harcourt Johnstone (Parliamentary Secretary to the Overseas Trade Department), Gwilym Lloyd George (Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Trade) and Dingle Foot (Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Economic Warfare). Leader of the National Liberals, Sir John Simon, accepts a peerage and becomes Lord Chancellor. Lloyd George declines an invitation to join.

Apartheid

Peter Hain (Lord Hain) recalls his experiences in the Young Liberals fighting apartheid in the 1960s and '70s.

Stop The Tour!

My parents, Adelaine and Walter Hain, were anti-apartheid leaders in Pretoria of the Liberal Party of South Africa. By 1960, this was the only one-person-one-vote party left after the banning of Mandela's African National Congress (ANC) and other groups. Eventually, after being jailed and stripped of their civil rights, they and their four children were forced into exile in Britain in 1966.[1]

I was aged 16 and a year later followed my parents in joining the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM). The young Jeremy Thorpe often spoke at its rallies, joined by David Steel, its long-standing president. By early 1968, I gradually became more politically involved, via the Young Liberals – partly because of our connection to the South African Liberal Party and partly because the YLs were then a vibrant, irreverent force for radicalism. Miranda Timaeus, my age, Mike Wallace, an older trainee accountant (and years later Liberal councillor in Burgess Hill) set up the YL branch in Putney where we lived, and I ended up as chair, discovering a zest for organisation probably instilled by observing and helping my parents in Pretoria.

YL radical politics quickly took over my life, leading me into an exciting culture of left-wing ideas where I was in awe of the charismatic YL leaders – George Kiloh, Terry Lacey, Peter Hellyer, Hilary Wainwright, Phil Kelly and Louis Eaks. They were expert at attention-grabbing, attracting the Maoist label 'Red Guards' from the media. We YLs called for a 'cultural revolution' in the senior party and in Britain as a whole. We thought British politics could be transformed through our YL radicalism.

I was immersed in a ferment of new and radical ideas, shaped by the passionate debates in teach-ins, conferences, demonstrations, sit-ins and voracious reading of left-wing books and pamphlets. Politics was in my DNA from my Pretoria boyhood, but my socialist beliefs crystallised around 1968–69, the years of the Paris uprising, of student agitation throughout Europe and the US, of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, and of anti-Vietnam War protests. A 'new left' had emerged, iconoclastic and just as opposed to capitalism as to Stalinism: 'Neither Washington nor Moscow' was our slogan. We favoured 'bottom-up' socialism rather than 'top-down', popular participation not state bureaucracy, workers' control not nationalisation: these were the watchwords, and the more radical YLs like me described ourselves as 'libertarian socialists', distinguishing ourselves from both Soviet-style state socialism and free-market classical liberalism.

The YLs' energy and flair for publicity, together with its continual pamphleteering and campaigning, offered me a wonderful crash course in political education. From YL manuals I learnt how to draft press releases, deal with the media and organise. We supported militant, though non-violent, direct action where necessary, emulating the wave

Peter Hain arrested in Downing Street, 1969

of protest and civil-rights demonstrations in America and university student sit-ins in which some YLs were involved, such as in 1968 at Hornsey College of Art.[2]

In October 1968 I joined a large group of Young Liberals at the big anti-Vietnam War demonstration in Grosvenor Square, witnessing violent clashes between police and protesters determined to storm the US embassy. Central London was eerily boarded up as we marched from Victoria Embankment to Mayfair. Our excitement resonated in our chants: 'London, Paris and Berlin – we shall fight, we shall win!' and, attacking US President Johnson, 'Hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids have you killed today?'

Our YL banners were something of a curiosity to the many socialist and Marxist groups on the march, even though the YLs had been represented on its organising committee. Collectively we felt that Harold Wilson's government had not taken a tough enough stand against the war though, in retrospect, at least he did keep Britain out of it by refusing to send troops.

The campaign against apartheid

We YLs also felt that Wilson was not dealing firmly enough with the illegal rebellion by the white minority in Rhodesia. Their leader, Ian Smith, had made a Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in 1965 to maintain racist rule in that country. Jeremy Thorpe's rousing speech condemning UDI at the Liberal Assembly in 1966 had earned him the media label 'Bomber Thorpe'. At the following year's assembly, the party adopted a resolution on Southern Africa, proposed by YL International Officer Peter Hellyer and seconded by David Steel, firmly identifying both the party and the YLs with the anti-apartheid cause.

As apartheid moved up the political agenda, a number of leading YLs, headed by Douglas Marchant, early in 1968 formed the YL Southern Africa Commission (SAC), and I quickly came into contact through the SAC with national YL leaders. SAC affiliated directly to the AAM and subsequently, after a tense internal dispute, separated from the YLs, a decision I voted against, feeling emotionally distraught

at the clash with close colleagues, Marchant included.

As the only ex-South African involved, I gained some prominence, which brought me into close touch with AAM leaders such as Ethel de Keyser, Alan Brooks and Abdul Minty. By October, aged 18, I was elected to its national committee. One of my first activities was setting up SAC's 'Medical Aid for Southern Africa' appeal in 1968 to assist the ANC and other liberation movements. Many supporters of anti-apartheid organisations would not associate themselves with guerrilla activity but would back medical aid.

Miranda Timaeus and I hitchhiked over 200 miles to our first national YL conference, in Scarborough, April 1968. For me, the conference was exciting, as I met leadership figures I'd only heard or read about and was called to the rostrum to make a brief speech in favour of a resolution supporting the ANC's liberation struggle, the first time I had spoken to a large gathering. However, despite the radicalism of the YLs, the resolution was narrowly defeated after strong appeals by pacifists.

For me, violence was no academic matter: I had seen too much of it in South Africa, and my dad was vehement about it. But the predicament of those resisting apartheid convinced me that the ANC was justified in adopting guerrilla tactics. With all democratic and legal channels blocked to the ANC, I was persuaded by those such as Nelson Mandela who argued there was no alternative to an armed struggle, and I started advocating the cause of the ANC and its sister liberation groups fighting racist regimes in southern Africa.

However, there was a vital distinction between my support for the ANC's guerrilla struggle and support for 'terrorism'. The violence of guerrilla movements such as the ANC was directed against an oppressive state, whereas the violence of terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda or Islamic State, the IRA or ultra-right American bombers is directed indiscriminately against innocent bystanders. Although the distinction did sometimes become blurred, as on the few occasions when sabotage carried out by the ANC unintentionally caught bystanders, I believed that it nevertheless remained valid and an important foundation for building political solidarity.

A violent strategy by resistance movements can only be justified when, as with European countries invaded by Hitler during the Second World War or the more recent tyranny of apartheid, all other means have been exhausted with no viable alternative. In the debates that raged around the radical politics of that era, I argued that to deny people the right to resist such tyrannies violently was to deny them their humanity and to acquiesce in their oppression, adding that, when the crunch came, all the pacifist could do was to bear moral witness, dying bravely as the tanks rolled in.

I knew that international sport, whether the Springboks, the Olympics or a cricket tour, gripped the white nation like nothing else. Importantly, sport granted whites the international respectability and legitimacy they increasingly craved as the evil reality of apartheid began to be exposed by horrors such as the Sharpeville massacre.

Sports apartheid

Some activists saw anti-apartheid campaigning in sport as at best peripheral, at worst eccentric. However, I was of white South African stock, as sports mad as pretty well all were, with Afrikaners especially fanatical about rugby. I knew that international sport, whether the Springboks, the Olympics or a cricket tour, gripped the white nation like nothing else. Importantly, sport granted whites the international respectability and legitimacy they increasingly craved as the evil

reality of apartheid began to be exposed by horrors such as the Sharpeville massacre.

Moreover, it was easier to achieve success through practical protest against sports links than it was to secure sanctions by taking on the might of international capital or military alliances, although I also fervently advocated this course. Victories in sport were crucial during a period when internal resistance had been smashed and it was extremely hard to impose international economic and arms boycotts. Apartheid politics was in the very core of South African sport, beginning with schools, going up through clubs to provincial and ultimately national level. This racism had a long history. Krom Hendricks, a ferocious fast-bowler easily able to represent his country but of mixed blood, was excluded from doing so in 1894 by Cecil John Rhodes, then prime minister of the Cape Colony during Gladstone's Liberal government. Indeed racism, including in South African sport, was cemented under the British Empire, with apartheid after the Second World War being institutionally deepened rather than invented.[3]

The real game-changer came over Basil D'Oliveira, who unwittingly found himself at the centre of a major storm in 1968. Like Krom, a highly talented 'Coloured' (mixed-race) South African, he had been unable to play first-class cricket in his own country, let alone for it. So, in 1960, he had travelled from his native Cape Town to England with the assistance of legendary BBC cricket commentator John Arlott, a Liberal Party member.

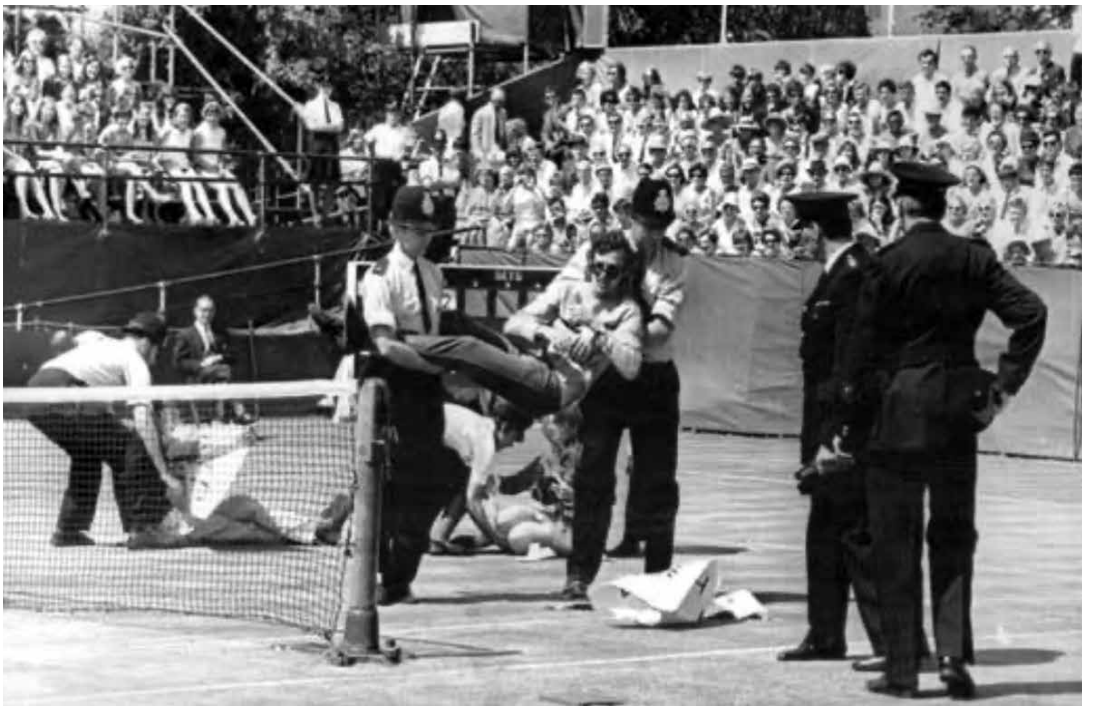
D'Oliveira rose meteorically to become an automatic choice for England from 1966, and on merit should have been selected for the 1968 cricket tour to South Africa. But following weeks of seedy manoeuvring and high drama, D'Oliveira was omitted from the touring party. And, as it transpired decades later, Doug Insole, the chairman of the selectors, had spoken to the South Africans beforehand, to be told that D'Oliveira would not be welcome. However, after weeks of raging controversy, D'Oliveira was reluctantly included. This led Prime Minister John Vorster to thunder preposterously at a gathering of the ruling party, 'It's not the England team. It's the team of the anti-apartheid movement.' He cancelled the tour: so much for 'keeping politics out of sport', the line ritually levelled at anti-apartheid campaigners like me.

Yet, despite the unprecedented veto of their tour, a few months later, in January 1969, the English cricket establishment, hunkered down from the world at its Lord's headquarters, brazenly announced that they would proceed with the scheduled 1970 cricket tour by a white South African team, as if the D'Oliveira affair had never happened. I was outraged at this development, and immediately got backing for a motion from the South-East England Federation of the NLYL pledging ourselves 'to take direct action to prevent scheduled matches from taking place unless the 1970 tour is cancelled'.

I had meanwhile been introduced to the exiles in London running the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee (SANROC). At their public meeting in London in May 1969, I proposed direct action to stop the cricket tour. The former Robben Island prisoner Dennis Brutus was in the chair and was very supportive, as was his colleague, Chris de Broglio. Since the 1950s, anti-apartheid sports protests in Britain had been largely symbolic: holding up banners outside stadiums, and these were patronisingly ignored. But direct action to physically stop sports tours could not be.

My inspiration came from student sit-ins such as that at Hornsey College of Art, worker occupations and the squatting of empty houses by the homeless. It was no longer enough simply to bear witness, and a new, more militant movement gathered momentum alongside the AAM, which maintained a discreet, sometimes uneasy, distance that I (and the rest of the YLs) respected as necessary to its more conventional role.

A tour by an all-white South African club side sponsored by a wealthy businessman, Wilf Isaacs, experienced the first-ever taste of direct



action against cricket anywhere, when, in the Essex town of Basildon in July 1969, I led a group of YLs onto the pitch. I had contacted a dozen or so beforehand and planned our intervention. Having tipped off journalists, we gathered as spectators at the small club ground. Play was interrupted for over ten minutes until police dragged us, limp, off the field, and this novel tactic certainly generated photographs and stories in the media.

Subsequent tour matches in Oxford and at the Oval saw even greater and more successful disruptions, organised by local AAM branches. That July, a Davis Cup tennis match was due to take place in Bristol between white South Africa and Britain. On the opening day I drove my parents' VW Beetle to Bristol with two fellow Putney YLs, Helen Tovey and Maree Pocklington. We planned our protest on the drive down, not knowing quite what to expect, tense and worried as we arrived and purchased tickets.

Taking our seats separately, we waited until I signalled and then ran onto the court, disrupting play for the first time in an international event with live television coverage and causing consternation, which was widely reported in the media. Later in the three-day tournament, play was further disrupted by an invasion, and flour bombs were thrown onto the court in protests organised by the Bristol Anti-Apartheid group.

Because sport was being targeted by direct action, the protests were highly newsworthy, with publicity for each encouraging others. Crucially, these events were taking place across the country and action could be initiated locally, instead of converging on London. This meant that the emerging movement was characterised by considerable local autonomy and spontaneity.

A network soon fell into place and, with active encouragement by Dennis Brutus and Chris de Broglio at SANROC, we decided to launch the Stop the Seventy Tour (STST) committee at a press conference in September 1969. It had broad support, from the AAM and United Nations Youth to the National Union of Students, Christian groups and young communists, Trotskyists and Young Liberals.

Davis Cup match, July 1969

Although I was only 19, I was pressed by Dennis Brutus, Chris de Broglio and others into a leadership role, and pledged 'mass demonstrations and disruptions throughout the 1970 cricket tour', confident that a national organisation would emerge, just as local activity had begun to gather pace in the previous few months. My very public threat was deliberately pitched to be newsworthy and therefore to capture the sense of interest needed to galvanise a big movement.

We needed to be quick, because I also promised demonstrations against the Springbok rugby tour, which, we had realised, rather belatedly, was due to start in six weeks' time. We aimed to use it as a dummy run to build a campaign capable of stopping the following summer's cricket tour. Looking back, I recall a fearless innocence, part exhilarating and part just getting on with what had to be done, determined to win a decisive battle against the evil of apartheid and convinced, perhaps more than anybody else, that we could achieve this through non-violent direct action.

That September, 1969, I spoke for the first time at the Liberal Party's annual conference in Brighton, urging support for direct action. I wasn't a natural or experienced orator, and it was rather nerve-racking. My photograph appeared in national newspapers, and I was now invited to do television interviews. Louis Eaks, by now Young Liberal national chair, helped me produce a folded YL broadsheet laying out the case against sports apartheid. London-based South African journalists had begun to take an increasing interest, rapidly elevating me to the status of a 'hate' figure in my old homeland, labelled 'Public Enemy Number One'.

On the back of growing excitement and publicity, the campaign took off and my parents' modest Putney flat, rented from an anti-apartheid friend, became the headquarters address and office. Volunteers turned up to help, sitting all over the living room, and my mother, chief activist before being jailed and banned in Pretoria, quickly assumed the crucial role of office secretary, fielding phone calls, coordinating information, helping with correspondence and banking donations. Dad came home from work to write leaflets and background briefs.

My public threats of direct action against the rugby tour and confident predictions that we could stop the cricket tour generated widespread attention. I found myself being regularly interviewed on national TV and radio, using the guidance and experience I had gained through the YLs to deal with the press on a daily basis, while also cycling daily to my lectures at London University, spending lunch breaks with homemade sandwiches in a call box taking phone calls from journalists and local organisers through messages relayed from my mother at home, where the phone rang incessantly.

A mass movement quickly grew, locally based, largely spontaneous, and usually focused around student unions, though involving local branches of the AAM, socialists, radicals, liberals, independents, trade unionists, vicars, priests and bishops. It was predominantly young, though by no means exclusively so, and took the Springbok rugby tour by storm. YLs were active throughout the growing movement, though by no means its mainstay, with senior party leaders sympathetic to the cause even if most were extremely uneasy-to-hostile about the direct-action tactics or 'lawbreaking', as our critics termed it.

The venue for the opening match, against Oxford University in October 1969, was switched after strong opposition from both the college authorities and the students, who sprayed weed killer on the ground and threatened to wreck the match. The new venue was kept secret to avoid demonstrations but Bob Trevor, a friendly Welsh sports journalist with the London *Evening News*, promised to phone us immediately the press were informed. At 9.30 p.m. the night before,

our phone rang and his familiar voice said: 'Twickenham, 3 p.m.'

I immediately phoned the Oxford Committee Against Apartheid and scores of organisers around the country. Coaches full of demonstrators were waiting; more than 1,000 rushed to the ground and we all purchased tickets, gathering together in the main stand. The match took place under siege, with pitch invasions and constant hostile chanting. Midway through the match, I spotted an opening in the police cordon and tried to jump over the spectator fence, but was immediately grabbed, carted out and unceremoniously dumped on the pavement. Sensationally, the mighty Springboks lost, clearly unnerved by the atmosphere.

Switching the first fixture from Oxford at the last minute had attracted front-page stories on the morning of the match and set the scene for the remaining games of the twenty-five-match tour. Local organisers realised that they were part of a mass national movement, and each of the matches saw demonstrations of varying sizes. Several of the biggest set-piece confrontations took place at the home of the Rugby Football Union, Twickenham, within easy reach of central London.

We were able to get 2,000 inside for the first scheduled match in late November, some 'disguised' by cutting their hair or wearing Springbok rosettes. There was a similar number outside. I was one of over a hundred demonstrators who managed to climb over the fence surrounding the pitch and outwit the police, though I was grabbed immediately. Play was stopped for over ten minutes while we were carried off and summarily ejected.

The week before, in Swansea, the most brutal confrontation of the entire tour had taken place, amid ugly scenes as police threw a hundred peacefully invading demonstrators back from the pitch and deliberately into the hands of 'stewards', who promptly handed out beatings. One demonstrator's jaw was broken, and he nearly lost an eye. Others, including women, were badly assaulted. Journalists from papers such as *The Times*, while not supportive of the demonstrations, condemned the 'viciousness' of the police and stewards.

In Northern Ireland (itself in turmoil following civil-rights protests, and sliding into barbaric violence), the Springbok match was cancelled for security reasons. Elsewhere, matches were made all-ticket and security inside was massively increased, with police standing shoulder to shoulder around the pitch, facing the spectators. In Cardiff all pretence at a normal rugby match was abandoned as barbed wire was put up around the field. In blue-rinse-conservative Bournemouth, the match had to be abandoned because the open ground there could not be defended.

Looking back half over a century later, we were possessed of a fearless idealism, undeterred by threats of violence, prosecution or in my case the very personal fury and threats I increasingly attracted. Morality was on our side, our cause was just, our militancy necessary, we were determined to win.

However, our tactics now changed. We knew that the STST campaign had been infiltrated. My home telephone number was tapped, a familiar though uncomfortable experience we thought had been left behind in Pretoria. So we established an 'inner group' of some of my most trusted and experienced activists, several older than me, who had years before participated in direct-action demonstrations through the Committee of 100, the militant offshoot of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. It was called the Special Action Group.

It booked Rosemary Chester, national secretary of the YLs, a vivacious young activist, into the Springbok team's London hotel in Park Lane (in 1972, she married the Liberal MP Archy Kirkwood, later Lord Kirkwood). Rosemary slipped through the hotel in the early hours, gumming up the players' door locks with solidifying agent, forcing them to

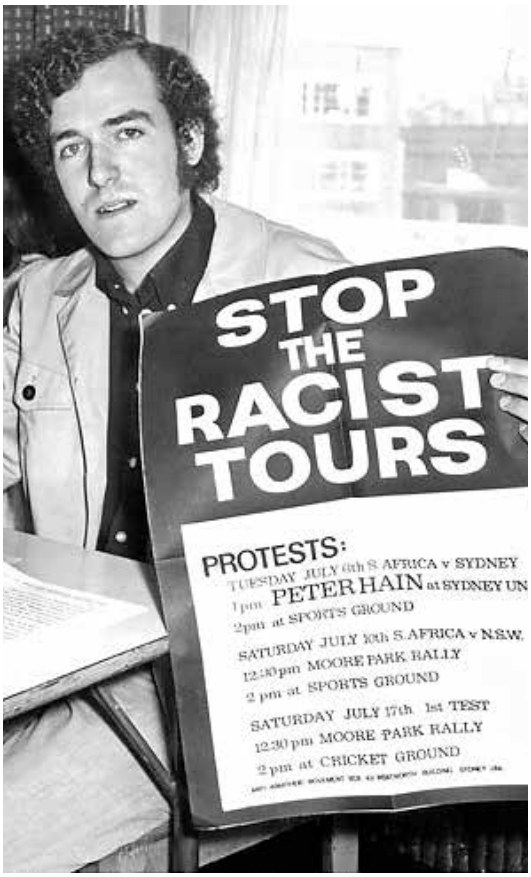
Twickenham, December 1969

break down the doors to get out on the morning of the pre-Christmas international match at Twickenham. Michael Deeny, an STST activist who worked in the City of London, turned up most unprotestor-like in a smart suit, politely told the driver of the team's coach waiting outside their London hotel that he was wanted inside, slipped into his seat, chained himself to the steering wheel and drove the coach off to crash it nearby as he was grappled by some of the Springbok players who had already boarded.

At the match, protesters evaded the heavy police cordon. Two of my Putney YL friends, Mike Findlay and Peter Twyman, had rehearsed their plans in our back garden, running and quickly attaching themselves to a broomstick with handcuffs we had purchased. Unlike other protesters, they were also deliberately dressed in jacket and tie. My South-African-accented aunt Josephine Stocks, then also a member of Putney Liberals, had purchased special ringside seats in front of the security cordon and, at a pre-arranged moment, Mike and Peter suddenly burst out, dodging to evade furious pursuers, one just managing to chain himself to the goalposts. Play was interrupted until he was cut free. Orange smoke pellets were also thrown among the players, which, as well as disrupting play, produced dramatic television and newspaper pictures.

At the last Twickenham match in late January 1970, we distributed packets to selected protesters (including me), containing powdered dye which turned black on contact with dampness. This was thrown onto the pitch so that the Springboks, rolling on the wet grass, were smeared with black stains, to chants from protesters on the terraces of 'Paint them black and send them back.'

Wherever the team went – resting, training or playing – it was under siege. Over the Christmas break, an STST activist ingeniously managed to attach an ANC flag to fly from the team's hotel flagpole, and it was reported that the players had taken a step inconceivable in the annals of Springbok history, voting to abort their tour and go home. However, the management, under political pressure, ordered them to stay, and the tour finally staggered to



an end with the players bitter and unsettled. For Vice-Captain Tommy Bedford, it proved a cathartic experience; within a year, he publicly stated that I should be listened to, not vilified, and praised our objectives. Although his response was a relatively isolated one in South Africa, it signalled the huge and destabilising impact of our campaign.

For the first time, the Springboks, accustomed to being lionised as perhaps the leading national rugby team in the world, had been treated as pariahs. They were no longer faced merely with what they habitually dismissed as the spluttering of 'misguided liberals and leftists' while they retreated to the warm hospitality of their rugby hosts. This was something of quite a different order. Anti-apartheid opponents had now shown a physical capacity to disrupt or stop the Springboks' ability to tour in the old way.

The white minority was apoplectic. The Afrikaans pro-government paper *Die Beeld* stated in an editorial:

> We have become accustomed to Britain becoming a haven for all sorts of undesirables from other countries. Nevertheless, it is degrading to see how a nation can allow itself to be dictated to by this bunch of left-wing, workshy, refugee long-hairs who in a society of any other country would be rejects.

The reaction among the black majority in South Africa was, however, diametrically different. After their release from prison many years later, both Nelson Mandela and Govan Mbeki told me that on Robben Island, news of the demonstrations transmitted to them by infuriated warders had been an enormous

Peter Hain in May 1970 and June 1971

morale boost. Mbeki said it had also brought a smile to their faces when they learnt that 'the son of the Hains' was leading the campaign.

Former South African Liberal Hugh Lewin was then in the fifth of his seven years in Pretoria Central and, like the Robben Islanders, had a news blackout imposed. He described how reports leaked through his warders, Afrikaner rugby fanatics to a man. First, they started swearing to each other about the '*betogers*' (demonstrators). Initially confused, Hugh began to piece it together and realised that something big was riling them. Gradually, the truth seeped out. He and his fellow 'politicals' were thrilled. Hugh claimed to have detected in the quality of the soup served up on a Saturday evening how successful the demonstrators had been in disrupting that afternoon's game: the poorer the soup, the more successful the demonstration.

Jonathan Steele of *The Guardian* reported on 5 March 1970:

> It is not hard to find South Africans who are delighted by the demonstrations against the Springboks. Go into Soweto … or into any other African township … and if you are not accompanied by a white South African, the masks fall. Eagerly they want the news confirmed. 'Is it true that they are having to use a thousand police to hold back the demonstrators today?' … Their views on the Springbok tour were straightforward. They were against it. And so were their neighbours, and anyone else you talked to.

The saturation coverage given to the campaign in the South African media reached parts of South African life that no other boycott campaign could, because most white South African men cared about sport first and foremost. The huge psychological and political impact was well illustrated by banner newspaper headlines – 'No Demonstrations!' – welcoming home a Springbok canoeing team in February 1970. The members of the team had arrived in Britain, canoed and left in virtual secrecy; we certainly never got to hear of it. But the team's captain was very clear about the reasons for such 'success' at an ecstatic homecoming reception when he exclaimed: 'Most demonstrators are hippies and hippies don't like water; that's why we weren't worried by them.'

Stopping the cricket tour

The rugby tour had provided the movement with a perfect springboard from which to plan direct action to stop the cricket tour, due to start at the beginning of May 1970. But opposition, coordinated by the AAM, went much wider. The churches, led by the former England cricket captain and Bishop of Woolwich, David Sheppard, urged cancellation. The Commonwealth Games, due to take place in Edinburgh that summer, also became an important lever. SANROC's international expertise and contacts were put to good use as it was privately pointed out to African and Asian countries that they would be in an intolerable position if they participated in the games at the same time as an apartheid cricket tour was under siege elsewhere in Britain.

Late in the night on 19 January 1970, demonstrators simultaneously raided fourteen of the seventeen county cricket club grounds. All were daubed with paint slogans. In addition, a small patch in the outfield of Glamorgan's Cardiff ground was dug up, and weed killer was sprayed on Warwickshire's Birmingham ground. Pre-planned telephone reports from each small, tight group poured in throughout the night to the Press Association news agency and to my home. In the morning the coordinated protest dominated the radio bulletins and television programmes, and there were screaming headlines with photos in the evening papers and the following day's national newspapers.

It was a devastating shock to the cricket authorities. The widespread strength of the

movement had been starkly revealed in an operation seemingly carried out with military precision. More than this, the spectre of a cricket tour collapsing amid damaged pitches and weed killer was conjured up and began to crystallise.

Speculation was rife about who was responsible. The AAM denied all knowledge. People inevitably accused the STST, believing it alone had the organisational capacity necessary to mount the raids. But I said (entirely accurately) that the STST national committee had not authorised or approved the action, thereby distancing us from it.

The only national figure to give the raids full backing was the YL national chairman, Louis Eaks, who attracted headlines and dominated the airwaves when he said that 'some Young Liberals had been involved.' This was accurate as far as it went, though his intervention provoked irritation among those involved who considered it opportunistic. It was in fact a covert operation by key STST activists in the clandestine Special Action Group, executed with meticulous planning, efficiency and impact.

However, the pressure on the Liberal Party leadership was intense, with angry denunciations by Conservatives and their newspaper supporters. The YLs, already notorious from their 'Red Guard' phase were viewed by many of their seniors as a liability, Louis even more than me. A few weeks earlier David Steel had braved hostility from constituents in his Scottish borders constituency, a centre of Scottish rugby, by joining pickets outside the match against the Springboks. He feared his stance as president of the AAM might oust him as the local MP, but in fact he clung on with a majority of 550 in June 1970.

Within weeks, 300 reels of barbed wire arrived at Lord's, and most county grounds introduced guard dogs and security. Then pressure on the cricket authorities intensified. West Indies cricket leaders angrily denounced the tour, and African, Asian and Caribbean countries talked of withdrawing from the Commonwealth Games. Gradually, a range of public bodies came out against the tour and there was talk of trade unions taking industrial action. Some Labour MPs, including the AAM's vice-chair, Peter Jackson, said they would join sit-down pitch invasions; North Cornwall Liberal MP John Pardoe seemed to endorse them too.

The chairman of the government-sponsored Community Relations Commission, Frank Cousins, told the home secretary that the tour would do 'untold damage' to race relations. On 12 February the Cricket Council called a press conference at Lord's. I managed to infiltrate it until spotted by officials, who stiffly ushered me out but not before I glimpsed an extraordinary sight: the pitch eerily surrounded by barbed wire, silhouetted in the snowy night. Lord's, the magisterial home of international cricket, looked for all the world like a concentration camp, symbolising the torment that had torn asunder this most dignified and graceful of games.

The Cricket Council issued a sombre statement explaining that the tour had been cut drastically to just twelve matches from its original twenty-eight and it was to be played on just eight grounds instead of the original twenty-two, with artificial all-weather pitches to be installed as an additional security precaution. It was a striking decision, on the one hand indicative of bunker-like obstinacy, on the other testimony to the growing power of the campaign. I denounced the decision, quipping that we might rename ourselves 'The Stop the Seventy *Half*-Tour campaign'.

However, the Conservative shadow attorney general, Sir Peter Rawlinson, attacked the home secretary, James Callaghan, for remaining 'neutral' and 'acknowledging the licence to riot'. Rawlinson also called for an injunction to be taken out against me, insisting that my public statements threatening to stop the tour constituted a direct incitement to illegal action. After cabinet documents were made public thirty years later (and, ironically, when I was a serving Labour government minister), it was also

revealed that ministers had discussed whether or not to prosecute me, with James Callaghan in favour and Tony Benn against. However, Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson then publicly opposed the tour for the first time.

The West Indian Campaign Against Apartheid Cricket was launched by leading black activist Jeff Crawford, whom I actively encouraged, because linking the campaign to racism in Britain added an important extra dimension. SANROC, through the Supreme Council for Sport in Africa, an agency of the Organisation of African Unity, consolidated the basis for a Commonwealth Games boycott. Trade unions came out against the tour. Television workers and journalists threatened a media blackout, and radio's 'voice of cricket', John Arlott, announced he would not do the ball-by-ball commentary for which he was internationally renowned. Mike Brearley (later to be one of England's most successful cricket captains) took the courageous step of speaking at STST's national conference on 7 March 1970.

Opposition was by now reaching right into the establishment. Leading public figures, including David Sheppard, formed the Fair Cricket Campaign (FCC), whose vice-chairman was the senior Conservative Sir Edward Boyle. Though explicitly committed to lawful, respectable methods and publicly opposed to the STST's tactics, the FCC was privately friendly. I was invited for a meeting with its leaders that I undertook not to disclose, arriving to an atmosphere that was courteous if edgy. We quickly found cordial common ground after I said I was relaxed if they felt it necessary to criticise our militancy, but that it would be best if we refrained from arguing publicly with each other since we had a common objective (to stop the tour) and a common enemy (apartheid). David Sheppard, especially, saw the sense of this immediately, and we agreed to stay in touch and keep our contacts confidential.

I saw the power in having a 'spectrum of protest': the STST's militancy; the AAM's conventional pressure-group role and its very effective links with the labour movement; SANROC's expert international diplomacy; and the FCC's impeccable respectability. There was now a very broadly based opposition to the tour, which I knew was essential for victory. It also reflected my antipathy to the debilitating sectarianism I had witnessed

over the previous couple of years of radical activism.

Although the STST's direct action powered the whole campaign, it could have been isolated without a great hinterland of broad public support, and I was at pains to stake out a non-sectarian position, refusing to criticise the more moderate groups and understanding their concerns about our militancy. This also enabled STST activists under my leadership to include Liberals as well as Trotskyists and communists, who normally wouldn't be seen under the same political umbrella. We could all sink our ideological differences under the banner of action to stop the tour.

By April, the campaign's momentum was still increasing. Prime Minister Harold Wilson went further, saying people 'should feel free to demonstrate against the tour', drawing fierce criticism from right-wing MPs and media, even though he was careful to criticise disruptive protests. The British Council of Churches also called for peaceful demonstrations. The Queen announced that neither she nor any member of the royal family would make the traditional visit to the Lord's test match and the South Africans would not receive the traditional invitation to Buckingham Palace.

Then, with the tour just six weeks away, all SANROC's patient lobbying paid off when the Supreme Council for Sport in Africa announced that thirteen African countries would definitely boycott the Commonwealth Games if the tour went ahead. Asian and Caribbean countries soon followed, raising the prospect of a whites-only games in Edinburgh running alongside a whites-only cricket tour. Sparked off by local direct action, the campaign had provoked an international diplomatic and political furore.

The AAM played a crucial organisational role, both as a participant in the STST and in its own right; an AAM poster caught the public's imagination and was widely published. Under the caption 'If you could see their national sport, you might be less keen to see their cricket', it showed a policeman beating defenceless black citizens in Cato Manor township outside Durban.

The STST went ahead with plans to blockade the team at Heathrow Airport. Thousands of tickets were being bought up by local groups (the matches had been made all-ticket). Secret plans were being executed by the Special Action Group, which consulted me privately throughout. Ingeniously, the group had discovered an old underground train tunnel running right underneath Lord's Cricket Ground, with a disused but still functional air shaft that could facilitate a dramatic entry onto the pitch, potentially by hundreds of activists.

Although much activity was coordinated nationally by the STST, local groups operated quite independently. Partly by design, to avoid acting like a conspiracy, this was mainly a product of the way the movement had evolved. There was also a considerable degree of individualistic autonomy in the campaign.

I opened our front door one day to be faced by two young, bright-eyed if somewhat zany model-aeroplane buffs, with excitable plans to buzz the pitch during play from their aunt's flat

which overlooked Lords. There were reports from all over the country of other novel protest methods. Some individuals were breeding armies of locusts, which they planned to let free on the turf. Others acquired small mirrors with which they intended to blind the batsmen. Newspapers had a field day reporting on such stories, and I was blamed for just about everything, regardless of whether or not I had any prior knowledge or involvement, and was increasingly the target of hate mail and threats to my safety or life.

The combination of sport, race and direct action had a toxic potency for many on the right in Middle England. For some, a cricket tour to England being stopped by 'radical agitators' seemed equivalent to the loss of empire, as revealed in letters sent by members to the MCC. One labelled me and the STST as a 'complete negation of all this country stands for'; another saw the MCC standing against us as 'the last bastion of what remains of the British way of life'.

But events were scrambling to a climax. Harold Wilson was about to call a general election, and there was a notable shift in opinion. For the first time, E. W. Swanton, cricket correspondent for the conservative *Daily Telegraph*, and Ted Dexter, former England captain and one-time Conservative Party parliamentary candidate, both urged cancellation. Finally, Home Secretary James Callaghan formally requested it. A hurried meeting was arranged at Lord's and, at long last, the tour was off, cricket's leaders bitterly complaining they had had no option but to accede to what they interpreted as a government instruction but was, in reality, a face-saving excuse for their humiliation.

From their sordid manoeuvrings over Basil D'Oliveira to their astonishing decision to proceed with the 1970 invitation to the white South Africans, even after their own tour there had been stopped by the apartheid government, they seemed to me impervious to the modern world or to any appeals for human rights and equal cricketing opportunities, a relic of Empire long gone.

'Hain stopped play' was the cricketing headline in a sympathetic feature in *The Guardian* . . . Yet would it have happened without the flamboyant, iconoclastic, radical leadership of the Young Liberals from the mid-1960s to early 1970s? I doubt it.

'Hain stopped play' was the cricketing headline in a sympathetic feature in *The Guardian*. But the right-wing press trumpeted darkly about 'anarchy', 'lawlessness' and the threat to England's civilisation. A campaign with a nine-month gestation in the minds of a few people had won with mass support, the STST being one of the very few British protest groups to have completely achieved its objectives, its success widely recognised as a decisive blow against apartheid.[4]

Yet would it have happened without the flamboyant, iconoclastic, radical leadership of the Young Liberals from the mid-1960s to early 1970s? I doubt it.

Labour peer since 2015, Young Liberal national chair 1971–73, Peter Hain joined the Labour Party in 1977, was Labour MP for Neath 1991–2015, and a Labour Minister for twelve years, seven in the cabinet. Also author of A Pretoria Boy: South Africa's 'Public Enemy Number One' *(Icon Books, 2021).*

1 See Peter Hain, *Ad & Wal: Values, duty, sacrifice in apartheid South Africa* (Biteback, 2014)

2 For an account by students and staff at the college, see *The Hornsey Affair* (Penguin. 1969)

3 See Peter Hain and André Odendaal, *Pitch Battles: Sport, racism and resistance* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2020)

4 See Peter Hain, *Don't Play with Apartheid: The background to the Stop the Seventy Tour Campaign* (Allen & Unwin, 1971)

Introduction to Liberal history

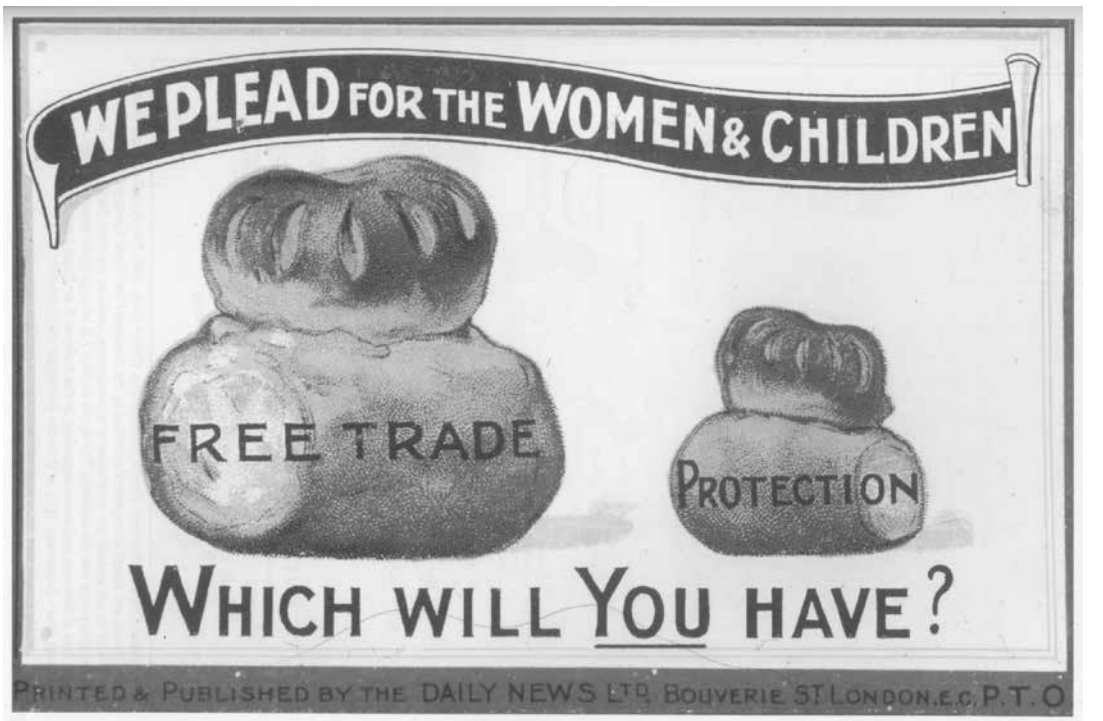
In our new series of short introductory articles, **Duncan Brack** analyses the importance of the cause of free trade to Liberals and Liberal governments.

Free Trade and the Liberal Party

The cause of 'free trade', the removal of barriers to international trade in goods and services, played an important part in British politics in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For much of its life, the fortunes of the Liberal Party were closely tied to the strength of popular feeling for free trade.

The theory of free trade was developed by the liberal economists Adam Smith and David Ricardo, in opposition to the mercantilist orthodoxy prevalent since the sixteenth century. Mercantilists held that the total volume of world trade was fixed, and it was therefore in nations' interests to dominate as great a share as possible, partly by tariffs (import duties) aimed at discouraging imports and partly by military action and colonial ventures designed to gain control of overseas markets. In contrast, Smith argued that free markets – international as well as domestic – would promote enterprise and growth, pointing to the trade-based prosperity of the ancient civilisations of Greece and Rome, and, in more recent times, of Bengal and China.

Ricardo took up Smith's concept of the specialisation of labour and developed the theory of comparative advantage, the idea that nations can maximise their output and wealth by specialising in the production of goods at which they are relatively most efficient, trading with other countries to realise the



gains from such specialisation. Again in contrast to prevailing orthodoxy, Ricardo held that even the unilateral removal of trade barriers by only one trading partner would benefit both parties.

In the early nineteenth century, the theory suggested that Britain should concentrate on manufactured goods, selling them abroad to purchase food. Also, as Smith pointed out, the country with the largest volume of world trade would naturally benefit most from open markets – and until the 1880s, Britain was that country. Furthermore, it had to trade to survive – it did not produce sufficient food to feed its rapidly growing population.

These arguments reached the political scene with the campaign to abolish the Corn Laws, the high duties on the import of grain established after the Napoleonic Wars in order to protect British agriculture from foreign competition, spearheaded by the Anti-Corn Law League in the 1840s. Manchester, the centre of the cotton industry, whose products were denied full access to overseas markets because of continental grain-growers' inability to export to Britain, became the headquarters of the League, and the radical Liberals Richard Cobden and John Bright were its leaders. The term 'Manchester School', coined by Benjamin Disraeli in 1846 to describe the League's leaders, came in time to stand for a free-trade classical liberal agenda which influenced liberals throughout Europe.

Employing lecturers, public meetings, pamphlets and direct electoral pressure, the League achieved its aim in 1846 when the Tory Prime Minister Robert Peel abolished the Corn Laws, splitting the Conservative Party and helping to drive some of his supporters (including W. E. Gladstone) towards the Liberals in the process. After Gladstone's budget of 1860, in what is generally recognised as the first government of the modern Liberal Party, only sixteen dutiable articles remained in the British tariff, compared to more than a thousand in 1852. Free trade became a national obsession: 'like parliamentary representation or ministerial responsibility', commented *The Times* in 1859, 'not so much a prevalent opinion as an article of national faith'. The subsequent growth in British exports, particularly of manufactured products, formed the basis of the long mid-Victorian economic boom.

As lower tariffs meant cheaper food, together with higher employment and bigger profits in manufacturing, the doctrine of free trade appealed to the growing manufacturing and business interests, precisely those groups most attracted to the nascent Liberal Party, and was opposed by the predominantly Tory land-owners whose estates produced the grain. Liberals, however, always saw much more than economic justification for open markets. Abolishing protection for agriculture was part of the process of tearing down the remnants of the feudal order and putting an end to the special treatment enjoyed by the land-owners. Cobden and the League argued, by extension, for an end to special treatment for any industry; commercial success should be the outcome of hard work and natural talent alone, not the protection of vested interests. As the Liberal leader Henry Campbell-Bannerman put it in 1903, 'We are Liberals. We believe in free trade because we believe in the capacity of our countrymen.'[1] The campaign for free trade formed an important part of the Liberal assault on economic, and therefore political, privilege. It was associated with the interests of the many against the few: the economic twin of democracy.[2]

The removal of tariff barriers also had benefits on the international scene. Liberals looked to free trade as the agency which would promote internationalism and end war. 'For the disbanding of great armies and the promotion of peace', wrote Bright, 'I rely on the abolition of tariffs, on the brotherhood of the nations resulting from free trade in

Election poster, 1906

the products of industry.'[3] Trade promoted interdependence and a sense of international community, building links between peoples and nations and rendering conflict less likely. The view that free trade was a step to universal peace was propagated by a wide number of associations linking trade and peace, such as the Workmen's Peace Association founded by William Randal Cremer (later a Liberal MP) in 1871.

Liberals did their best to spread the gospel of free trade to other countries. Cobden's tour of Europe in 1846–47 had some success in persuading governments to lower tariffs, particularly in smaller states, and later he became converted to the need for commercial treaties. The subsequent success of the Anglo-French treaty of 1860 in generating a whole rash of further treaties – the Cobden–Chevalier treaty network – encouraged some to foresee new forms of European cooperation, not simply over issues of war (through the 'Concert of Europe') but for purposes of trade and taxation, a new public law within the 'Commonwealth of Europe'.[4] In this can be discerned the origins of support for a European free trading area and, potentially, political union.

Free trade remained an article of Liberal faith for decades, even after British pre-eminence in world markets began to wane in the 1870s. As the trade balance grew steadily worse, pressure for protectionism mounted, most notably from the former radical leader Joseph Chamberlain, who had departed the Liberal Party in the split over Irish Home Rule in 1886. But free trade had too great a grip on the national mind, and Chamberlain's campaign for Imperial Preference (protectionism for domestic industry and preferences for exports from the self-governing dominions), launched in 1903, split the Conservative/Unionist Party (encouraging a wave of defections of Unionist free traders to the Liberals, including Winston Churchill) and reunited the Liberals after their post-Gladstonian divisions. Businessmen and manufacturers, fearing a trade war, returned to the Liberal fold they had deserted over the previous twenty years, and working-class support grew at the prospect of dearer food. Liberal candidates habitually appeared on election platforms with two loaves of bread, contrasting the Liberal 'big loaf' with the Tory 'little loaf' which would follow the imposition of grain duties. Coupled with the other failures of Balfour's ministry, the result was the Liberal landslide election victory of 1906.

In turn the abandonment of free trade in 1915, as a wartime necessity, helped undermine Liberal loyalties, not least because it was implemented by the coalition government with the Unionists that Asquith had formed earlier that year. Post-war, however, the cause of free trade helped bring Liberals together again. In 1923, Conservative Prime Minister Baldwin's sudden conversion to tariff reform and his decision to call an election on the issue, led to the reunification of the Liberal Party, split between its Asquith and Lloyd George wings after wartime divisions. The outcome was an interruption of the inter-war decline in Liberal fortunes, with an increase in seats, though not enough to escape third-party status.

The Liberal faith in free trade, however, wavered under the strains of the Great Depression. The downwards spiral of ever-higher tariffs and ever-lower trade that overtook the world in the wake of Wall Street's Great Crash of 1929 was impossible for any single country to resist. The coalition National Government's introduction of a general tariff in February 1932 produced the 'Agreement to Differ' under which the Liberal leader Herbert Samuel and his colleagues were permitted to remain in government even while opposing its policy; but the Ottawa Agreements entrenching protection within the Empire finally forced them out in September, ending the last peacetime participation in UK government

by the Liberal Party until 2010. Sir John Simon's Liberal National faction endorsed protection, stayed in government and eventually merged with the Conservatives.

The cause of free trade and the Liberal Party both seemed to be doomed. An opinion survey in 1942 showed that the only Liberal policy the public could identify was free trade, but that the vast majority had no idea what the party stood for; like free trade itself, it seemed a relic of a bygone age. The end of the Second World War, however, brought comprehensive change, with the creation of new international institutions aimed at avoiding a repeat of the disastrous trade wars of the 1930s. The Liberal John Maynard Keynes was partly responsible for the plans for an International Trade Organisation alongside the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Although the proposal was vetoed by the US, its 'provisional' substitute – the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade – was able, over the following forty years, to coordinate successive rounds of tariff reductions and its own transformation, in 1995, into the World Trade Organisation. As on many other issues, Liberal ideas came to be adopted by other parties as trade liberalisation once again became the accepted faith.

Ironically, the Liberal Party itself suffered from divisions over trade as its Parliamentary representation came to rest increasingly in rural areas. After a 1953 Assembly vote for a policy of gradual abandonment of guaranteed markets and fixed prices for agriculture, Jeremy Thorpe (then the Liberal candidate for North Devon) seized the microphone and proclaimed that he and other candidates for rural seats would disown such an electorally damaging position. In 1958 moves to delete the word 'unilateral' from a motion on free trade ended in uproar. The 1959 manifesto, however, still demanded the dismantling of all protectionism within one parliament, ending with the slogan 'exchange goods, not bombs'. It was not until Jo Grimond's policy innovations took root, reemphasising the Party's social liberal inheritance, that the Liberals came to be widely identified with any policies other than free trade.

The moral argument for trade was still powerful. In 1956 the Liberals became the first party to argue for British participation in the European Common Market: the Cobdenite vision of trade building links between peoples was an important factor, overriding concerns over potential European protectionism against the rest of the world. Liberal parties throughout Europe share this vision, however much they may be divided over the details of economic and social policy.

In more recent times, Liberal Democrats have expressed concern over some of the negative aspects of globalisation, including the elevation of trade liberalisation over other goals of international policy, such as environmental protection, and the growth in inequalities of wealth between developed nations and the poorest countries. The central belief in the freedom to exchange goods and services across international borders has remained, however, not just for the economic benefits, but for wider reasons: the extension of opportunity to every individual, every enterprise and every country, no matter how small; and the building of relationships between peoples and nations, pulling communities together rather than driving them apart.

Duncan Brack is the Editor of the Journal of Liberal History *and co-editor of all the History Group's publications.*

1 At Bolton 1903, cited in I. Bradley, *The Optimists: Themes and Personalities in Victorian Liberalism* (Faber & Faber, 1980)
2 As argued in Ian Packer, *Liberal Government and Politics, 1905–15* (Palgrave, 2006)
3 Cited in J. L. Sturgis, *John Bright and the Empire* (Athlone Press, 1969).
4 Anthony Howe, 'Liberals, free trade and Europe from Cobden to the Common Market', *Journal of Liberal History* 98 (spring 2018).

International politics

Neils Eichhorn reviews the impact of events outside the UK, particularly in the US, on Liberal governments in the second half of the nineteenth century.

William Ewart Gladstone, the Liberal Party, and the Impact of North American Politics and War, 1855–1885

On 27 November 1879, William Ewart Gladstone spoke at West Calder on the future of the country and its relationship with the United States. He lauded how much the United States had grown and prospered since its founding over a century earlier. He observed, 'The development which the Republic has effected has been unexampled in its rapidity and force. … But while we have been advancing with this portentous rapidity, America is passing us by as if in a canter.' Gladstone was sure that it was just a question of time before the 'daughter' former colony would surpass 'mother' Britain, the former colonial metropolis of the United States.[1] Yet this was the same man who seventeen years earlier had expected the imminent demise of that same republic in his controversial Newcastle speech.[2]

As the central figure of the Liberal Party in this period, Gladstone sheds light on the various challenges faced by the party as it defined its politics in the light of the multitude of domestic and international challenges.[3] However, neither the Civil War nor political changes in the United States figured much in those political conversations. Obviously, much happened during those thirty years, but it is the author's hope that selected glimpses of the changes and continuities will illustrate the limited impact of North American events on British liberal thinking. It may seem odd to suggest in an article about the American Civil War's impact on the Liberal Party that such an impact was marginal, but we need to avoid narrowly focused overstatements in order to understand the full picture faced by British policy makers. This work is a challenge to Anglophilic and US exceptionalist thinking by decentring the United States from the narrative and pointing out the complexities faced by Liberal policy makers in parliament, particularly Gladstone.

The Coalition Ministry, 1854, by Sir John Gilbert (© National Portrait Gallery, London). Aberdeen's cabinet decides on the expedition to the Crimea; Palmerston, on the right, points at the town of Balaklava on a map held open by the Duke of Newcastle. Gladstone is seated on the left, holding a letter on his knee.

This article is not about the American Civil War[4] or more accurately the Civil War era (c.1850 to c.1880) and its impact on British Liberal policy makers. The interested reader will find an abundance of works of varying quality on that subject.[5] From among the numerous issues and problems both domestic and international faced by Britain during this period, I focus on just four topic areas: the impact of the Crimean War, the debates over electoral reform, the Irish Question, and the settling of the *Alabama* claims. While each theme will generally start with the end of the war in North America, it will frequently move back in time for context.

First elected to parliament in 1832, Gladstone's first ministerial appointment was in Peel's cabinet in 1843. In 1852, Lord Aberdeen called on him to be chancellor of the exchequer, as did Palmerston in 1859 when the Liberal Party came into being but remained a loose coalition of different interests, requiring a delicate balancing act. On 3 December 1868, Gladstone became prime minister in his own right and served three more times, dominating British Liberal politics for much of the remainder of the century.

In 1868, Gladstone and his party faced a complicated domestic and international situation. This included the continuing rivalry with Russia and the tsarist government's growing attempts to revise the Crimean War's peace treaty terms; the complicated legacies of the rebel shipbuilding program during the American Civil War in North America; the perennial Irish question; and continued domestic demands for an enlargement of the electoral franchise. These were certainly not the only issues faced by Gladstone's first ministry, but I will use them to consider the impact of the American Civil War on the Liberal Party, suggesting a limited impact of the United States on British thinking. As the party faced all

these crises, the American Civil War was rarely discussed and hardly influenced British policy makers.[6]

The impact of the Crimean War

The Crimean War (1853–1856) was a watershed in European history as well as in British politics. The British government had ill-advisedly entered the conflict under pressure from belligerent-minded members of the cabinet such as Palmerston, after Russia and the Ottoman Empire had already been at war for a few months. For many Russophobes in Britain, the aim was to contain Russian power and reduce the threat that the tsarist empire posed to British imperial interests in the Eastern Mediterranean. For Palmerston, this was also a conflict between modern, liberal, representative systems of government and the autocratic conservatism of the tsar. The outcome of the war, a territorial return to the status quo antebellum and the closing of the Bosporus to Russian naval assets, was hardly satisfactory considering the cost, human, material and financial, for the powers involved.[7]

British historians have not yet grappled with what I will call 'Crimean War Syndrome'. There is not yet an answer as to why Palmerston so dramatically changed his attitude after the Crimean War. He is often considered a loose cannon and belligerent politician in the lead-up to the Crimean War, and not just Russia felt his wrath in that regard. However, he became much more reluctant to get involved in international entanglements after the Crimean War, including in the American Civil War and the unification struggles in Europe.[8] While Great Britain certainly engaged in much sabre rattling during the Italian and German unification wars, there was more bluff and bluster than an actual desire to engage militarily. Britain withdrew into isolation, reluctant to engage in international adventures and altering the balance of power; and the shadow of the Crimean War, or Crimean War Syndrome, lingered into the Gladstone ministries.[9] To understand the impact of the American Civil War on British thinking, the long-term effect of the Crimean War should be kept in mind. At the same time, as I have suggested elsewhere, British politicians always kept a close eye on Russia's expansionist tendencies.[10]

Gladstone himself was deeply aware of the fundamental impact that the Crimean War had had on Britain and its allies. He pointed to the Ottoman Empire's massive accumulation of debt after the war. He appreciated that some of the debt helped to fund a new ironclad fleet, but British investors did not benefit from the new debt. Even more, Gladstone understood that the Crimean War had become less popular as the lack of tangible results became apparent. The leaders of the parliamentary opposition to the war, John Bright and Richard Cobden, gained support as they had been willing to stand up against the initially popular conflict.[11] Parliamentary debates on the lessons the country should learn from the Crimean War were much more frequent than any on the American Civil War.

Britain withdrew into isolation, reluctant to engage in international adventures and altering the balance of power; and the shadow of the Crimean War, or Crimean War Syndrome, lingered into the Gladstone ministries.

During the Crimean War, the British war effort was hamstrung by bureaucratic problems. When the Aberdeen government entered the war, the cabinet contained the secretary of state for war and the colonies. In 1854, the government divided the department, with separate secretaries of state for war and for the colonies. On 15 February 1870, Gladstone's war secretary, Edward, Viscount Cardwell, rose in the House of Commons to propose a new War Office bill. He reminded his fellow MPs of the disorganised state of the army at the

time of the Crimean War, which had brought about the creation of his office.[12] He used the memory of the Crimean War to continue to improve the efficiency of the British military.

The Cardwell Reforms came after the American Civil War and in the course of the Franco-German War of 1870/71; however, its inspirations were much older. The rebellion in North America only surfaced with regard to the need for Canadian defences during the *Trent* affair. The experiences of the British Army during the Crimean War and the 1857 Indian Rebellion, which had stretched the military resources of the empire to their limits, brought changes that saw the British Army withdraw from the settler colonies and return much of the fighting force to Great Britain itself. Here, a two-battalion regimental system gave each unit a specific base and recruiting ground, allowing one of the battalions to serve in the empire, and create closer ties between community and unit. Furthermore, the new enemies were perceived to be in Central Europe, with Chesney's 1871 novella, *The Battle of Dorking*, suggesting the hypothetical scenario of a German invasion of Great Britain.[13] The American Civil War had little impact on the reforms.

The war between France and the unifying German states raised new dilemmas for the Liberal Party and Gladstone. Among them was the accusation that the government had learned the wrong lessons from the Crimean War. On 1 August 1870, Benjamin Disraeli rose to address the Franco-German War, pointing out that the House had frequently during past and recent European conflicts remained silent and, in his opinion, that had caused much damage. With brutal honesty he said, 'They have thought that by silence they were aiding the Government, and it has generally happened that by that silence they have embarrassed it, so that when the Parliament and the Ministry have separated this has often occurred.' Disraeli reminded the House that Britain was a signatory power to the treaty that had created Belgium and protected the state's neutrality within Europe, a neutrality threatened by the war between France and the German states.[14] While he did not draw an explicit parallel, one can easily see that reluctance stemming from the Crimean War influenced British inaction.

Furthermore, Disraeli implied that the Gladstone ministry should take meaningful action:

> I hope, therefore, there will be between Her Majesty's Government and Russia not a mere general exchange of platitudes as to the advantages of restoring peace and averting the horrors of war, but something more. I hope they will confer together as two great Powers who have entered into the same engagements, and as two Powers who themselves may be forced to take the part of belligerents.

While the Conservative leader agreed with the declaration of neutrality, he desired that it be an armed neutrality to better protect British interests. Even more, he considered it important for Britain to act more forcefully and with the military ability to back its position.[15] While Liberal governments had bluffed the international community with British projections of power in the past decades, that was not working anymore and Disraeli demanded teeth to go with the British roar.

Gladstone responded for the government. He questioned the accuracy of Disraeli's history lesson and claimed that the British government had unsuccessfully assumed in the present situation the role of 'mediator'. As Disraeli had raised the option of cooperation with Russia, Gladstone noted that there was no ill-feeling between the two countries preventing such a cooperation. However, the shadow of the Crimean War and its changes to the European balance of power lingered. Gladstone opposed the notion of armed neutrality. He reminded Disraeli that being a neutral included duties Britain had to take very seriously. He stated, 'We had that misfortune in the case of the great conflict which devastated the Continent of North America.' At the

same time, Gladstone corrected the view of the Crimean War voiced by Disraeli.[16] While the recent events in North America influenced the conversation of how Great Britain should react to the continental conflict, the Crimean War legacy was at least as powerful. For British policy makers, continental European affairs always took precedent over what happened in the rest of the world.

Despite Gladstone's claim to the contrary, concerns remained whether Britain under Liberal leadership had abdicated its role and influence in Europe. As parliament debated the peace between France and the German states, members wondered if Great Britain's influence in Europe had declined. Gladstone expressed little worry:

> Do let us bear in mind that England is not Europe, and England is not neutral Europe … I sometimes hear hon. Gentlemen express sentiments to the effect that we have lost our influence in Europe, and that nobody regards us. I think England has no reason to be dissatisfied with the position she occupies in regard to European affairs. The anxiety of other Powers to enter into the consideration of our views, to obtain an expression of them, and to obtain our co-operation – if this were a matter of national vanity, is as much as we ought to desire; and we must be careful we do not strain the opportunities of our position.[17]

Despite Britain's frequent meddling and engagement in European affairs, Gladstone seemed to indicate that the future lay not with Europe, at least not as the old-style powerbroker of yesterdays. With possible echoes of modern days, Britain did not desire to be chained down by European entanglements but have all the freedom of action that its global economic and territorial imperial interests required.

Increasingly, British attention was not on the final stages of the wars of German unification; there was growing concern about Russian revisionism of the 1856 Treaty of Paris which had ended the Crimean War. Russia challenged the treaty stipulation that had demilitarised the Black Sea.[18] The lingering shadow of the Crimean War remained as Warrington's Liberal MP, Peter Rylands, rose to remind the members that the Crimean War was increasingly viewed as a mistake by Britons, especially as 'the Treaty did not compensate for the sacrifices of the war in which we were involved.' Even more, Rylands assumed the war was preventable and that it was the combination of public opinion and the press whipping the country into a spirit of war, encouraged by the accusations levelled by Russell and Palmerston, against Russia.[19]

The idea of an international conference to settle the outstanding issues with Russia did not have significant support even within the Liberal Party. For example, Reading MP Sir Francis Henry Goldsmid worried that such an international conference, especially while France was still engaged in war, was not a wise policy. Even more, such a conference was likely 'to give up all we had fought for in the Crimean War – namely, the neutralisation of the Black Sea; and Russia, as usual, gained her end.' Finally, Goldsmid queried whether, if Russia was permitted to abrogate the treaty of 1856, what prevented the tsarist government from abrogating the newest treaty in a few years?[20]

The party was divided on how to best approach international relations and in many ways, the Crimean War continued to hang over the Liberal Party's ideological conversations and divide its members on foreign policies regarding Russia. It is important to note how much Russia loomed over these conversations and how little North American contributed to them. As much as they did not wish to be part of Europe, they were part of Europe and European affairs were of far greater importance.

Electoral reform

If the party could not agree on a coherent foreign policy, discussions about domestic

reforms, particularly electoral reforms, were not much easier. The British certainly looked to other countries and history for examples in how to craft a stable political entity and make adjustments, including justifying the expansion of the electoral franchise. This had been an ongoing conversation in the country since the First Reform Act in the 1830s. The Chartist movement had reinvigorated calls for democratic reforms and parliament debated an enlargement of the electoral franchise during the 1850s. As those parliamentary debates went nowhere, the issue reappeared in the late 1860s and early 1870s.

The reform debates in the 1850s and 1860s are well known to British scholars of the era, but historians in the United States continue to operate under an exceptionalist perception that the victory of the United States in 1865 safeguarded republicanism for the world. As a recent scholar terms it, 'Were southern secession to succeed, slavery would be preserved, the republican experiment discredited.'[21] Illustrating the complete lack of understanding for the complex and long-ongoing British conversation about electoral reform is James McPherson's statement, 'It is probably no exaggeration to say that if the North had lost the war, thereby confirming Tory opinions of democracy and confounding the liberals, the Reform Bill would have been delayed for years.'[22] However, as recent, less Anglophilic and less US-exceptionalist scholarship has shown, the British were well aware of the problematic US electoral system and did not view the United States as the last best hope on earth for democracy.

In the process of justifying any type of political reform, British political leaders looked abroad for inspiration and warnings. The greatest worry was that a political reform could result in instability. Among others, Britons looked to Greece, often seen as the 'cradle of democracy'. They were amazed at how far the country had fallen – a powerful reminder of the instability of democratic societies. Events like the Don Pacifico Affair in the 1850s had highlighted to the British public and political leadership the instability of modern Greece.[23] The United States was no different, as the British had often looked with concern at the former colony.[24]

Importantly, Gladstone and members of the Liberal Party knew that they were part of a loose coalition. After all, the proto-Liberal Party during the 1850s and into the 1860s consisted of Whigs, Peelites and Radicals, each with their own agendas. Even if there was a new name, the individuals in the Liberal cabinet retained these old identities. The party was under Gladstone's sway, but people had the perception that 'Gladstone might have been a dangerous man to have as a friend, but he might be even more dangerous to have as an enemy.' In many ways Gladstone gave the party a unifier around whom the various interests could collect.[25] However, this was not always the case as the electoral reform debates illustrate.

As I showed elsewhere, in the course of the 1850s, when parliament debated electoral reform, which happened on four occasions, the United States usually served as an example to avoid. Well aware of how elections, and especially election day, worked there, British political leaders perceived democratic elections as a direct route to anarchy and chaos. Election fraud and mobs only added to the perception that democracy created instability, something the British desired to avoid.[26] The war in North America did not lessen the perception of democratic instability and the US version as an example to avoid.

In the course of the 1850s, when parliament debated electoral reform, which happened on four occasions, the United States usually served as an example to avoid.

Although the leading voice of the Liberal Party, Gladstone was reluctant on the issue,

worrying about the 'whims of unfettered democracy'. Throughout his political career, he 'remained social conservative and an unenthusiastic democrat, anxious to preserve the roles of a hereditary monarchy and aristocracy, to reaffirm the legitimacy of the State and Church, and to preserve a hierarchical social order.'[27]

However, even after the passage of the Second Reform Act of 1867, the demands to further enlarge the electoral franchise persisted. Expansion was only one issue; election security was another. In 1870, the Liberal MP for Huddersfield, Edward Leatham, proposed the adoption of a secret ballot to protect voters against the whims of their employers, landlords and others in power. In the second reading, he justified the bill's necessity based on coercion that had taken place and how that impacted electoral outcomes.[28]

As so often, international examples provided inspiration for MPs. The member for Huddersfield pointed to Australia, where the colonial authorities had already instituted a secret ballot to protect against coercion. There was hope that such a process would undercut the potential for violence at the election, which Leatham had to admit British elections were not immune from either, as mob intimidation and disruption had historically occurred. He observed, 'At Gravesend a mob – I regret to say calling themselves Liberals – took possession of the town at noon on the polling day, smashed the windows of all known Conservatives, and, if the evidence is to be believed, so intimidated voters that they turned the election.' And this was not the only example.[29]

As so often, international examples provided inspiration for MPs. The member for Huddersfield pointed to Australia, where the colonial authorities had already instituted a secret ballot to protect against coercion.

While semi-democratic elections had been the norm in the United States for decades, the ballot was delivered by the parties and cast in open fashion, opening the process to corruption on many different levels. Therefore, Leatham did not point to the former British colonies in North America, but the loyal one in the southern hemisphere for an example of good elections. He noted:

> the Australian Ballot proposed by this Bill is a simple, easy, and expeditious mode of taking the poll; that while riot and disorder prevailed at Australian elections before its introduction, since its introduction they have been conducted with perfect order; that whereas intimidation, bribery, and treating prevailed to a greater or less extent, intimidation has absolutely ceased, and bribery and treating, where they existed, have been reduced to a minimum.[30]

Australia was an example of a functioning democratic system of government that British Liberals could learn from. Placing this imperial possession with a much shorter experience with democratic government ahead of the United States illustrates further that the latter was not omnipresent to the British mind when it came to political reforms.

Finally, Leatham pointed to European liberals as universally calling for the secret ballot and even hinted at the continuation of manhood suffrage in France during the reign of Napoleon III. Leatham claimed:

> Imperfect though the French Ballot may be, it has been found complete enough to baffle one of the most powerful despotisms which the world has ever known. It is the Ballot which is raising the French nation out of the political degradation in which they have been plunged.[31]

Despite what some US historians like to see in Napoleon III's France, this British Liberal

did not view the country solely in a negative light, the continuation of democratic elections being a beacon in the dark days of Napoleon's regime.

Finally, Leatham turned to the United States and reminded his fellow members of the committee hearing during which the opponents of the ballot produced the example of South Carolina during slavery. The witness gave a reasonable presentation of the issues of bribery in the state, showcasing the state and system's backwardness. Leatham offered a different assessment of the electoral system in the United States:

> There is bribery in New York, in Pennsylvania, and at Boston. Now, why is this? Because the American Ballot, although perhaps complete enough to meet any ordinary exigency, is not complete enough to ensure purity among a population saturated with the corrupt ideas which they bring with them from Europe. In the few American constituencies which are corrupt, the voting tickets are purposely made distinct in colour and device, in order that the briber may watch the bribed vote given.[32]

As this was a debate about the secret ballot, the United States again served as an example of how to avoid the chaos associated with democracy.

The government response came from the Marquess of Hartington, the Postmaster General, who pointed out that Leatham's proposal had put the government in an awkward position. The government preferred to follow the Queen's Speech's suggestion and appoint a committee to look into electoral reform, which could include the secret ballot.[33] The Conservative member for Chester, Henry Cecil Raikes, pointed to a problematic reality for the supporters of the secret ballot, which was that such a voting system did not exist in the United States or France. Instead, the main example proponents could bring forward was Australia, a small colonial society.[34] The United States and its recent rebellion did not contribute much to this conversation within the Liberal Party or the country as a whole, which was still divided on electoral reform.

Despite the secret ballot debate, the enlargement of the franchise remained a topic into the 1880s. As so often in the past, questions about democracy and how trustworthy the voter was arose immediately. The Ipswich MP, Jesse Collings, pointed to how the United States had granted African Americans the right to vote so they could learn how to exercise it in an intelligent way. Collings argued that, 'There was abundant evidence that our rural population would know how to use the vote. At many meetings which he had attended they had exhibited marvellous political instinct and intelligence.'[35]

However, not everybody in the Liberal Party agreed with the assessment for more reforms. The Montrose MP, William Baxter, argued that it was not necessary for Great Britain to imitate all the political changes made by the Australian colony or the United States. After all, Baxter argued, 'Some of our ancient franchises are difficult to defend; but they have come down from an olden period, and are cherished by large classes of the people of this country.' At the same time, he did not deny the need for reforms. He worried about the ignorance of people exercising the right to vote and the need for education laws to have an effect in that regard. He was not in favour of the idea of universal manhood suffrage. 'Theoretically, there are people who believe that manhood suffrage is the correct principle. I am not here to deny that after this generation, and probably another, have passed away it may possibly be safe.' Despite having some qualms about the redistribution of districts, Baxter believed strongly, 'history has taught us, in trumpet tones, in all time that Commonwealths are not endangered by trusting the people, but by withholding from them rights.'[36] The omnipresent fear of revolution in British politics and the desire to avoid a situation similar to

France dominated Liberal conversations, not the events or impact of the recent rebellion in North America. Even after seventy years, the French Revolution and its more recent imitators cast a long shadow over British politics.

However, by 1880, the British needed little reminding that the US democratic system was flawed. Reconstruction offered addition examples of how corrupt and fraudulent those elections were. The 1876 presidential election was an utter disaster with both parties in Louisiana doing everything to win, including pre-election intimidation, vote manipulation and outright election theft. If the election was not bad enough, the later investigation of the election fraud uncovered in even greater detail how widespread and high up the fraud went.[37]

The *Pall Mall Gazette*, which had only recently changed editorial outlook to the Liberal Party, published a devastating indictment of the US electoral system in September 1880. While the paper dismissed some of the accusations about voter intimidation and racist violence, the evidence that fraud, vote manipulation and the outright rigging of the election had taken place were clear. The paper observed:

> Thus there is the most singular toleration of acknowledged foul play by both the players; and this is all the more noteworthy because communities and Governments, far less scrupulous on the whole, have proved extremely intolerant of electoral fraud. If ever there was a Government which might be supposed capable of it, it was that of the Second French Empire. The Ministers and prefects of Napoleon III did not indeed neglect some American precedents; to use the American phrase, they often 'gerrymandered' the constituencies by grouping them so as to produce a favourable result; but they never ventured to tamper with the ballot-box.[38]

In other words, even, in US scholarship, the often-vilified Emperor Napoleon III did not engage in activities perpetrated by US politicians and especially those in Louisiana in 1876, with outright manipulation of the vote. How could the United States be an example for democratic elections if it did not respect the voice of the voters? The Liberal Party was well aware of this situation and cautious using the United States as an example when calling for electoral reform.

Irish home rule

The third issue whereby the American Civil War often reared its ugly face in British politics and may have shaped Liberal policy is the Irish Question. Tens of thousands of Irishmen fought in the US army, and some of the Irish nationalist leaders viewed the war as a training opportunity for a future independence war in Ireland. They could also use outstanding issues between Great Britain and the United States for their nationalist campaign. While, in 1848, a small group of revolutionaries had unsuccessfully tried to end British rule, the Irish had regrouped in 1858 as the Irish Republican Brotherhood under the leadership of James Stephens. Their desire to bring about Irish independence was manifested in attempts to stage an uprising in Ireland, terrorism in Great Britain, and a conflict between Great Britain and the United States along the Canadian border.[39] In the light of these events, Gladstone started to contemplate appeasement of the Irish by embracing home rule.[40]

For once, the events in North American had an impact on thinking in Great Britain and the Liberal Party. The leadership of the Irish Republican Brotherhood was largely in exile in France and some in the United States. Their ambition for Irish independence had not declined. The Civil War had seen a large number of Irish migrants take up arms in defence of the United States, training that could be useful during another revolution. The violent campaign of the IRB in Europe and Fenians in North America meant that Gladstone had to deal with the Irish situation, which he tried

to settle by inching the country toward home rule, a position unpopular even in his own party.[41]

The initial conversation in the government was about giving the Irish some concessions to undermine the Irish Republican Brotherhood. As a result, parliament passed the Irish Church Act of 1869 which separated the Church of England and Ireland and disestablished the latter. Gladstone's ability to pass the act and his desire to make changes to Irish policy was part of the new thinking in the party. Not a Whig nor a Radical Liberal, neither was his economic liberalism that of the Manchester School. Lord Granville characterised him as part of the Oxford Movement: 'Mr. Gladstone was, it was noted, Scotch by origin, Welsh by residence, and Catholic by sympathy.'[42] However, the political leadership in the United States and London had no desire to let the domestic Irish issue escalate into a conflict between the two countries.

The Fenians were largely a nuisance. On 23 February 1866, Sir Edward Watkin, the Liberal MP for Stockport, asked what the government had done about the Fenian Raids and whether the government had talked with the US government about the situation. Gladstone responded for the government by pointing back to the recent statement by the home secretary that 'the Fenian conspiracy was of American and not of Irish origin, and that it was not countenanced by the Government of the United States.' Furthermore, Gladstone defended the actions of the governments in London and Washington in the matter. He observed, 'The mere general remonstrance which my hon. Friend recommends, the mere complaint to the United States Government of what is going on in America, the mere setting forth of the inconvenience which arises to us from those lawless proceedings – for such they are – of certain American subjects, would have diminished the dignity of this country.' Why should the British government make a fool of itself arguing over a movement universally disliked. Gladstone urged his fellow members to be cautious and look to the nuances with regard to the Fenian movement.[43]

While Watkin was satisfied with Gladstone's answer, the Liberal member for Chatham, Sir Andrew Otway, wondered if the House should let Gladstone and the government off so easily after admitting no demonstration had taken place in Washington. He pointed to the Crimean War and wondered if the war would have taken place if the Commons had made the British views more clearly known to the Russian. Otway grilled Gladstone on how it was possible the government had no information about Fenian activities – what was the minister in Washington doing?[44] The question session illustrated the rift even within the Liberal Party over the Irish Question.

At the same time, Gladstone implicitly worried that if a conflict with, say, the United States emerged, the Irish would not be loyal to the mother country and be a liability.

In Birmingham, on 7 November 1888, Gladstone spoke about the Irish Question and the issues of home rule. In view of the nationalist age that had seen the creation of many nation-states but also left many unfulfilled dreams, Gladstone noted that 'the Irish cannot and the Irish ought not, to acquiesce in a Government which is against them, a Government of unequal laws.' While Gladstone elaborated on the many British policies where the Irish people had suffered, he was cautious not to suggest outright Irish independence or even home rule, to which he was sympathetic. At the same time, Gladstone implicitly worried that if a conflict with, say, the United States emerged, the Irish would not be loyal to the mother country and be a liability.[45] His policies were thus not just based around sympathy for the Irish.

The Liberal Party was not unanimously behind Gladstone on the idea of home rule.

When he introduced a specific policy proposal in 1886 during his third premiership, the party split apart, losing its majority in the House of Commons. As a result, after only months in office, Gladstone's third ministry collapsed on 20 July 1886.

In the final debate on the subject, George Goshen, Liberal MP for Edinburgh East, who eventually turned against Gladstone, wondered why it was necessary to change the relationship between Ireland and the rest of the kingdom, which made not much sense. He looked to Austria and Hungary as an example. Gladstone briefly interjected that he did not think that there was only a partial union, but it is unclear if he meant the Habsburg or British. In contrast, he looked to the other parts of the British Dominion, when he explained:

> There is no doubt a practical question, because it is quite true that in constituting a Legislature in Ireland we do what we did when we constituted a Legislature for Canada and for Australia. We devolve an important portion of power – we did it in Canada, and I hope we shall do it in Ireland – and we devolve it with a view to not a partial, not a nominal, but a real and practical independent management of their own affairs.

At the same time, Gladstone pointed to international examples to illustrate that independence was usually the result of a foreign intervention, like that of France during the rebellion of the Thirteen Colonies. While the United States appeared in the debates as a safe haven for Irish refugees and a base for Irish national ambitions, there was no reference to the recent rebellion.[46]

Historian Theodore Koditschek asked the important question that even members of parliament had wondered about regarding the Irish diaspora community in the United States. 'Would the United States become the staging ground for a new Irish revolt, much as Spain and France had been in earlier centuries?'[47] The growing international tensions and rivalries made the possibility that one of Britain's rivals might come to the aid of the Irish a distinct possibility and, in light of the isolation Britain had entered within European politics, it was not far-fetched. However, while one might see a parallel between the rebellion in North America and Ireland, some members of the Liberal Party viewed the country as a united whole that could not be separated with home rule.

Alabama claims

Finally, Gladstone was lucky that during his first ministry he put to rest one of the remaining issues between Great Britain and the United States from the 1860s, the settlement of the so-called *Alabama* claims.[48] There was much disagreement over whether the British government should accept any responsibility for the actions done by the Confederate raider *Alabama*, based on the accusation from US political figures that the British had allowed the ship to depart and implicitly supported the rebellion. However, Gladstone pushed for it and asked his chancellor of the exchequer to pay the settlement of $15 million. He did not view it as an admission of guilt but as an investment in the future. As Boyd Hilton notes, 'For Gladstone the important point was to establish 'a good prospective system [of] rules for international law in the future.'[49]

The *Alabama* claims raised an odd situation from the British perspective. The earl of Redesdale put it rather pointedly in the House of Lords: 'We have the anomalous state of things that Virginia and the other Southern States are asking us to give them an indemnity for the injury committed by themselves.' The earl of Lauderdale, a former naval officer, added that the British would not have made claims against the United States if Russia had built *Alabama*s in the United States during the Crimean War. Foreign Secretary Lord Granville corrected his colleagues in the Lords that the British had never recognised

the Confederacy's independence, just its belligerency. He could not comment further on the treaty since he felt the commissioners had done the best they could under the circumstances.[50]

The British soon discovered when the arbitration tribunal sat down in Geneva that the vagueness of the treaty text was hurting them. They had left the claims over the *Alabama* vague so that the treaty would win ratification. However, the negotiation team had assumed that any offering by the United States of the indirect claims would immediately be rejected by the tribunal. Members of Gladstone's cabinet, even Lord Goschen, were not in favour of the indirect claims being allowed at the tribunal. He even threatened to resign from the cabinet, placing it in grave danger. Gladstone defused the situation by observing that he too opposed the indirect claims made by the United States. At the same time, this was not a matter before the cabinet but before the arbitration tribunal.[51]

At the end we have to be cautious with Gladstone's unique set of views. Despite his Newcastle speech having assumed the imminent end of the United States in 1862, within fifteen years, Gladstone had changed his tune and assumed that the country 'rendered a splendid service to the general cause of popular government throughout the world.' At the same time, Gladstone was impressed how Britain had peacefully freed the slaves, but the island communities remained economically desolate and peace out of reach, whereas the United States freed its slaves in bloody civil war without the economy suffering and peace and order remaining in place.[52] Gladstone either was wilfully ignorant or intentionally misleading in this statement as Reconstruction was hardly peaceful. The new generation of Liberals, some of whom were US-philes, like modern historians, took a far less objective view on the United States.

It needs to be remembered that even this concluding episode of the rebellion was overshadowed by international events surrounding the war between France and the German states and associated rebellion in Paris, the uprising in Cuba, the ever-present Eastern Question and rivalry with Russia as it made its way into Central Asia. It is too easy to assume that Liberal Party members looked to the recent rebellion in North America when making policy decisions. They, like the political leaders of the country, had to take into consideration a multitude of international issues and frequently the United States was the example to avoid, as with democracy.

Niels Eichhorn holds a PhD in History from the University of Arkansas. He has published Liberty and Slavery: European Separatists, Southern Secession, and the American Civil War *(LSU Press, 2019),* Atlantic History in the Nineteenth Century: Migration, Trade, Conflict, and Ideas *(Palgrave, 2019) and* The Civil War Battles of Macon *(The History Press, 2021), together with articles on Civil War diplomacy in* Civil War History *and* American Nineteenth Century History.

1 Quoted in *Thoughts from the Writings and Speeches of William Ewart Gladstone*, ed. George Barnett Smith (Frederick A. Stokes Co, 1895), pp. 214–15.

2 *The Observer*, 12 Oct. 1862; Niels Eichhorn, 'The Intervention Crisis of 1862: A British Diplomatic Dilemma?', *American Nineteenth Century History*, 15 (Nov. 2014), pp. 287–310.

3 See John Breuilly, *Labour and Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Essays in Comparative History* (Manchester University Press, 1992); Duncan A. Campbell, *English Public Opinion and the American Civil War* (Royal Historical Society/Boydell Press, 2003); Murney Gerlach, *British Liberalism and the United States: Political and Social Thought in the Late Victorian Age* (Palgrave, 2001); Brent E. Kinser, *The American Civil War in the Shaping of British Democracy* (Ashgate, 2011); Dieter Langewiesche, *Liberalism in Germany* (Princeton University Press, 2000); Simon Morgan and Anthony Howe, *Rethinking Nineteenth-Century Liberalism: Richard Cobden*

Bicentenary Essays (Routledge, 2016). These works show that the Civil War had an impact on some Liberal Party members in Great Britain but alongside other influences such as Italy and its Risorgimento. There is no clear pattern of British- or US-based scholars taking a different perspective, as scholars based on both sides of the Atlantic tend to overemphasise US influences.

4 An arguably better term for the conflict is 'the War of the Rebellion'; however, the term 'the American Civil War' is used here in consideration of its readership. See Steven Hahn, *A Nation Without Borders: The United States and Its World in an Age of Civil Wars 1830–1910* (Viking, 2016).

5 See Hugh Dubrulle, *Ambivalent Nation: How Britain Imagined the American Civil War* (Louisiana State University Press, 2018); Peter O'Connor, *American Sectionalism in the British Mind 1832–1863* (Louisiana State University Press, 2018).

6 Scholarship bears this out. There are also few mentions of the United States in general, aside from the Fenians and the *Alabama* Claims. See Jonathan P. Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain* (Yale University Press, 1993).

7 See Orlando Figes, *The Crimean War: A History* (Metropolitan Books, 2010), p. 432. Paul W. Schroeder, in *Austria, Great Britain and the Crimean War: The Destruction of the European Concert* (Cornell University Press, 1972), pp. 417–19, 421–2, argues that British efforts to craft a new Europe and its lack of commitment to the new European order gave rise to the unification movements and created chaos instead of progress.

8 The most recent Palmerston biographer David Brown – *Palmerston: A Biography* (Yale University Press, 2010) – argues that Palmerston was keenly aware of the power of public opinion but that the goal of the Palmerston government was to promote liberal policies and institutions aboard, which put Britain in conflict with the Russian empire.

9 David F. Krein, in *The Last Palmerston Government: Foreign Policy, Domestic Politics, and the Genesis of 'Splendid Isolation'* (Iowa State University Press, 1978), argues that it was during this last Palmerston government that the British embraced splendid isolation. However, the Crimean War may be a more appropriate starting point.

10 Eichhorn, 'Intervention Crisis', pp. 287–310.

11 *Writings and Speeches*, ed. Barnett Smith, pp. 134, 215–16.

12 Hansard, Parl Deb. (series 3) vol. 199, cols. 390–1 (15 Feb. 1870). https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1870/feb/15/first-reading

13 Parry, *Rise and Fall*, pp. 289–90; K. Theodore Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation 1846–1886* (Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 601–4. Also see Robert Biddulph, *Lord Cardwell at the War Office: A History of His Administration, 1868–1874* (John Murray, 1904).

14 Hansard, Parl. Deb. (series 3) vol 203, cols. 1286–1300 (1 Aug. 1870). https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1870/aug/01/the-war-observations

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Hansard, Parl. Deb. (series 3) vol. 204, col. 454 (17 Feb. 1871). https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1871/feb/17/france-and-germany-terms-of-peace

18 Michael J. Winstanley, *Gladstone and the Liberal Party* (Routledge, 1990), p. 49.

19 Hansard, Parl. Deb. (series 3) vol 205, col. 919 (30 Mar. 1871). https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1871/mar/30/resolution

20 Hansard, Parl. Deb. (series 3) vol. 205, cols. 936–8 (30 Mar. 1871). https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1871/mar/30/resolution

21 Joseph A. Fry, *Lincoln, Seward, and US Foreign Relation in the Civil War Era* (University Press of Kentucky, 2019), p. 188.

22 James McPherson, '"The Whole Family of Man": Lincoln and the Last Best Hope Abroad', in Robert E. May (ed.), *The North, The South, and the Atlantic Rim*, (1995. University Press of Florida, 2013), p. 161.

23 Jocelyn Hunt, *Britain, 1846–1919* (Routledge, 2003), pp. 39–40.

24 This argument is also made by David P. Crook, *American Democracy in English Politics: 1815–1850* (Clarendon Press, 1965) and more recently O'Connor, *American Sectionalism*.

25 Winstanley, *Gladstone*, p. 66.

26 Niels Eichhorn, 'Democracy: The Civil War and the Transnational Struggle for Electoral Reform', *American Nineteenth Century History*, 20 (2019), pp. 293–313. Also see Robert Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote in British Politics, 1848–1867: The Making of the Second Reform Act* (Ashgate, 2011).
27 Winstanley, *Gladstone*, p. 13.
28 Hansard, Parl. Deb. (series 3) vol. 200, cols. 10–32 (16 Mar. 1870). https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1870/mar/16/second-reading.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 Hansard, Parl. Deb. (series 3) vol. 200, cols. 32–3 (16 Mar. 1870). https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1870/mar/16/second-reading
34 Hansard, Parl. Deb. (series 3) vol. 200, cols. 52–3 (16 Mar. 1870). https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1870/mar/16/second-reading
35 Collings, 24 Mar. 1884, Representation of the People, 686. https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1884/mar/24/second-reading-first-night
36 Hansard, Parl. Deb. (series 3) vol. 286, cols. 660–1 (24 Mar. 1884). https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1884/mar/24/second-reading-first-night
37 See Adam Fairclough, *Bulldozed and Betrayed: Louisiana and the Stolen Elections of 1876* (Louisiana State University Press, 2021).
38 *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 6 Sep. 1880.
39 See R. V. Comerford, *The Fenians in Context: Irish Politics and Society, 1848–82* (Wolfhound Press, 1985); Brian Jenkins, *Fenians and Anglo-American Relations during Reconstruction* (Cornell University Press, 1969); Brian Jenkins, *The Fenian Problem: Insurgency and Terrorism in a Liberal State, 1858–1874* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008).
40 As Grenfell Morton illustrated in *Home Rule and the Irish Question* (Longman; 1980), Gladstone had been interested in the Irish Question since the 1840s and, once given a chance, worked to ease tensions with things like the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland. Jeremy Smith in *Britain and Ireland: From Home Rule to Independence* (Longman, 1999) argues that Gladstone's good intentions for Ireland ran into significant opposition and turned the topic into something more difficult than he had expected.
41 Hunt, *Britain*, pp. 210–11.
42 Edmond George Petty Fitzmaurice, *The Life of Granville George Leveson Gower: Second Earl Granville, K.G., 1815–1891*, vol. ii (Longmans, Green, 1905), p. 2.
43 Hansard, Parl. Deb. (series 3) vol. 181, cols. 1027–54 (23 Feb. 1866). https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1866/feb/23/question-11
44 Ibid.
45 Quoted in *The Speeches and Public Addresses of the Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone: With Notes and Introductions*, eds. Arthur Wollaston Hutton and Herman Cohen, vol. ix (Methuen, 1892), pp. 69, 95–9.
46 Hansard, Parl. Deb. (series 3) vol. 306, cols. 1145–245 (7 Jun. 1886). https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1886/jun/07/second-reading-adjourned-debate
47 Theodore Koditschek, *Liberalism, Imperialism and the Historical Imagination: Nineteenth Century Visions of Great Britain* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 178.
48 For a study on the *Alabama* claims, see Phillip E. Myers, *Dissolving Tensions: Rapprochement and Resolution in British–American–Canadian Relations in the Treaty of Washington Era, 1865–1914* (Kent University Press, 2015).
49 Boyd Hilton, 'Utilitarian or neo-Foxite Whig? Robert Lowe as Chancellor of the Exchequer', in E. H. H. Green and Duncan Tanner (eds.), *The Strange Survival of Liberal England: Political Leaders, Moral Values and the Reception of Economic Debate* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 61.
50 Hansard, Parl. Deb. (series 3) vol. 206, cols. 698701 (12 May 1871). https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1871/may/12/question
51 Quoted in Arthur D. Elliot, *The Life of George Joachim Goschen, First Viscount Goschen* (Longmans, Green, 1911), 1:133–5.
52 William Ewart Gladstone, 'Kin Beyond Sea', *North American Review*, 264 (Sep. 1878), p. 212.

Reports

Was the coalition a mistake? Why did we fail to stop Brexit?

Liberal Democrat History Group evening meeting, 7 October 2022, with Vince Cable and Rachel Smith. Chair: Anne Perkins.
Report by **Neil Stockley**

The meeting chair, veteran journalist and broadcaster Anne Perkins, opened proceedings by asking about the book's major revelation, that Vince suffered a 'mini stroke' in May 2018, when he was leader of Liberal Democrats. The episode was kept hidden from the party and the public.

Vince explained that, at the time, he didn't know how serious the stroke was, or how long its effects would last. In his family, he went on, there was a long tradition of keeping such things secret and never discussing them. Vince recalled some embarrassing episodes. Once, he was speaking in the Commons and completely forgot where he was, for probably a few seconds – though it had felt to him like much longer. Fortunately, 'the people who were there were either asleep or working on their iPhones' and he soon found his place.

On another occasion Vince, along with his predecessor Tim Farron, missed what had been built up as a key Commons vote on Brexit, much to the consternation of the pro-Remain movement. Vince had spent most of the day in hospital undergoing tests and, not knowing what was going on at parliament, went on to dinner with a journalist. Alistair Carmichael, the chief whip, took the blame but the party's federal executive demanded an inquest and explanation for the leader's absence.

Then, he scrambled a joke in a conference speech so that it came out 'a good deal more vulgar than I had intended' and distracted media attention from the substance of his message about the future of liberal democracy. It all sounded amusing, 'but when you're in a high-profile position, these things matter,' Vince said.

It was a stressful time for Rachel too. She recalled how her husband, who was temporarily unable to drive, insisted on cycling to some appointments. They eventually agreed she would cycle behind him but, she added, 'it was just hard work'. For six weeks, she also accompanied him whenever he spoke in public. Eventually Rachel and, possibly with more vehemence, Vince's family intervened, saying 'this can't go on, you're going to kill yourself shortly.' It was one factor, he said, in his decision to resign the leadership and retire from the Commons in 2019.

Most of the discussion focused, understandably, on the coalition government. Anne Perkins went back to basics by asking why the Liberal Democrats had signed up to it in 2010. Vince reminded the audience that when the coalition agreement was made there was little dissent from the party's MPs or peers, or the membership. He acknowledged that he had 'no fondness' for the Conservatives and would have preferred to work with Gordon Brown. Still, Vince had finally concluded that a full-blown coalition with the Conservatives was the only way to provide stable government. Part of his reasoning was political: had the party insisted instead on a confidence and supply arrangement, he argued, the Conservatives would simply have called another general election within six months. They would have blamed the Liberal Democrats for the lack of strong fiscal policy decisions to the party's electoral cost.

Vince also saw a powerful economic argument: the

financial markets needed to be reassured. During the coalition talks, he was approached by the head of the civil service, the permanent secretary to the Treasury and 'various people speaking for the governor of the Bank of England' pleading for he and colleagues to 'step up and deliver some stability'. They called on Vince to 'signal very quickly that there is a clear plan to stabilise the public finances, [otherwise] sterling will crash, we will not be able to sell government bonds [and] the yields will go up.' Vince saw no choice but to accept these arguments and 'be responsible'.

Rachel's comments reflected the views of most party members at the time: 'I had this image of the Liberal Democrat liberty bird stuck in a Conservative tree … my gut feelings were 'Help! … the overlap [between the two parties] on policy was so small [but] I accepted what Vince was saying about the economy. Something had to be done.'

Vince calmly demolished two myths that have grown up around the coalition. First, the Liberal Democrats did not face a binary choice between Conservative austerity and Labour benevolence when deciding who to work with in 2010. The Labour Party had their own austerity programme, 'the Darling plan', to remove the structural current non-cyclical deficit over six or seven years. The coalition started out trying to achieve this result over a four-to-five-year timespan, 'but when we saw the pain this was going to cause, around about 2012, we backed off, and slowed down the process [so] in the latter part of the coalition we were exactly following the Darling plan, by which time, the Labour Party had moved on.' The coalition could have done more to raise taxes, he mused, but early decisions to increase VAT and capital gains tax had been greeted by such outcries that cutting spending seemed the politically easier option.

Second, not all the Liberal Democrat cabinet ministers went along enthusiastically with the approach taken by the chancellor, George Osborne, to spending cuts. Vince was clear that there was no choice but to reduce the deficit, but the Treasury used a very narrow definition, so that 'the big hit was on public investment – the railways, telecommunications, science and that was very damaging economically.' When he made these points to Osborne, the chancellor had agreed with them, but said he would only back off if the Liberal Democrats agreed to deeper cuts in benefits which Vince refused to do.

The discussion showed just how difficult the coalition was for Vince and other Liberal Democrat ministers. He and his colleagues had to make decisions that were neither simple nor straightforward. They often found themselves in a no-win situation.

The most obvious example was the decision to increase university tuition fees, which the party had gone into the 2010 election promising to abolish. Vince explained that some months before, he had tried unsuccessfully to warn the party conference and parliamentary colleagues that if the Liberal Democrats ended up in government, they would have to make some very difficult decisions about both taxes and spending. There was however a strong mood that 'we needed some good offerings on fees for students and other things'. The real disaster came, he added, when the leadership agreed to sign the NUS pledge to vote against any increases in tuition fees.

Once the coalition government was formed, Vince found himself in charge of BIS, the department responsible for universities policy, including tuition fees. Before the election, his Labour predecessor, Peter Mandelson, had agreed with the Conservative universities spokesperson, David Willetts, that fees would have to increase substantially and momentum was building in the department behind such a move. All the options were 'awful', he said: either take money from universities teaching grants or remove maintenance grants or kill the further education sector – or substantially

raise fees. 'I tried to package the measures to make it like a graduate tax [which was] related to ability to pay, with measures to sweeten the pill,' he went on, 'but unfortunately it was all lost in the noise: we had betrayed the pledge.'

Vince agreed with Anne Perkins that there were lessons to be drawn from the tuition fees debacle about how the coalition government was formed – 'who went where' – and what the Liberal Democrats ended up being blamed for as a result. He explained that as the cabinet appointments were being made, very rapidly, Vince had tried to have higher education policy (in which he could claim no expertise) placed under a Conservative-run department, in exchange for banking policy becoming part of his remit. The reaction, he said, 'was like a nuclear explosion in Treasury and the whole of the City mobilised to stop it.' Still, he conceded, 'we should have seen the Exocet rocket that was on the way.'

Vince revealed that he had considered resigning on two occasions. The first was in December 2010, when he was caught on tape telling undercover reporters that he had 'declared war' on Rupert Murdoch over the media magnate's plans to take over all of BSkyB. Rachel and his daughter dissuaded him from quitting. The second occasion concerned a major policy issue: the government's approach to public investment. By the end of 2012 there was no economic growth, banks were not lending, and the IMF was criticising the government's austerity policies. 'We could have done more in terms of borrowing to invest but the Treasury and the Liberal Democrats there said you can't. I thought that was doing a lot of harm and got bad tempered about it all.' Osborne then told Vince that if he went public about his concerns, it would be the end of the coalition. 'I was tempted to go in and resign,' he remembered.

Vince had another regret. The Liberal Democrat negotiating team thought they had won quite a big prize, he said, when the Conservatives agreed to hold a referendum on bringing in the alternative vote (AV). But the Conservatives destroyed the proposal in the referendum campaign; in any case, he added, AV would not have been a radical reform. Vince was clear that the Liberal Democrats should have pressed harder in the government for reform, adding that 'this must be top of the list' if there's another hung parliament in eighteen months' time.

Despite all these bitter disappointments, Vince had not supported moves within the Liberal Democrats to break up the coalition a year or two before the end of the parliament. The issue came to a climax after the Liberal Democrats suffered disastrous results in the European Parliament elections of May 2014, causing considerable internal unrest. Vince admitted to mixed feelings. 'I saw the argument but opposed it,' he said, 'I thought there was an argument for keeping going and piling up substantial legacy achievements. There were ministers, [such as] Steve Webb with pensions reform, doing important things that took time. I was just starting to understand how [my] department worked and starting to do seriously useful things around industrial strategy and the business bank. But maybe I should have been more decisive and thrown my weight behind [party president] Tim Farron and others and said, 'enough is enough'.

In 2015, the Conservatives waged what he called 'a relentless and brutal campaign' against Liberal Democrat MPs as they sought to win a Commons majority. Their message, he said, was as blunt as it was effective: 'you may have a good Lib Dem MP here, but a Labour and SNP government will mean chaos' and people panicked.

Vince was one of the many casualties. His defeat in Twickenham came as a shock to both he and Rachel, despite his agent's obvious concerns. He recalled that he, like many colleagues, had deluded himself that he could win on the strength of his personal vote.

When canvassing they simply hadn't heard constituents' concerns about a possible Labour–SNP administration. Rachel had found some solace in the fact that they could now spend more time together. Vince reminded the meeting how difficult defeat had been for many colleagues, both professionally and emotionally.

Even if he stopped short of describing the coalition as a mistake, Vince believed that, after the experience of the Cameron–Clegg government, the Liberal Democrats would not go into another coalition under first past the post 'for decades'. There were other models for cross-party government, he said. He also noted that 'confidence and supply' arrangements had their difficulties, as the DUP learned after 2017 when they supported the Conservatives who 'took them to the cleaners' over the Northern Ireland protocol.

The 2017 general election saw Vince back in the Commons and he was soon elected leader of the Liberal Democrats ('Nobody else wanted to contest it was the ugly truth.') He realised that the party faced a long haul as it sought to rebuild trust with left-leaning voters who were still angry about the coalition. It was not an easy time, but he found the strength and resilience of the local government base a major asset in his efforts to steadily rebuild the party.

Then there was Brexit. With Tim Farron having positioned the Liberal Democrats as firmly anti-Brexit and pro-Remain, the party was energised and membership tripled. Vince recognised there was also a dilemma. 'In becoming the peoples vote party, we walked away from the 'soft Brexit' option being promoted by Norman Lamb and others. We might have been able to play a role working with the likes of Ken Clarke, salvaging something like the customs union.' He concluded however that this was never really an option because 'we had become a fundamentalist party' on the issue. Vince added that he played his part by, for instance, supporting the 'bollocks to Brexit' slogan.

Vince was adamant that the Liberal Democrats 'shouldn't beat ourselves up' over Brexit. When Theresa May declared in her Lancaster House speech that the UK was leaving the European Union, including the Single Market, 'she burnt the boats'. It was a terrible strategic error, he argued, that ruled out any compromise options.

He also pointed out that the Liberal Democrats played no part in the 2016 Remain campaign. 'It was a [David] Cameron and Osborne campaign, complacent and arrogant, with a handful of Labour people.' Cameron and Osborne tried to use the same playbook as in the Scottish independence referendum he said, when they should have used 'a more considered, ecumenical' approach. Vince also charged that the Labour Party leader, Jeremy Corbyn 'sat on his hands … [he] and his people carry a heavy weight of responsibility [for the result].'

Rachel added a perspective that is too rarely considered: the impact of a political career on spouses and families. She admitted to some surprise when Vince became a cabinet minister, despite being aware that she had married an ambitious and able politician. She had her own interests and had thought occasionally about giving up her rural life. Rachel had always decided that while 'my heart was in Twickenham, my soul was in Hampshire with my walking and painting, and its what makes me happy.' She also found having a close-up view of government fascinating, even though Rachel learned to be very careful about what she said in public.

Interestingly, she did not share all of Vince's political views. They had a long-standing disagreement on free trade, where she described herself as 'something of an economic nationalist'. On issues of war, such as Syria and Libya, Rachel saw herself as something of a 'peacenik'.

Media intrusion in their lives was clearly difficult on occasion, but Rachel maintained that she 'tried to take laid back approach'. During

what they called 'the Murdoch stuff', on a cold day in the run up to Christmas, junior journalists converged on their home in the early hours of the morning and were joined by others. Rachel implored them to 'go away and get warm' and declined their requests for a cup of coffee, but they proved persistent. When it became hard to leave the house for a lunch appointment, they had to ask police to clear the way.

In the early hours of another morning, a young woman with bright blue hair, an eco-warrior, had placed crime scene tape around their porch. She later appeared in an *FT Magazine* feature entitled 'not too posh to protest'. Rachel wrote to the editor saying, 'if you want to do a fashion shoot at our home, please pay us next time.'

Rachel admitted to some bittersweet memories of Vince's time as leader. The Liberal Democrats did well in the May 2018 local elections, she recalled, and 'his leadership was getting somewhere.' Then they went on holiday, and he showed signs of illness on the plane with his minor stroke, and that was that.

For me, the most telling point in a fascinating, candid discussion came when Anne Perkins challenged Vince on whether the Liberal Democrats had been as 'good at politics' as they might have been, when the Conservatives were, as she said, 'totally ruthless'. He recounted how their anti-AV campaign included leaflets cynically attacking Nick Clegg, including over tuition fees. At one dramatic cabinet meeting, Chris Huhne got up and threw all the papers on the table and there were almost fisticuffs. Vince explained that he could work productively with some Conservatives, such as Matt Hancock, one of his junior ministers, and that he developed a good working relationship with Osborne. Then, he agreed, 'we weren't nasty enough'.

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

Forgotten Liberal Heroes: Sir Edward Grey and Richard Haldane

Liberal Democrat History Group evening meeting, 30 January 2023, with Thomas Otte and John Campbell OBE. Chair: Layla Moran MP.
Report by **Gianni Sarra**

Sir Edward Grey, 1st Viscount Grey of Fallodon, and Richard Haldane, 1st Viscount Haldane, were both 'big beasts' in the Liberal cabinets of Henry Campbell-Bannerman and H. H. Asquith. Despite substantial legacies and key roles, they are largely forgotten. In a meeting chaired by Layla Moran MP, their role in British history was discussed. The case for Edward Grey was put forward by Thomas Otte, Professor of Diplomatic History at University of East Anglia and the author of *Statesman of Europe: A Life of Sir Edward Grey*. Haldane was discussed by John Campbell OBE, cofounder of Campbell Lutyens and author of *Haldane: The Forgotten Statesman Who Shaped Modern Britain*, who has long considered Haldane a personal hero.

Grey's claim to fame is obvious: he served as foreign secretary for a continuous eleven years from 1905 to 1916, a tenure that has not been exceeded since. His most consequential acts included the Anglo-Russian entente of 1907, defusing several crises between European powers, and ultimately supporting Britain's entry into the First World War. His famous quote – 'the lamps are going out all over Europe, we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime' – is seen as one of the most articulate expressions of the impact of war. Haldane's career was more varied, perhaps less defined by any one position: he was a highly

effective secretary of state for war, a tireless educational reformer, a champion of efficiency in government, and two-time lord chancellor, as well as a highly accomplished lawyer and philosopher.

Both speakers put forward strong cases for why Grey and Haldane warrant greater attention and admiration from modern liberals. Grey, Professor Otte posited, has been wrongly maligned, including by contemporaries such as David Lloyd George, and no doubt hurt by his own relative reluctance to speak up for himself. His statecraft warrants an urgent re-evaluation. Haldane, Campbell passionately argued, is an unjustly neglected statesman who helped shape modern Britain and whose personal capabilities and governing philosophy hold important lessons for us today. Just one public memorial, a single blue plaque, exists to him. It is clear that Campbell thinks this is grossly insufficient.

The two men had a deep and enduring personal and political friendship, often sharing a residence together, working on red boxes alongside each other and supporting one another through both personal bereavements and political tribulations alike. Indeed, as Campbell elaborated upon in his talk, Haldane encouraged Grey to stay within politics and supported Grey after his wife's tragic death mere weeks after they entered government together. They were both members of the Coefficients Dining Club, a monthly dining group spanning the political spectrum set up by Sidney and Beatrice Webb, influential early Fabians who co-founded the London School of Economics. The two, with Asquith, were part of the 'Relugas Compact', a 1905 attempt to put Asquith in charge of the Liberals in the House of Commons by having Campbell-Bannerman elevated to the Lords, 'kicked upstairs' as it were. The plot collapsed when Asquith accepted Number 11 and both Grey and Haldane joined his cabinet. Grey and Haldane would later accept that they had been unfair to Campbell-Bannerman as the right man to keep the separate wings of the party together at the time.

Ideologically, the two represented similar wings of the Liberal Party. Both were influential backers of New Liberalism, and as New Liberals they were associated with some of the progressive causes of the time. Grey was described as a 'curious mixture of the old-fashioned Whig and the socialist', supporting home rule, educational causes, and women's suffrage. While of noble background himself, Grey viewed part of the duty of his era as paving the way for the working and middle classes to enter politics. Similarly, Haldane believed that the Liberals, had they been sufficiently ambitious, could have pre-empted the need for a Labour Party (and indeed in later life he joined Labour, according to Campbell motivated by what he saw as Labour concentrating on education to a far greater degree than the Liberals of the time were). Both were also Liberal Imperialists, who viewed empire as a means to promote liberal causes and important liberalising reforms. Modern understandings about the realities of imperial rule might go some way towards explaining their relative scarcity of modern sympathisers.

Both men have their legacy defined in large part by the First World War. For Haldane, it was the vindication of his work as war secretary, the position that he served in from 1905 to 1912. He restructured the army after the heavy criticisms of its performance in the Boer War and in preparation for a future continental war in Europe. Among the innovations during his tenure were the British Expeditionary Force, the Territorial Force, a new general staff structure, the establishment of Officers' Training Corps, and the forerunners to the RAF, MI5, and MI6. The design and implementation of these reforms was vindicated by the arduous stress testing of the war. Haldane, a lifelong Germanophile, visited Germany in 1912 in an attempt to secure future peace between the two

nations. This diplomatic effort failed, however, and provoked considerable ire from the Tory opposition.

For Grey, the First World War was the tragedy that he had failed to prevent and the most frequent knock to his reputation. What Professor Otte emphasised was the need to contextualise this. European politics was so febrile, so volatile, that it was worth considering the times Grey's statecraft stopped the descent into war. The task of any foreign secretary was to preserve the balance of power in Europe so as to prevent such wars, with the Franco-Russian and German-Austrian-Italian blocs needing to be broadly balanced. The events of 1905 had left Russia weakened, and thus Grey saw it as necessary to move closer to France, while avoiding the entanglements of a more formalised alliance. Until 1914, Grey's attempts to avoid war succeeded and he had smartly used Russia's period of weakness to settle outstanding imperial conflicts with them without further jeopardising the balance of power. The US had considered him the preserver of European peace. Conferences had prevented an escalation of war in situations such as the Balkans crises in 1912 and 1913, Russia had stabilised, and Germany had largely ceded the naval race.

Grey had, perhaps, grown overconfident in the success of his ability to defuse tricky situations via conference talks. The murders in Sarajevo proved too difficult a challenge, even for him. Still, his judgement remained sharp in the aftermath: he was an early voice warning about Hitler's rise and his intellectual support for the League of Nations steered the growth of international arbitration. As to Grey's advice to cabinet to enter the war in 1914, this too makes sense, Professor Otte argues, if you remember that it ensured Britain had a voice in the post-war settlement. As to the question of whether Grey could have done more, Otte argues that he effected as reasonable a strategy as he could with the information on hand and the British refusal to have conscription or standing alliances. While the war was not inevitable, discerning the intentions of the other powers was near impossible.

While Grey was scarcely absent from domestic politics, Haldane seemed to thrive there. Upon elevation to the Lords in 1911, he helped push through the Parliament Act establishing the supremacy of the Commons. He advocated a strong partnership between ministers and bureaucrats, pushing through the professionalisation and education of the civil service, chairing important government reform and efficiency efforts, and recommending ministries be split by function rather than beneficiary. Haldane was a highly accomplished lawyer: Queen's Counsel at 34, in his later judicial roles he advocated for a kind of judicial activism, striving to interpret the law in a way that expressed the popular will. He also made substantial contributions to Canadian constitutional law. Campbell unequivocally defends the federal division of powers that Haldane shaped, crediting it for helping save the integrity of Canada decades later by allowing the Quebecois independence referendum to narrowly be defeated.

Campbell argues that Haldane was a modern equivalent to the philosopher-king called for by Aristotle and Plato, a philosopher-politician uniquely equipped to understand the intricacies of contemporary debates. As a philosopher, Haldane was a noted authority on Hegel and Schopenhauer, and drew from them in his own ideas on efficiency and decentralisation. It was in education that Haldane created possibly the most concrete legacy in modern Britain. He was involved in not just the founding of the LSE with the Webbs but also Imperial College London, and, furthermore, catalysed the conception of red-brick civic universities by arguing for Liverpool to be freed from its early constraints, and advocated adult and working-class education. He did this all without once holding official government office in education.

Gianni Sarra is a PhD candidate at King's College London, working on issues of political ethics and liberal political theory, and is a member of the Liberal Democrat History Group executive.

Reviews

Christabel and the Liberals

June Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst: A Biography* (Routledge, 2018)
Review by **Jaime Reynolds**

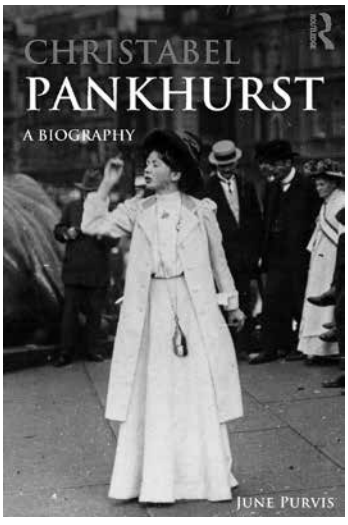
Any student of the struggle for women's suffrage soon encounters the wide gulf between the popular and academic visions of how the vote was won. In the popular imagination, the militant struggle of the suffragettes led by the Pankhursts dominates the scene. When, in 2018, women MPs celebrated the centenary of the winning of the vote in the House of Commons almost all of them wore the purple, white and green colours of the Pankhursts' Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). This mirrored the fixation with the suffragette fight in the commemorations that took place that year.

Academic opinion, on the other hand, is less impressed by the suffragette legend and is critical of many aspects of the militant campaign, especially in its later stages. It questions the effectiveness of its tactics and attributes the eventual winning of the vote in 1916–18 to factors on which the Pankhurst movement – by then largely disbanded – had little if any impact.

Many observers extend criticism of the strategy of the Pankhursts to their wider ideas and personalities. Thus Martin Pugh, biographer of the Pankhursts, sums up the careers of Christabel and her mother as being characterised by political 'shallowness' and 'their ceaseless search for self-promotion'. The force of this critique lies in the fact that it echoes attacks made on Christabel by many of her erstwhile collaborators in the militant movement, not least Sylvia and Adela Pankhurst, her two younger sisters. Sylvia's *The Suffragette Movement* (1931) which depicts Christabel as its 'evil genius' had a huge influence over the historiography.

June Purvis sets out to provide a radical feminist corrective to this consensus. Noting that Christabel 'has not been popular with feminist writers and male historians', she presents the case for the defence. Purvis, who is an emeritus professor of women's and gender history at the University of Portsmouth, as one of the foremost students of the suffrage movement is highly qualified to attempt this task. The biography follows her earlier study of Emmeline Pankhurst (2002).

The charge-sheet against Christabel is a long one. First, as chief strategist of the movement – while her ever-supportive mother was its chief agitator, public speaker and martyr – Christabel is blamed for leading the WSPU into a dead-end of escalating militancy and illegality bordering, by 1912–14, on terrorism.



Intended to shift public opinion and later to coerce the Asquith government into concessions, instead it fuelled and hardened opposition.

Secondly, Christabel's steady shift to the right is deplored. Her insistence on prioritising a limited franchise that would exclude most working-class women repelled many of the left and liberal elements of the WSPU, not least her own sisters. The rightward shift culminated in 1914–18 when the Pankhursts effectively substituted the fight for the vote with a jingoistic pro-war and anti-Red campaign supported and funded by right-wing business and the Rothermere press.

Thirdly, Christabel disappointed many feminists. The pre-1914 Christabel, an inspirational figure and electrifying speaker who developed a radical, separatist feminist standpoint, drifted away from the cause afterwards. After narrowly failing to become the first woman MP to sit in parliament in 1918, she became disillusioned with the results of women gaining the vote, played almost no part in the continuing feminist movement, and was uninspired by or even hostile to its concerns. Many of her friends and critics were perplexed by her new passion – which lasted for the remaining three decades of her life – as a Second Adventist writer and preacher, based mostly in the United States. They saw this as a strange and regrettable coda to the career of such a brilliant feminist icon.

Lastly, Christabel's personality has come in for much criticism. She is accused of running the WSPU autocratically as a cult, of evading the imprisonment and force-feeding suffered by her mother and followers by operating in comfort from France, and of advocating a 'sex-war' against men. For her first biographer, David Mitchell, she was 'a manipulative … ruthless, cold, ambitious, autocratic, self-seeking, single-minded, calculating and selfish lesbian'.

Purvis directs heavy fire against the excesses and undeclared biases she detects in much of this criticism, notably the 'masculinist' perspective which, she argues, pervades the writing of many male historians. Such critics fail to understand that Christabel was a radical feminist for whom contesting gender inequality was paramount, not secondary to or inseparable from class, party or wider political considerations. They rely on liberal or socialist feminist sources – above all Sylvia's condemnation – to make their case. For Purvis, this standpoint fails to comprehend Christabel as a radical feminist whose starting point was a refusal to submit to male-dominated parties, laws and ideas.

As regards the shift to the right, Purvis points out that 'feminism is not owned by the left', and it was not unusual for feminists of the time to hold socially conservative, patriotic and imperialist views as Christabel did. Purvis considers that Christabel's pro-war stance was not an anomaly but in tune with the climate of opinion in wartime Britain. Far from being a betrayal of feminism, Purvis sees Christabel's patriotic crusade as an extension of her feminism and a successful one.

As regards the criticism of her later career as a Christian evangelist, Purvis detects a 'secularist bias' uncomprehending of Christabel's achievement as a woman in becoming a leading international evangelical preacher.

On the central issue of the efficacy of the militant campaign, Purvis defends the strategy developed by Christabel, praising her political insight and tactical skill and suggesting that it was unlikely that non-militancy would have produced any better results. However, she does not hide the extent of the impasse in which the WSPU found itself by 1914, quoting the judgment of Annie Kenney, Christabel's right-hand, that the adoption of violence from 1912 was the point where the movement lost. Purvis implies that the wartime patriotic propaganda of the Pankhurst duo, which opened doors to Lloyd George and influential right-wing circles, helped to defuse hostility towards

votes for women. But if so, this rather confirms the shortcomings of militancy and the potential of a more subtle approach. Purvis also quotes the theory that the threat of a postwar renewal of militancy forced the concession of the vote, but the central fact is that the Pankhursts were absent from the endgame of the suffrage struggle. At the crucial stage, they were preoccupied with their patriotic mission: Emmeline was in Petrograd attempting to keep the Russians in the war, while Christabel was busy combating war weariness at home.

Even if she cannot dispel the doubts around the practical results of militancy, Purvis insists that Christabel was 'one of the key feminist thinkers of the twentieth century' and argues persuasively that her career should be examined against the prevailing cultural templates of the time rather than today's assumptions of how a feminist should think and operate. Purvis also has some success in softening the hard image of Christabel's personality. She shows, for instance, that, after Sylvia's expulsion from the WSPU in 1913, the two sisters ceased nearly all contact, but it was Christabel who initiated their reconciliation in old age.

The book contains much of interest on the wider political context, including Christabel's difficult relationship with Liberalism. This was partly ideological: she was sure that men would never give up power voluntarily unless forced to do so. It was partly tactical: the Liberals were in government and they were thus the primary target of the WSPU's by-election campaigns, harassment, disruption and violence. Christabel also developed a deep personal antipathy for the Liberal leaders, above all Asquith.

This erupted at the November 1912 deputation of the women's suffrage societies, including the WSPU, to 10 Downing Street to protest at the government's abandonment of efforts to achieve a compromise solution to the suffrage issue. Purvis records the exchanges between Asquith and Christabel. Asquith commented that:

> Miss Pankhurst talked in terms of peace, presenting, I must say, a pistol in one hand and a dagger in the other'. In regard to Christabel's demand for equal suffrage, he replied 'I am the head of the Government, and I am not going to make myself responsible for the introduction of a measure which I do not conscientiously believe to be demanded in the interests of the country.' The pert Christabel, with a wave of her hand, instantly replied, 'Then you can go, and we will get another head', to which Asquith retorted, 'I may go if you like. If you can get rid of me'. The exchange did not stop there. 'We are not satisfied', said the spirited Christabel, to which Asquith replied very blandly, 'Oh, I didn't expect to satisfy *you*.' … the loyal Annie [Kenney] suddenly confronted Asquith with the announcement, 'I'm a Militant, and we all hate and distrust you. Do you call yourself a statesman?' The startled Asquith refused to discuss the question. Seeing Annie at daggers drawn with the Prime Minister, the protective Christabel interjected, 'Don't fret yourself about him, he is not worth it. Our fight will be on public ground (pp. 257–8).

Lloyd George – dubbed by the suffragettes as 'Oily George' – was included in this loathing. According to a journalist who knew her well, Christabel 'envisaged the whole suffrage movement … as a gigantic duel between herself & Lloyd George, whom she desired to destroy'. However, this changed. In 1915, encouraged by King George V, Lloyd George sought to enlist the Pankhursts in the war effort. A cordial meeting was held at the Ministry of Munitions and afterwards, when a woman in the crowd outside shouted 'We want the vote',

Lloyd George replied, 'Yes, but we want you in the shell factory first.' Soon Christabel replaced her mouthpiece *The Suffragette* with *Britannia* (slogan 'For King, for Country, for Freedom'), which specialised in virulent attacks on Asquith, Grey and Haldane for their alleged incompetence and peace sympathies. Effectively Lloyd George had enticed the Pankhursts into his camp for little in return. Christabel's pay-off came at the 1918 general election when, standing for her Women's Party in Smethwick, she was the only woman candidate to receive his Coalition coupon.

Christabel's rancour towards the Liberal Party resurfaced in 1957 when Roger Fulford, a prominent Liberal, published his book *Votes for Women*. She was appalled when Lady Violet Bonham-Carter's favourable comments on the book were broadcast on the BBC: 'I have never heard in the whole of *our* history such a vindictive diatribe against us, for the way in which *we* treated *her* father' [i.e., Asquith]. As for Fulford 'he is just a *party-political Liberal* – 3 times a Liberal candidate – who knows what the WSPU did to the last Liberal Govt – last in two senses of the word'. She was so agitated by the book that a close friend feared she might have a stroke.

The WSPU's antipathy for the Liberals was fully reciprocated. Many women Liberal suffragists – part of wider and much larger 'law-abiding' suffragist movement – were exasperated and highly critical of suffragette tactics, which they believed inflamed opposition and delayed attainment of the vote. There is thus some historical irony in the then Lib-Dem deputy-leader, Jo Swinson's WSPU sash worn in the 2018 Commons celebrations. The truth is that, for much of its existence, the WSPU and the Liberal Party were sworn enemies.

Dr Jaime Reynolds is a retired UK and EU civil servant and independent researcher. He is currently researching the first women leaders in British local politics.

Local Liberal history

Martin Kyrle, *The Liberals in Hampshire – a Part(l)y History. Part 5, Eastleigh 1981–90: Control!* (Sarsen Press, 2022)

Review by **Mark Egan**

In 1994, I started researching the grassroots organisation of the Liberal Party between 1945 and 1964, for a doctorate that I eventually received in 2000. The conventional wisdom in political science at the time was that political activity at local level was largely irrelevant, elections being decided by big national trends. Some literature was beginning to emerge that looked at the composition of the three main political parties, and there were some academic studies, mostly in the US, which showed a link between local campaigning and election results, but I felt that I was ploughing a lonely furrow, especially in focusing on the Liberals. One of my immediate challenges was that there were very few books about the Liberals during my chosen period. Also, in those far-off, pre-internet days, finding out basic information such as who the party's candidates were in general elections, and what the outcomes of local elections had been, was a major task. Thanks to Tony Greaves's bookshop, I bought all of *The Times*'s House of Commons guides for the period (except for 1945, which was and remains too expensive) which got me started with candidates. I also spent hours churning through old copies of the *Municipal Journal* and *The Times* to work out what was happening in local government.

He probably doesn't remember, but Martin Kyrle was one of the 140-plus 'old' Liberals that I interviewed, in his case to find out more about the party's revival in Southampton in the early 1960s. It's great to discover that he's still around and still contributing to contemporary understanding of where the Liberal Democrats have come from. His series on the Liberals in Hampshire begins in the fervour of the Grimond revival; volume five brings us to the Alliance era. This isn't an account of Liberals across the county, its focus is on Eastleigh, a particularly interesting borough given how dominant the Liberals and, latterly, Liberal Democrats have been there over several decades. This book deals with the period when the Liberals went from third place on the council to taking control (with the SDP). What does it tell us?

Firstly, Martin includes a number of leaflets that show how the party communicated with voters. They all focus (no pun intended) entirely on local issues and go into considerable detail. It feels like voters were being spoken to as adults without any of the posturing which sometimes characterises political leaflets today. The absence of reference to national issues is particularly striking and reflects how 'Focus' style leaflets first appeared in the late 1950s and 1960s. A strength at local level, this approach perhaps reinforced the notion that the Liberals could not succeed at national level.

Secondly, the story of Eddie Perry's recruitment to the party is also noteworthy. Perry was a local businessman and was approached to stand for the council by two existing councillors on the basis that his professional background was different from that of the existing council group. 'How do you know I am a Liberal?' he asked. 'We know how you run your business, how you treat your staff and how you speak to the customers. We've both known you long enough to feel confident.' After a brief period of consideration, Perry joined the party, was elected to the council and served for many years. In my research, I came across a number of examples of local Liberals recruiting prominent members of the community to stand for the council before they joined the party and with scant knowledge of their actual politics. Again, there were pros and cons to this approach, but it certainly seems to have worked in Eastleigh.

Finally, Eastleigh Liberals seemed to have fun, judging by the leaflets advertising the annual summer fete (not all of which would be regarded as culturally appropriate in 2022).

Martin's narrative is relatively short but there are some useful annexes. Looking back to my doctoral research, I was pleased to see comprehensive sets of local election results for the period, obituaries of some of the key players, and contemporary correspondence about local election performance. Tellingly, perhaps, the 1983 and 1987 elections are discussed in appendix 7. Martin stood in both elections and moved the Alliance into second place in 1983, paving the way for his successor, David Chidgey, to win in the 1994 by-election. Again, helpfully, Martin's election addresses are reproduced in full.

Martin has done future historians of the party an enormous service by capturing all of this important material, whether it be local election results or leaflets, in one place and providing his analysis of how the Liberals fared over the decades in which he has been a key player in Eastleigh politics. Given the price and the specific constituency focus, this book won't be for everyone; but I hope there are other local party stalwarts out there who can be similarly inspired and turn their files and their memories into publications which properly capture the importance of local politics.

Mark Egan is a long-standing member of the Liberal Democrat History Group, whose doctoral thesis was on the grassroots organisation of the Liberal Party 1945–64. He is currently interim CEO of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh.

A life well lived

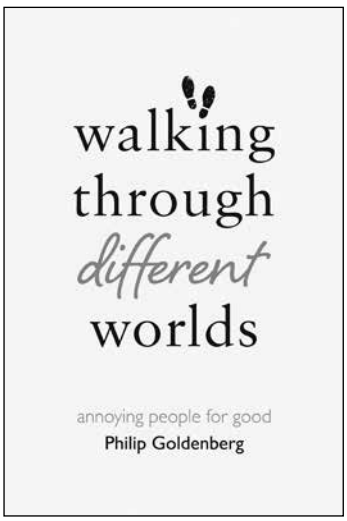
Philip Goldenberg, *Walking through Different Worlds: Annoying people for good* (The Book Guild, 2019)
Review by **William Wallace**

This is a personal memoir by a life-time active Liberal, who also had a successful career as a City lawyer, and with the CBI, the Royal Society of Arts and other organisations. Those interested in Liberal history will turn first to the chapters on his involvement in the national party, his experience in local government as a councillor in Woking, his campaigns in parliamentary and European elections, and the often-fraught relations within his local and regional parties – though the interaction between his Liberal commitments and the other strands of his public and private life provide an insight into the astonishingly wide number of activities that hyper-active Liberals find themselves caught up in.

Full disclosure: I first met Philip at the Young Liberal conference where I first met my wife and have worked with him on many political groups since. As his memoir explains, his political career involved a good deal of back-room work for the party, and a number of near-misses as a parliamentary candidate and a European parliamentary candidate. He played an important role in drawing up the constitution of the Liberal Democrats, in negotiations which were often tense and in which legal skills were valuable. He was one of the team in 1996–97 (as was I) who prepared for the possibility of a coalition or other arrangement with Labour after the 1997 election by conducting discreet conversations with various constitutional advisers who might play a role in shaping a different sort of government. He tells us about the occasion when the cabinet secretary pointed out 'the door that Sir Humphrey Appleby was locked out of', which fans of *Yes Minister* will remember. He is extremely discreet about our conversations with royal advisers, though more explicit on our prompting Peter Hennessy to deliver a public lecture on the construction of any future coalition. I would have welcomed even more detail on the preparations undertaken in 1996–97, perhaps in comparison with those undertaken in 2009–10.

Philip is candid about his own often acerbic wit; the sub-title, 'annoying people for good' says it well. He notes, for example, that he once began a speech as leader of the Liberal Democrat group on Woking Council by congratulating the controlling Conservative group on 'what Dr. Spooner would have described as a succession of shining wits.' This refusal to suffer fools gladly may explain some of his clashes with other Liberal activists in Woking and beyond – though his descriptions of the faction-fighting within his local party will be familiar to others with experience of the personality conflicts within so many voluntary organisations. He was also chair of his regional party – often a thankless but necessary task.

This, then, is a useful source book for students of Liberal history, on how one talented and energetic party member contributed an enormous amount to the party over several decades, with limited recognition or reward. It provides an individual perspective on the pressures of combining



campaigning and policy advice with professional and family life. He touches on the undertone of anti-Semitism that forced him to move from one City law firm to another, and that on occasion marked his relations with his Conservative counterparts. He notes the efforts he and his wife to care for their disabled child, and how that led him on to chair the charity concerned. He is proud of the contribution he made to the RSA's working group on 'Tomorrow's Company', putting forward a series of reforms of which too few have yet been enacted. He found himself, as a councillor, a practising Jew representing a Russian Orthodox monastery and a Muslim cemetery. He became actively involved in interfaith groups in Woking – another field in which relations are often delicate and open to misunderstanding.

And – like me and many other active Liberals – he has been a prolific writer of articles and letters to newspapers whenever opportunity arose, many of which he includes at the end of chapters and in an appendix. A life well lived, with insufficient reward, at least in this world.

William Wallace (Lord Wallace of Saltaire) is a member of the Journal of Liberal History *editorial board. He is currently Liberal Democrat Cabinet Office spokesman in the Lords.*

Brexit and social democracy

Adrian Williamson, *Europe and the Decline of Social Democracy in Britain* (The Boydell Press, 2019)
Reviewed by **Neil Stockley**

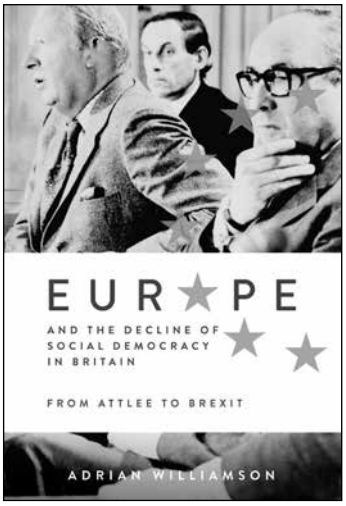
The Brexit referendum of 24 June 2016 was a traumatic event for liberals. Membership of the European Union provided Britain with economic and trading opportunities, cooperation on huge challenges such as climate change, influence in world affairs, social and environmental protections and access to culture. But the British electorate turned its back on all these benefits and liberals are still struggling to process the outcome.

In this tightly argued and well-researched account, Adrian Williamson traces the decision back to the massive political changes that shook Britain over the previous fifty years. From the end of the Second World War until the late 1970s, he contends, successive Labour and Conservative governments pursued policies in line with a broadly 'social democratic' consensus. These policies comprised an explicit commitment to full employment as a central goal of macro-economic strategy; egalitarian and redistributive approaches to taxation and public spending; strong trade unions, with a substantial role in both industrial and political affairs; a mixed economy, with utilities held in public ownership; comprehensive education; the welfare state; and a substantial public rented housing sector.

There was little room for extremes of any type. Just as Enoch Powell and other 'free marketeers' were pushed to the margins of the Conservative Party, so were the left factions within Labour marginalised, though the latter steadily gained strength in the party after the defeat of the Wilson government in 1970.

Crucially, Williamson argues, the dominant One Nation Conservatives and Labour right shared a deep conviction that the UK should be part of a joint economic venture with continental Europe. Conversely, the loudest voices against Britain's involvement in Europe came from the Tory right who advocated 'a fundamentalist form of free-market nationalism', and the Labour left who believed that membership would constrain their ability to build a socialist society.

Williamson goes on to contend that the post-war consensus reached its zenith at the time of the 1975 referendum, when Britons voted by a two-to-one margin to stay in the European Economic Community (EEC). But soaring



inflation, a balance of payments crisis and the 'winter of discontent' then opened the way to Margaret Thatcher's election victory in 1979. Over the following eleven years, she reversed much of the post-war domestic consensus in economic and industrial policy.

For a time, the pro-European cause did not appear to be at risk. In the mid-1980s, Mrs Thatcher's government engaged more deeply with the EEC, but she was soon at odds with the Commission President and proponent of 'social Europe', Jacques Delors. From 1988, Williamson explains, the Conservative parliamentary party moved steadily to the right and became ever more Eurosceptic.

The anti-European 'hard left' gained the ascendancy in the Labour Party after 1979, leading to a split and the formation of the Social Democratic Party (SDP). In the late 1980s and 1990s, the Labour Party under Neil Kinnock and Tony Blair rediscovered the European cause, albeit tentatively, even as the retreat of social democracy continued. Williamson contends that the New Labour cabinets after 1997 largely accepted the Thatcherite dispensation and 'pursued policies that left the UK once more on the periphery of a Europe with whose social democratic instincts they felt little sympathy'. Meanwhile, the SDP had dissolved into the increasingly market-friendly Liberal Democrats.

Williamson argues that after the 2008 financial crisis, Gordon Brown's government failed to deliver an effective social democratic prescription, leaving the Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition to pursue its austerity programme. In 2015, Labour fell once more under the control of hard left Eurosceptics. When the Brexit referendum came, those backing British membership of the EU were overwhelmed. Without the social democratic framework that had helped bring the UK into Europe in 1973, and kept it there in 1975, he contends, the pro-European cause lacked sufficient political robustness to resist the nationalist forces ranged against it.

This book has much to commend it. Readers are unlikely to find a more accessible and comprehensive survey of the debates and shifts over Europe that convulsed the Labour and Conservative parties for sixty years. It is hard to disagree with Williamson's conclusion that the curtailment of economic and social policies that aimed to promote an egalitarian society provided fertile political ground for the twenty-first-century Brexiteers. While he does not build his case on economic determinism, Britain was certainly a much less equal country in 2016 than it was in 1975, leaving the Remain camp unable to galvanise a broad electoral coalition for their cause.

In one important respect, however, the notion that the social democratic consensus embraced the cause of Britain in Europe, his argument is not always convincing.

The approach taken by successive Labour Party leaders is most instructive. The book acknowledges that Prime Minister Clement Attlee, arguably the most important co-founder of the post-war consensus, was a constitutional conservative who opposed supranationalist integration. But Williamson brushes over Attlee's refusal to join the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1950 on the grounds that the Community and, later, the Common Market, would gain too much influence over the British economy. Hugh Gaitskell, the social democrats' lost hero, famously

declared in 1962 that Britain joining the Common Market would mark the 'end of a thousand years of history'. Nor were the last Labour prime ministers who followed the post-war consensus committed Europeans. Harold Wilson, at heart a 'Commonwealth man', became renowned for his flip-flops on the Common Market question as he struggled to hold his party together. James Callaghan was also ambivalent about Europe for most of his career and ended up, at most, a pragmatic supporter of the EEC.

As Williamson explains very well, the question of entry bitterly divided the Labour Party in the 1960s and 1970s, with most of its MPs and members suspicious or hostile to membership. At the 1975 referendum, the leading figures in the 'No' campaign were Labour's left-wingers and nationalists who saw the EEC as, in Tony Benn's words, 'a capitalist club'. Roy Jenkins, the party's leading pro-European, advocated membership primarily on political grounds: Britain should take its rightful place among other medium-sized powers in Europe, rather than trying to go it alone in an increasingly hostile world; being part of a wider entity would enhance her influence. In the 1975 referendum campaign Jenkins did not usually deploy economic or social policy – that is, social democratic – arguments for staying in.

The latter was also true of the Conservatives, who were indisputably the more pro-European of the two main parties under Harold Macmillan and Edward Heath and who provided the organisational backbone of the official Yes campaign in 1975. Heath pursued vigorously the cause of entry because he believed that Britain could only become more competitive and achieve higher economic growth by entering the Common Market. By providing opportunities for technological cooperation and economies of scale, Heath concluded, membership could help to deliver his vision of a more efficient UK economy. As Williamson points out, he perceived a 'Christian Democratic Europe' – possibly including industrial planning and strong trade unions - as being very different from a 'Socialist Democratic one'. Just as importantly, Heath was adamant that being part of an EEC with a common foreign and security policy was essential to restoring Britain's global influence.

All of this raises an interesting question: the extent to which the European Communities and latterly the European Union have been agents for social democracy. Williamson touches on this when he points out that the Treaty of Rome contained what was in effect a Social Chapter, but he also observes, correctly, that later on, the EU Social Chapter – a major battlefront in UK political debates during the 1990s – was a much more modest undertaking than British political rhetoric suggested. Towards the end of the book, he says that: 'the EU emerged from the [2008–09 financial] crisis as a force for neoliberalism and financial orthodoxy'. But then, deregulatory and anti-statist ideas have shaped EEC and EU policies since the 1980s. These are complex issues that deserve more detailed analysis and discussion in the context of Brexit.

Williamson restricts the Liberal Party, SDP and Liberal Democrats to walk-on parts. Jeremy Thorpe plays an enthusiastic, high-profile role in the Yes campaign of 1975. When Labour comes under the control of the Eurosceptic, Bennite left in the early 1980s, Roy Jenkins and the Gang of Four, staunch defenders of the social democratic consensus and true believers of Britain's destiny in Europe, founded the SDP. The new party fails and is absorbed into the Liberal Democrats who become more market-friendly until, under Nick Clegg and the 'Orange Bookers', they become a full-fledged 'neo-liberal' party, content to be enablers of the Cameron–Osborne austerity programme.

Williamson's approach is understandable, given that

A Liberal Democrat History Group evening meeting

The Strange Death of Liberal England Revisited

George Dangerfield's *The Strange Death of Liberal England*, published in 1935, became one of the most influential accounts of the Liberal Party's demise as a party of government. By the end of 1913, claimed Dangerfield, 'Liberal England was reduced to ashes' by the threat of civil war in Ireland, the campaign for women's suffrage and an unprecedented wave of strikes.

In recent decades, however, many historians have taken issue with Dangerfield's thesis. Join **Vernon Bogdanor** (Research Professor at the Centre for British Politics and Government at King's College London and author of *The Strange Survival of Liberal Britain: Politics and Power Before the First World War*) and **Richard Toye** (Professor of History at the University of Exeter) to discuss Liberal politics in the early twentieth century. Chair: **Sarah Olney MP**.

6.30pm, Monday 10 July
National Liberal Club, 1 Whitehall Place, London SW1A 2HE.

*Those unable to attend in person will be able to view the meeting via Zoom. Please register for online access via the History Group website (*https://liberalhistory.org.uk/events*/). For those attending in person, there is no need to register.*

the parties were a long way from government for nearly all of the period under discussion. Even so, there is much more to the development of Liberal Democrat economic thinking from the 1980s until the formation of the coalition than he allows. As for the party's role in the coalition, 'Orange Booker' David Laws has provided detailed accounts of how Nick Clegg and others blocked the Conservatives' attempts to cut public spending even more sharply after economic growth slowed halfway into the coalition's term. Laws and the 'social democrat' Vince Cable have been similarly frank about the debates and differences between Liberal Democrat ministers over the coalition's fiscal strategy.

Perhaps I protest too much, and the various ways in which the Liberal Democrats may have unknowingly turned the wheel of history towards Brexit could also be the subject of a further study. This readable book provides a lucid, accessible account of the much more significant, long-term political drivers behind this momentous decision.

Neil Stockley is a menber of the Liberal Democrat History Group's executive committee.