Roy Jenkins

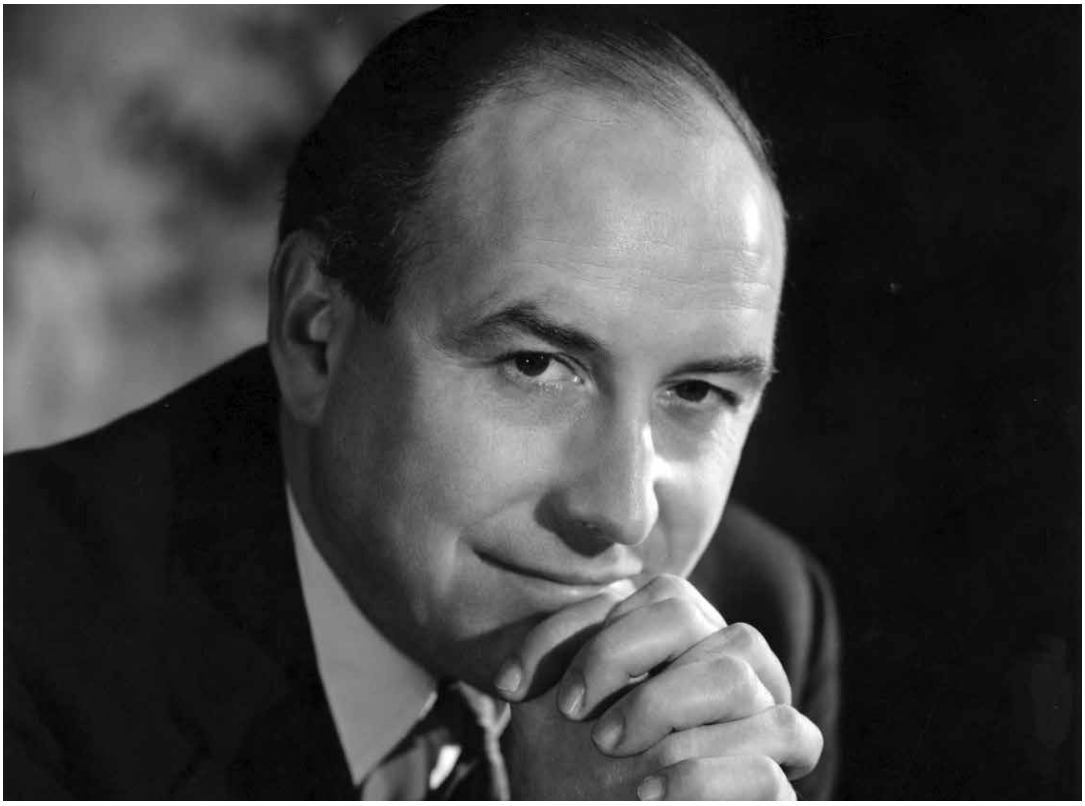
Marc Collinson examines Roy Jenkins' record in reforming and liberalising British race relations legislation.

Roy Jenkins' 'liberal hour[s]'

Ministerial power, the 'Liberal tradition', and the redefinition of British race relations legislation

In an accessible write up of the Institute of Race Relations report 'Colour, Citizenship and British Society', social scientist Nicholas Deakin described the passing of 1960s race relations legislation as a 'liberal hour'. A phrase borrowed from US politician Adlai Stevenson, it referred to a moment where people of all shades of opinion would accept the 'necessity of a movement in policy on a social problem issue' in a liberal direction.[1] Understanding the role of Roy Jenkins as home secretary in the mid-1960s and mid-1970s provides a case study of how a 'liberal' reform programme could still be implemented when there was little electoral chance of a Liberal government. This is not a novel argument, and Jenkins has not been without advocates. Jeremy Nuttall has recently described him as the 'main force … behind the liberalization of the country's moral code.'[2] How Jenkins used the political power of his office to be this 'main force' was, in many ways, central to this history. However, in most examples of these social reforms, including the decriminalisation of abortion or homosexuality, his actions facilitated the reforms of others, rather than being a direct intervention. To better understand Jenkins's commitment to liberalisation, an evaluation of a policy area that he actually impacted, like race relations, is necessary. This allows greater consideration of what Jenkins sought to achieve and how.

In a later reflection, former Social Democratic Party member and later Labour cabinet minister Andrew Adonis has reconsidered the Jenkins home secretaryship as that of an archetypal 'transformational minister' – one who made reform happen.[3] However, while useful, this framework is perhaps more suited to advancing an overarching agenda, rather than specific changes to a defined policy area, such as race relations. Within this more focused area, more effective is political scientist Archie Brown's category of the 'redefining' politician that seeks 'to move the centre [of politics] in their direction … [aiming] to alter people's thinking of what is feasible and desirable'.[4] Such politicians do this by articulating their vision through speeches and mobilising political support in party and parliament. However, as Jenkins's second term at the Home Office demonstrated, as issues became more technical and policymaking infrastructure was more developed, a 'redefining politician' needed specialist advisors in a more formalised role that was possible in the 1960s. An effective background team helped make the redefinition a reality, as the politician used what the historian Robert Caro defined, in his biography of the great (if



Roy Jenkins, Baron Jenkins of Hillhead (1920–2003) in 1963 (© National Portrait Gallery, London)

imperfect) liberal President Lyndon Johnson, as 'political power'.[5]

Caro argues that, in a democracy, political power allows elected politicians to affect the lives of millions of their fellow citizens.[6] In the right context, a politician with sufficient political power can be crucial in redefining the policy, as opposed to just advocating principles.[7] In the narrower field of race relations, it remains possible to evaluate Jenkins's own initiative and direct impact.[8] He was arguably one of what he later defined as the 'considerable liberal influences in ... Labour' during this period when the Liberal Party lacked direct political influence.[9] This article differs from previous interpretations, as it focuses specifically on Jenkins's attempts to modernise Britain's race relations apparatus, contextualised within the wider creation of a 'civilised' or 'permissive' (depending on the writer's political views) society. Where previous home secretaries had done little to alleviate the racial discrimination that had permeated some sections of British society, he acted as a leading ministerial champion of post-war integration. Through examining these events, it is possible to trace the influence of what Jenkins later described as the 'Liberal Tradition' on his politics, many years before he broke away from Labour Party.[10]

Liberal attitudes? Labour politicians and post-war migration

From the late 1950s, large-scale migration impacted on British society, particularly in urban areas affected by ongoing deindustrialisation. However, despite various concerns at the local level, at the national level, the Labour Party supported the principle of equality and,

in 1958, its ruling National Executive Committee (NEC) published a statement against racial discrimination that was supported by the party's conference.[11] Within the party, Roy Jenkins was not the first parliamentarian to champion the cause. By 1962, left-wing MP Fenner Brockway's eighth attempt to introduce a private members bill (a piece of legislation promoted by a backbench MP after winning a ballot of colleagues) that would ban racial discrimination was again unsuccessful.[12] Until 1961, championing racial equality had been the preserve of Labour's intellectual, anti-imperialist left wing, not the party leadership.

Only after party leader Hugh Gaitskell took a strong anti-discrimination stance in parliamentary debates over what became the Macmillan government's Commonwealth Immigration Act of 1962, did things change. This legislation, which sought to limit entry of migrants from Britain's former colonies, encouraged the party leadership to demonstrate their commitment to the ethos of its 1958 statement. However, new Labour leader Harold Wilson then announced at an anti-apartheid rally on 17 March 1963 in Trafalgar Square that, 'When we have a Labour majority, we will enact it as a government measure'.[13] This was an important and significant change, but how it would be implemented if and when Labour returned to office was dependent on a successful election victory and a stable political situation. However, during the 1964 election one unexpected constituency result caused a great deal of political trouble.

In the Smethwick constituency on the outskirts of Birmingham, in a contest dominated by racial innuendo, Conservative candidate Peter Griffiths defeated the shadow foreign secretary, Patrick Gordon Walker.[14] Yet Labour politicians were far from cowed. Harold Wilson declared Peter Griffiths a 'parliamentary leper', appointed Gordon Walker as foreign secretary anyway, and engineered a by-election at Leyton, which the unlucky Gordon Walker lost for a combination of reasons.[15] As a fellow Midlands MP, Roy Jenkins reflected privately that Smethwick left him 'feeling gloomy' and he pitied the 'ghastliness of the position for Gordon Walker'.[16] However, wider concerns and political instability forced the government to act. As Wilson and Jenkins (still aviation minister at this point) agreed in a private meeting shortly afterwards, another election was impossible, but agreed action was required to address apparent concerns over migration and racial discrimination.[17]

Responding to Smethwick, Labour's new home secretary, Frank Soskice, brought forward a 'package deal' of greater immigration restriction and what became the Race Relations Act 1965.[18] However, Labour's process for drawing it up had been 'fragmentary and incoherent'.[19] It soon became obvious that, as it did not cover discrimination in employment and housing, it was too weak to be effective. Rather, the 1965 Act was more of a 'statement of policy than a substantial prohibition'.[20] Though the Act was a failure of substance, it provided a foundation on which future reforms could build. Furthermore, political changes were on the horizon. In the cabinet reshuffle following Gordon Walker's resignation in January 1965, Roy Jenkins was offered the Ministry of Education, but turned it down hoping to be offered the Home Office when it became available. He did not have to wait long, as the home secretary, Sir Frank Soskice, resigned in the subsequent December and Wilson replaced him with Jenkins.

A liberal at the Home Office?

On his appointment, Jenkins was the youngest home secretary since Churchill and set about reform with a similar energy. He replaced the existing permanent secretary with Philip Allen, a civil servant of a similar mind. In a later reflection, Allen observed that Jenkins's first period at the Home Office had

a 'marked and lasting effect on the country's culture and social values.'[21] Here, Roy Jenkins's long-term thinking and well-known views, alongside a ready-made manifesto or 'unauthorised programme' for reform, ensured he was able to outline changes with speed and efficiency.[22] His 1959 Penguin Special, *The Labour Case*, laid out reforms that could be implemented by an incoming Labour government, though there was no direct policy for race relations, beyond criticism of the actions of the South African and Rhodesian governments.[23] Beyond this, Jenkins expressed his view that the UK's migration system was 'more suitable to a police state', and encouraged civil society to advocate for 'a general climate of opinion favourable to gaiety and tolerance' regarding issues like racial discrimination, which was not just 'a job for politicians'.[24] However, much of the overall proposed reform package could only by promoted by an activist minister at the Home Office, which Jenkins sought to be after his December 1965 appointment.

For example, Jenkins promoted the Criminal Justice Act of 1967, which abolished flogging in prisons and introduced majority verdicts by juries. He also used powers already invested in the home secretary to merge police forces, reducing the number from 117 to 49. Jenkins then set about supporting two private members bills that stand above others as exemplars of the government's support of the 'civilised society.' In 1966, Jenkins gave support to David Steel's Medical Termination of Pregnancy Bill and Leo Abse's Sexual Offences Bill, which respectively decriminalised abortion and homosexuality. The government provided help with drafting and extra parliamentary time. Although Jenkins performed only a facilitative role, without his intervention these changes were unlikely to happen. However, his significant role within race relations policy was of a different order, with the home secretary central to the reform agenda. Rather than collaborating with parliamentary colleagues, Jenkins drove the agenda himself, alongside key allies such as former Liberal MP and friend Mark Bonham Carter, and lawyer and anti-discrimination campaigner Anthony Lester.[25] Both, in effect, formed part of a liberal-minded advisory network that reinforced the home secretary's political instincts. They also helped him communicate his message.

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On 23 May 1966, the home secretary gave a speech, redrafted by Lester, that some have called his best.[26] His advisers called it his 'we shall overcome' speech, purposely referencing Lyndon Johnson's appropriation of that civil rights slogan while promoting America's recent 1965 Voting Rights Act.[27] In it, Jenkins argued that integration relied on equal opportunity, cultural diversity, and mutual tolerance. He was critical of attempts to disparage the purity of the little Englander mentality, arguing, 'If it were to happen to the rest of us, to the Welsh (like myself), to the Scots, to the Irish, to the Jews, to the mid-European, and to still more recent arrivals, it would be little short of a national disaster.' This was a rare example of Jenkins actually acknowledging his Welsh roots for political purposes, something he rarely did in the political arena.[28] In his speech, Jenkins argued that it was right that the Home Office oversaw both immigration control and the 'exciting and constructive part of the work … integration policy.' He argued that whilst migration control was 'distasteful …, it remains a duty.'[29] Jenkins advocated a policy of liberalising the system and redefining its ethos, rather than transforming it beyond recognition. In a passage in which he defined the Wilson government's view on integration, he suggested integration should be seen 'not

as a flattening process of assimilation but as equal opportunity, accompanied by cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance.'[30] The home secretary had committed the government to the reform of race relations legislation.

The speech fulfilled Harold Wilson's rallying cry that the Labour Party was 'a moral crusade or it is nothing,' but also outlined practical concerns, such as failings in the Race Relations Act to address a proliferation of racialist literature. The home secretary argued that new race relations legislation could extend the newly constituted Race Relations Board, which was designed to deal with complaints and conciliate, and their purview over employment and housing to better facilitate integration. Ministers were wary of legislating for enforcement. Jenkins suggested such actions could not be imposed by legal compulsion and that the 'voluntary co-operation of employers and trade unionists' was necessary.[31] Such words were also backed up with action, such as his appointment of Mark Bonham Carter, H. H. Asquith's grandson, Jenkins's publisher and friend, and a former Liberal MP, as chair of the Race Relations Board, and his plans to pursue a more progressive approach through new administrative structures.[32] Alongside such telling actions, political speeches were also used to outline a new agenda and encourage wider support for proposed measures.

In the home secretary's first speech after the March 1966 election, and in speeches that followed, a careful strategy was employed to avoid creating an electoral backlash. In the aftermath of the Smethwick result, the government were most concerned about angering Labour voters they thought opposed to migration.[33] As academic Nicholas Deakin suggested, Jenkins had 'placed' several speeches on race relations throughout his career at the Home Office, like 'stepping-stones across a potentially treacherous marsh'.[34] Like many, he saw 'nothing but good' for migrant communities when ministers addressed racial prejudice.[35] What was most striking was how similar Jenkins's agenda was to the policy proposals contained in the Liberal Party manifesto at the 1966 election.[36] Although he demonstrated limited interest in the Liberal Party at this point and perceived Labour as the only viable alternative to the Conservatives, the home secretary was clearly a 'small-l' liberal fellow traveller, sharing similar instincts on race relations.

However, at this time, even though Liberal Party parliamentarians collaborated with Labour cabinet members, and both drew ideas from the same liberal tradition, party politics dominated. Even then, Liberal candidates were not encouraged to be overly supportive of Jenkins as home secretary, or Labour's approach to the policy area more broadly.[37] What remained apparent was that a progressive, liberal agenda formed the ideological core of Roy Jenkins's period at the Home Office. Many of these ideals were encapsulated by his May 1966 speech, which clearly outlined the direction of travel in policymaking. It reflected his December 1967 observation that the 'positive side of politics [was about] getting ideas translated into policies, and the policies translated into legislation'.[38] Jenkins made a number of speeches to follow this up, and used the influence that came alongside his political power as home secretary to make it possible.[39] This allowed him to further his agenda, with the support of cabinet colleagues, who expressed no opposition in cabinet, where they criticised discriminatory practices, particularly in Rhodesia, at great length.[40] However, the realities of politics remained unavoidable, as unexpected political events undermined the best-laid policy plans. Despite all the work that went into it, the 1966 seamen's strike and its fallout, which was the main news story of the week, obscured the speech's impact.[41]

After Jenkins

Political realities aside, the ambitions articulated by the home secretary's speech ensured policymaking momentum was maintained. A month later, Labour MP Maurice Orbach presented a private members bill, drafted by the Jenkins's advisors, to parliament.[42] From late 1967 onwards, a report by the think tank Political and Economic Planning demonstrated to policymakers that existing legislation was inadequate and failing to combat discrimination in housing and employment.[43] A vital addition to the debate over extending the reach of the Race Relations Act, it gave Jenkins the political space to argue for greater powers. Its publication led to a parliamentary motion signed by 142 Labour and Liberal members calling for an extension of the 1965 Act.[44] This was key to the Labour government's decision to propose new legislation.[45] After the devaluation crisis of autumn 1967, Harold Wilson performed a cabinet reshuffle, where he moved Jim Callaghan to the Home Office and Jenkins to the Treasury. Therefore, Jenkins had been in post for less than two years and had not had the chance to legislate on race relations.[46] However, his liberal ideas influenced already-planned legislation.

Callaghan initially suggested that he would not bow to liberal consciences, but would be a 'simple Home Secretary', an observation clearly aimed at his predecessor.[47] However, circumstances led him to reach for Jenkins's proposed reforms. While still at the Home Office, Jenkins had considered the need to implement tighter restrictions if a large percentage of Kenya's Asian minority took up their right to British citizenship after President Jomo Kenyatta implemented his policy of 'Africanization'. The new home secretary passed legislation within three days, to deal with the 'emergency' situation. However, Callaghan's contemporaneous claims that he had inherited contingency legislation from his predecessor, was not completely accurate, as this was still under discussion.[48] Rather, Callaghan's approach suited his own agenda. He was able to shore up concerns among Labour's right wing and address Conservative concerns, before using the race relations legislation outlined by Jenkins to appease the left and reposition himself at the party centre. Despite the new home secretary's suggestions to the contrary, Jenkins's liberalising agendas survived and formed an important part of Callaghan's legislative plans.[49]

On 23 April 1968, Jim Callaghan introduced a new race relations bill, three days after Conservative MP Enoch Powell deliberately pre-empted him and delivered his infamous 'Rivers of Blood' speech.[50] Callaghan's race relations bill was wider in scope, but weaker in enforcement, as the new home secretary had blocked greater enforcement powers to the Race Relations Board and courts.[51] Jenkins, now chancellor, supported his colleague in a speech at Swansea on 4 May 1968. He criticised Powell's speech as well as his motives for making it. While accepting that integration could not happen without migration being limited, he argued that migration had to be dealt with responsibly, as a matter of principle.[52] While Jenkins was no longer politically responsible for race relations, he nonetheless played an important role in making the Race Relations (Amendment) Act of 1968 a reality and encouraging a progressive political settlement at a difficult time. Jenkins made few public comments other than the Swansea speech before the government lost power in 1970, but his liberal approach clearly redefined Labour's policy on race relations during the mid and late 1960s.

A returning Home Secretary

Labour's return to government in 1974 was different to the heady days of 1964. The economy was in crisis and years in opposition had damaged reputations, including that of Roy Jenkins, which had been so carefully cultivated in

government before 1970. Harold Wilson was prime minister again, but he was less dynamic than a decade before and more focused on party unity. While the UK's accession to the European Economic Community was a success for Edward Heath, national industrial disputes compounded by a global energy crisis led to a sudden end to his administration. Similarly, Jenkins's role in leading Labour pro-Europeans to vote with the Conservatives to support Heath's objective had inflamed Labour Party divisions over its European policy and undermined Jenkins's chances of succeeding Wilson as party leader and prime minister. Before this, it was assumed that Jenkins was Wilson's obvious successor, confirmed by his post-1970 election as party deputy leader. Clashes over Europe had prompted Roy Jenkins's resignation as deputy leader in 1972 and had soured much goodwill. By 1974, the sixties appeared to be the zenith of his Labour career.

Returning to government with Labour more divided than ever, cabinet construction proved difficult for Harold Wilson. Still, he placed Jenkins as home secretary as it allowed his return to government in a more 'semi-detached role,' where his actions would not inflame a temperamental internal party atmosphere.[53] In the new administration, Jenkins's relationship with his junior minister, Alex Lyon shaped the development and implementation of race relations policy. They proved to be one of the government's less effective ministerial pairings, as they clashed over the priorities.[54] In his objectives, Jenkins was more focused on humanising the bureaucracy and created new machinery where appropriate. Alex Lyon, a committed socialist, sought more radical solutions to the wider system that transformed an oppressive bureaucracy that had, to date, ostracised migrants from decision making.[55] While both sought political means to eradicate racial discrimination, they represented different progressive traditions. Despite this, legislative and policymaking activity was no less realistic and no less liberal than Jenkins's previous incumbency.

New ideas were brought into the political process through innovative channels, be they special advisors, think-tank research, or alternative examples informed by international practice.

At Westminster, the progressive human rights lawyer Anthony Lester, a principal Jenkins acolyte since the 1960s, became the home secretary's special adviser, advising on both sex and race discrimination legislation.[56] Early policy initiatives backed up these principles. In April 1974, Jenkins announced an amnesty for Commonwealth citizens declared illegal by the retrospective implementation of the Immigration Act 1971. In June, Labour lifted restrictions on the admission of husbands and fiancés of women settled in Britain. Before October 1974, Labour was a minority government, so Jenkins and Lyon began an administrative, rather than legislative, liberalisation of migration rules. In February 1975, ministers raised the entry quota of non-patrial UK passport holders from 3,000 to 5,000.[57] Although they had accepted the necessity of the inherited Conservative Immigration Act, Jenkins sought to liberalise its more authoritarian aspects. Many were concerned that these reforms may anger the electorate and prove unpopular. However, tactically implemented administrative tweaks were not the sustained, significant reform that Jenkins and Alex Lyon hoped for. Instead, they now relied on fresh ideas and new evidence drawn from beyond traditional policymaking circles. As in the 1960s, Home Office ministers and advisers once more engaged with intellectual stimuli beyond the Civil Service.

It was the role of two of Jenkins's more liberal advisors that helped develop new policies. The centrality of Mark Bonham-Carter, the influential chair of the statutory Community Relations Commission (CRC) since 1971, and Anthony Lester demonstrated the significance and influence of Jenkins's long-term, informal, liberal advisory network. It also reflected a change in how government operated. Special advisors were only formally created by Harold Wilson's government of March to October 1974 and provided politicians with a vital source of alternative information and advice.[58] Such advisors were vital in the process as, after the 1974 election, there was no single vision, and the opposing viewpoints of his special advisor and the chair of the CRC proved central to the development of reformed enforcement apparatus. Bonham-Carter and Lester were in serious disagreement over the shape this should take.[59] It was through these debates and negotiations that the eventual Act possessed necessary investigative powers, and the power of legal sanction.[60] The significance of these two liberally minded advisors to the outcome emphasises the open, intellectual nature of policy development within Roy Jenkins's Home Office. It also showed how the creation of special advisors merely formalised relationships that already existed informally.

Ideas were also drawn from a broader pool than was usual within the post-war Labour Party. Independent think tank Political and Economic Planning (PEP) produced a series of reports on the state of British race relations between 1974 and 1976.[61] These discussed housing, unemployment, and newer concepts like racial disadvantage, which informed the types of changes examined and implemented by Jenkins and his advisers at the Home Office.[62] Perhaps most important was racial disadvantage, which was a transformative concept within the development of the 1976 Race Relations Act. It implied that employment discrimination could be contextual, not just intentional, thus widening the legal definition. The Home Office's adoption of this drew on an influential and progressive 1971 American Supreme Court judgment, *Griggs v. Duke Power*.[63] It was a legal development that had long interested Jenkins's advisors, Mark Bonham-Carter and Anthony Lester.[64] Yet these had little immediate impact on political agenda before Roy Jenkins visited the USA in December 1974.[65]

Within post-war Britain, this influence of ideas drawn from other countries cannot be underestimated.[66] During Roy Jenkins's December 1974 visit to the US, he attended seminars at the University of Pennsylvania.[67] Jenkins's trip was transformative and acted to change government language. One unnamed junior minister was so enamoured with the American Supreme Court ruling, they quoted it in a parliamentary standing committee, one of the rare occasions that another nation's case law has been quoted in support of proposed UK legislation.[68] Within weeks, Health Secretary Barbara Castle explained to cabinet that 'informed opinion was abandoning the view that differences in colour should be treated as if they did not exist or did not matter'.[69] In just a short timeframe, the very underpinnings of the UK's exiting anti-discrimination legislation appeared outdated. New ideas were brought into the political process through innovative channels, be they special advisors, think-tank research, or alternative examples informed by international practice.

The last intervention

During his final term as home secretary, Roy Jenkins oversaw the implementation of new legislation on sex and race discrimination. Brought forward in sequence, this allowed the government to legitimate its actions. The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 was deliberately

designed with provisions based on the earlier Race Relations Act (1968) promulgated by Jim Callaghan. Once the former was passed, the newly proposed race relations bill built on its established precedent.[70] This leap-frogging approach allowed legislation to maintain an air of progression and improvement, with each individual bill or law part of a wider programme of reform, which constituted a second 'liberal hour'. Neither piece of legislation was, like the Race Relations Act (1965), a mere statement of intent. Both Acts created new administrative bodies, namely the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality, which again took inspiration from American examples.[71] This created a package of measures that proved sustainable, with compulsion and regulation required instead of voluntary agreements. Labour had learned lessons from earlier policymaking initiatives.

In office, Roy Jenkins used political power in pursuit of the liberal aim to ensure that the state did not obstruct individual freedom.

Arguably, consistency in leading actors helped. Many of these changes were based on the work of Roy Jenkins and his advisors, who used the political power of the home secretaryship to redefine how the government addressed discriminatory behaviour in the UK. Among wider political debates about protecting individuals, Roy Jenkins believed legislation was important. For example, he had opposed attempts in cabinet to obfuscate legally defined rights through the proposed creation of voluntary procedures around the management of the closed shop, as suggested by the TUC.[72] Jenkins, ever the liberal individualist, opposed a woolly, non-definitive approach, and demanded legal safeguards based on rights and responsibilities.[73] Throughout cabinet meetings, Jenkins's colleagues were uninterested and distracted, but the home secretary ensured his view was heard.[74] These were not the actions of a self-defined recidivist, uninterested in the outcomes of the government and merely reacting. While less absorbed with reaching the top of the Labour Party, Jenkins delivered important reforms to the British legal system, using the clear authority of his ministerial office to pursue a more liberal agenda. Then, as early 1976 began, Roy Jenkins introduced his last formal contribution to the UK's race relations infrastructure.

Despite his years as a leading champion of legislative reform over race relations, the 1976 law was the only one he guided through parliament. Speaking in the House Commons, Jenkins outlined four principles that had inspired the government's approach to the proposed legislation. Firstly, Labour accepted that most settled migrants would remain permanently. Secondly, they were 'entitled to full and equal treatment regardless of their colour, race, or national origins.' Thirdly, the government acknowledged that strict migration control would remain a cornerstone of policy. Finally, it accepted that integration required more than just legislation; it depended 'upon the leadership of Government and Parliament and on the other hand, upon the response of society as a whole.'[75] The legislation merged the Race Relations Board and Community Relations Commission, created by previous legislation, and created a new Commission for Racial Equality (CRE). It also gave civil courts and industrial tribunals the responsibility for redress, rather than the CRE. Instead, it received enhanced investigatory powers, which allowed it to investigate discrimination beyond complaints and, as Jenkins argued, 'work towards the elimination of discrimination'.[76]

The Race Relations Act (1976) gained royal assent on 22 November 1976. Yet, by this point, the home secretary's ministerial career was over. He had run in the leadership election to succeed Harold Wilson but lost out to James Callaghan. Discussions centred around Jenkins's request for the Foreign Office, which was refused, and his unwillingness to wait six months before a move to the Treasury in place of Denis Healey.[77] Shortly afterwards, Jenkins was selected to be the next (and only British) president of the European Commission, which required his resignation as MP for Stechford. Labour lost Stechford and Ashfield to the Conservatives, which reflected the outcome of several by-elections in 1977 that eroded the Labour government's majority, and a vote of no confidence was likely. Only the formation of the 'Lib–Lab' Pact with the Liberal Party in March 1977 avoided a potential loss of power. That a Labour–Liberal confidence arrangement was the outcome of Roy Jenkins leaving parliament was perhaps the most ironic outcome. However, his notably liberal use of administrative levers and political power during his two terms as home secretary are certainly worthy of reflection.

Two Liberal hours

Although Roy Jenkins championed further important reforms in other roles, his two tenures at the Home Office during the 1960s and 1970s were among the most creative periods of his career. In fact, through a clear understanding of Jenkins's liberal and social democratic instincts, it is possible to understand his support for the SDP–Liberal Alliance manifesto commitments in regard to a non-discriminative migration control system in 1983 and afterwards.[78] While Jenkins was still a leading Labour figure, he was a liberal fellow traveller whose transition, via the SDP, to Liberal politics was foreshadowed by his earlier activity as a Labour home secretary. It was also important that, alongside the 'liberal hour' of pro-migration, pro-integration, and anti-racist policymaking that Jenkins led during 1966 and 1967, he led a second such 'hour' during his second tenure in the mid-1970s. He served as a catalyst of meaningful social reform and used political power to engineer liberal ends. More widely, Jenkins's two incumbencies at the Home Office did a great deal to improve the relationship between British law and its impact on citizens' everyday lives.

In office, Roy Jenkins used political power in pursuit of the liberal aim to ensure that the state did not obstruct individual freedom. As much as any of his contemporaries, Jenkins was a redefining politician who created a more tolerant legal framework. That Jenkins's liberal approach was recognised (and maligned) by his colleague, James Callaghan, perhaps emphasises the pertinence of it. His parliamentary and public interventions had promoted improved race relations legislation in the mid-1960s, arguably doing as much as the activities of campaign groups that argued for similar or more radical changes from the comparative political periphery. Jenkins took a liberal sentiment and reshaped it into a policy that impacted upon the wider population. It is through these actions that Jenkins can be regarded as redefining, rather than merely a facilitative actor. This was a deep political instinct that reappeared at later points in his career, be that during his return as a Labour home secretary in the mid-1970s, or during his leadership of the nascent Social Democratic Party after 1982. Through the case study of race relations, it becomes possible to view a consistent, liberal agenda pursued by a significant political figure who operated across post-war Britain's main progressive political parties. ■

Dr Marc Collinson is a Lecturer in Political History at Bangor University. His research interests focus on electoral phenomena, the significance of place in politics, and the use of political power in modern Britain. Marc is currently completing a

monograph for Routledge about the 1964 General Election contest in Smethwick in the West Midlands. He has also written several biographical entries for the Dictionary of Labour Biography and the Dictionary of Welsh Biography, with one for the latter concerning Roy Jenkins. Future projects explore the holders of the office of the Secretary of State for Wales and the development of town twinning partnerships.

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