

conferred on them when Kenya became independent in 1963. There was a marathon debate in the Lords on 29 February 1968, which the Government won by

twenty-four votes, with both front benches in support, but all the Liberals, the bishops and many others against. As Bonham Carter wrote afterwards,

'I have never seen a more clear-cut line between the forces of Light & Darkness.' ■

Malcolm Baines

Megan Lloyd George (1902–66)

Born in Criccieth, north Wales, Megan was the third daughter and fifth child of future Liberal Prime Minister David Lloyd George and his wife, Margaret. Brought up largely in Wales, she replaced her sister, Mair, after the latter's premature death, as Lloyd George's favourite. Grimond described her in his memoirs as 'perpetually young, perpetually unfulfilled', and that captures some of her character. In part, this reflected her unique upbringing, initially at Number 11 and then at Number 10 Downing Street. Megan also spent considerable time abroad in Versailles, Canada, USA and India. Throughout it all, she was her father's confidante, central to his political life first as chancellor of the exchequer and then as prime minister. During her life she repeated the mantra, 'I am a Radical, as my father was.' Much more than Violet Bonham Carter, Megan Lloyd George remained in her father's shadow throughout her political career. Indeed, throughout the years when he was alive, Megan seems to have followed his political lead almost without thinking. However, whilst she had inherited his

charm, she had not his formidable capacity for hard work.

Megan won a contested selection for Anglesey, one of the few remaining safe Liberal seats, and was elected MP in the 1929 election. She followed her father in the hung parliament in moving towards some sort of arrangement with the minority Labour government. The Liberals, however, were very divided and, in the summer of 1931, the threat of an economic collapse led to the formation of a National Government. Lloyd George was recovering from an operation, so could be easily excluded by Baldwin and Ramsey MacDonald. Megan joined her father in Opposition once the new National Government decided a general election was necessary. She was re-elected comfortably in both the 1931 and 1935 elections. Samuel's defeat and replacement by Sinclair as Liberal leader in 1935 opened up the opportunity for the Lloyd George family MPs to rejoin the mainstream Liberal Party.

The later 1930s saw much foreign travel for Megan, including to Jamaica. Notoriously, she also visited Germany with her father

to see Hitler in 1936. In the same year she became the Labour MP, Philip Noel-Baker's, lover. Megan did not lead the struggle against appeasement, preferring to develop a career as a broadcasting MP, appearing on TV as early as April 1937. Perhaps inevitably, Megan's role in the Norway debate in May 1940 was to run to fetch her father when it was believed his intervention would have most impact. Herbert Morrison pestered Megan to persuade Lloyd George to take part. Churchill became prime minister but many of the chief appeasers remained in the government. Lloyd George refused to join but, in December 1940, the Liberal ambassador to the USA, Lord Lothian died. Lloyd George was asked to replace him and refused again. Halifax, the foreign secretary, was sent instead. The resulting reshuffle provided a chance for Megan to join the Ministry of Pensions as parliamentary secretary, the only government job, she was ever offered. However, because of her campaigning for equal workplace injury compensation treatment for men and women, Megan felt obliged to turn it down.

In January 1941, Megan's mother died; and, at her mother's death bed, Megan agreed to end her relationship with Philip Noel-Baker. Their affair was paused thereafter for over five years until April 1947. Family ructions continued as, following Margaret's death, Lloyd George married his long-term mistress, Frances Stevenson, with whom Megan had had very strained relations. Suffering from cancer, Lloyd George accepted an earldom and then died in March 1945 with Megan at his bedside.

Megan was re-elected in the 1945 general election with a much-reduced majority over Labour, despite having no Conservative opponent. She followed the general Liberal approach of supporting the initial nationalisation policies of the new Labour government and maintained good relations with Labour ministers. A steady stream of former Liberal MPs joined Labour during this period including Tom Horabin, Richard Acland and Sir Geoffrey Mander. In December 1947, Liberal headquarters had to deny that Megan was about to follow suit.

By 1948, the Liberal Parliamentary Party had begun to move to the right. The Assembly argued for cuts in public expenditure and all the MPs voted against steel nationalisation. In January 1949, Megan became deputy leader of the party, but more as an attempt to bind her loyalty than in the hope that she would provide any real support



Megan Lloyd George in 1923 (© National Portrait Gallery, London)

to Clement Davies. Indeed, her parliamentary focus continued as before on the issues that really interested her – rights of women and self-government for Wales. The next general election was in February 1950, and the Liberals fought it on a broad front with right-wing economic policies and left-wing social policies. Megan gave one of the three Liberal party-political broadcasts, along with Samuel and Davies. Hers ended in Welsh with 'Goodnight – self-government for Wales' which must have been incomprehensible to English monoglot listeners but was a clarion call to her own voters in Anglesey. Megan was re-elected with

an increased majority this time, despite a Tory intervention.

The 1950 to 1951 parliament saw increased Tory pressure on the weakened Labour government. Megan found herself allied with two other Liberal MPs, Emrys Roberts and Edgar Granville, trying to save the radical soul of the party. However, there was widespread concern that the party was moving even further to the right. In the meantime, Labour's governmental coherence collapsed, and Attlee called a general election for October 1951. Megan focused on her radical record rather than trying to maximise the anti-Labour vote. As a result, she lost to Labour by 595 votes. Both her

fellow radical Liberals, Roberts and Granville, also lost their seats. Noel-Baker and James Callaghan then suggested to her that the time had finally come to join the Labour Party.

Within the Liberals, the radicals continued to debate the way forwards whilst staying away from party meetings. However, they did not act together and one by one they moved across to Labour. Megan focused much of her energies on the cross-party campaign to get a Parliament for Wales. Joining Labour was delayed by Megan's concern about Labour infighting between Bevan and Gaitskell and the lack of suitable parliamentary opportunities in Wales for her to re-enter the Commons as a Labour MP. Even as late as 1953, the remaining radicals in the Liberal Party hoped that Megan could be more active and swing the party to the left. Finally, Megan joined

Labour just in time to speak for them in the 1955 election.

Her opportunity to rejoin parliament came in November 1956, at the height of the Suez crisis, with the sudden death of Sir Rhys Hopkin Morris, the Liberal MP for Carmarthen. As a largely Welsh speaking and rural constituency, Labour's national executive saw it as an ideal opportunity for Megan. However, Megan won the selection by only one vote. The Liberals selected a candidate who supported the Tories' Suez policy, and the Conservatives did not stand. Megan campaigned on Suez even though the Labour organisers would have preferred her to focus on less controversial domestic issues. In the end she won by 3,000 votes.

As a Labour backbencher Megan was never really comfortable within a party whose traditions and ethos were so unfamiliar to

her. She had lost the battle to save the Liberal Party as a significant, progressive and genuinely Radical force. Despite being diagnosed with cancer in 1962, Megan fought both the 1964 and 1966 elections but was too ill to visit the constituency in 1966. Even so, the seriousness of the cancer was not at all widely known and her death two months later in May 1966 was a surprise.

Megan Lloyd George didn't really have her own separate political identity until after her father's death in March 1945. She is probably most fondly remembered for her leadership of the Parliament for Wales campaign in the 1950s. Megan's lack of drive, relying on her charm to make a political impression, meant that she was never able to mould the Liberal Party in her image and her departure was probably only a matter of time. ■

Malcolm Baines

'A Party Divided' continued from page 39

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- 47 M. Petrie, 'Anti-Socialism, Liberalism and Individualism: Rethinking the Realignment of Scottish Politics 1945–1970', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 28 (2018), p. 204.
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