to reveal to the Foreign Press Bureau chief not only his own Jewish heritage, but also that the party was led by the UK's first Jewish political leader, Sir Herbert Samuel.

Bryant takes the reader very well through the careers of the Glamour Boys, including the fate of those such as Bernays who died in the Second World War. What Bryant also shows, perhaps unwittingly, is the extent to which a recognisable Liberal social and political culture persisted until at least 1945, even among the Liberal Nationals. When Bernays finally did marry, in 1942, it was to the daughter of a former Coalition Liberal MP, George Britton, who sat for Bristol East from 1918 to 1922; whilst his big political break was joining Lord Beauchamp, one-time member of Campbell-Bannerman and Asquith's administrations, as his speechwriter and PA for his 1930 empire tour.

From a wider Liberal historical perspective, other Liberal figures, such as Lothian, Beauchamp, Mabane, Mander, Reading, Wilfrid Roberts and Leslie Hore-Belisha, flit in and out of the stories of the Glamour Boys, which makes it an interesting read and reminds us of the roles that Liberals played both in support for and opposition to appeasement in the years before the outbreak of war. ■

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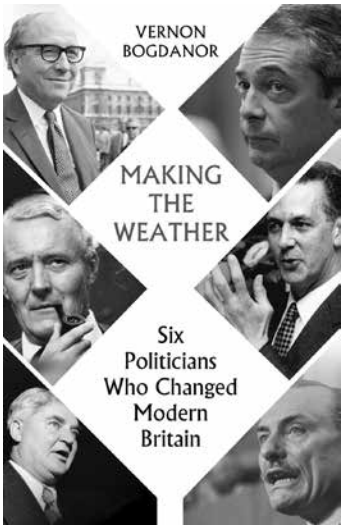
Politicians who mattered

Vernon Bogdanor, *Making the Weather: Six Politicians who Changed Modern Britain* (Haus Publishing, 2024)
Review by David Dutton

Vernon Bogdanor enjoys a well-merited reputation as the foremost historian of the modern British constitution. In recent years he has moved his focus into more specifically party politics. His magisterial work *The Strange Survival of Liberal Britain*, offering a compelling overview of the political scene of the late Victorian and Edwardian era, was published in 2022. It forced all who read it to reconsider many of the orthodoxies relating to this turbulent period. He now offers *Making the Weather*, a series of essays based on lectures originally given at Gresham College, in which he considers the careers and, more importantly, the impact of six postwar politicians – three from the left and three from the right – who 'changed modern Britain'. These short essays are obviously not the vehicle for startlingly new biographical details about the individuals considered. Their value lies in Bogdanor's nuanced and carefully crafted insights into the strengths – and weaknesses and sometimes even the internal contradictions – of their thinking.

A word of explanation of the book's title is perhaps in order. In his classic *Great Contemporaries*, first published in 1937, Winston Churchill described Joseph Chamberlain at the height of his powers – a member of a Unionist cabinet, with the 'august Lord Salisbury, Prime Minister since God knew when' and 'wise, cautious, polished, comprehending, airily fearless, Arthur Balfour' as Leader of the House of Commons. But, stressed Churchill, it was Chamberlain 'who made the weather'.[1] In similar terms, Bogdanor has not written a study of the 'nearly men' of recent decades, the prime ministers we might have had if only circumstances had worked out a little differently. His focus is on the influence exerted by his six case



studies, not on their proximity to the premiership. Chamberlain's ministerial career, after all, never took him higher than the colonial office, but the impact he exerted on both the main parties of the day and on the key issues with which they engaged was immense.

Bogdanor's six choices are, of course, his personal selection. Others, as the author readily concedes, might suggest different names. But his selections are well chosen, and a compelling case is made for each. At first glance the surprising inclusion is that of Nigel Farage. Only in the year of this book's publication did the leader of Reform UK finally, at his eighth attempt, succeed in getting elected to the House of Commons. But if we accept Bogdanor's contention that 'Brexit' was 'the most consequential foreign-policy decision that Britain has taken since the war' (p. 295), then it is difficult to see how Farage could have been left out. Bogdanor lists among Farage's achievements – so far – turning UKIP from 'a crank party into a powerful campaigning force', 'melding incompatible elements together' into a powerful electoral coalition, facilitating Boris Johnson's goal to 'get Brexit done' and destroying three Conservative prime ministers while helping to turn the Conservative defeat of 2024 into a rout (p. 294).

If, by the end of this book, the rightful inclusion of any of the chosen six seems in doubt, it is perhaps that of Tony Benn. At the height of his career, Benn was, according to taste, a populist messiah or the most dangerous man in the country. Only in his last years, and enjoying ever waning influence, did he mysteriously transmogrify into a 'national treasure'. With time, much of his political vision appeared fundamentally flawed. As Bogdanor suggests, this advocate of widening political participation 'overestimated the enthusiasm of the public for political involvement' (p. 252). Rather than the society Benn had hoped to see, in which industry would be accountable to its workers, governments of both left and right have accepted that industry should be made 'accountable through competition in a market economy' (p. 253). The House of Lords, which Benn struggled (successfully) to leave, but which he wished to abolish, is still in existence, though its future composition remains unclear. In the absence of important and lasting legislation from his time as a minister, his legacy appears thin. His role in allowing party members a decisive say in the selection of party leaders may be Benn's most significant legacy – though the experience of Corbyn, Johnson and Truss suggests that it was a questionable one. Many would still subscribe to the view that the ability to command the support of the party in the House of Commons must remain a leader's most vital attribute. At the start of a new period of Labour government, and with the disastrous interlude of Jeremy Corbyn's leadership receding into history, Bogdanor concludes that 'Labour needs to overcome and repudiate Benn's legacy, not build upon it' (p. 256).

In another essay, Bogdanor presents Aneurin Bevan as 'the prime exponent in post-war Britain of the idea of democratic socialism' (p. 11). An MP for thirty-one years, Bevan was a minister for less than six. But this was long enough to oversee the setting up of the National Health Service, an achievement which guarantees him a place in a book such as this. This is an institution which Nigel Lawson once described as 'the closest thing the English have to a religion'.[2] Yet Bogdanor is not afraid to point to its many shortcomings. He sees it as 'an over-centralised and top-heavy monolith

unresponsive to the public and with insufficient incentive to provide high-quality services' (p. 47). Its status in the public mind has hindered the consideration of possibly better alternatives, while its current parlous state is 'a consequence not of failing to build on Bevan's legacy but of refusing to repudiate it' (p. 49). But Bevan's name will always be linked with a hugely popular institution, even though there is a strong case for suggesting that, as far as the provision of a comprehensive and 'free' health service was concerned, the weather really changed in the years before Bevan took office, inside the all-party wartime coalition in which he played no part.

Elsewhere, Bogdanor offers a scrupulously fair assessment of Enoch Powell. It was Powell's lasting achievement to bring the issue of immigration, a matter of considerable concern for a large section of the British population, on to the political agenda. The author is rightly critical of the means by which Powell did this, particularly his infamous 'Rivers of Blood' speech in 1968. But he notes too that, whatever damage it caused, Powell's approach was also self-defeating: 'the main effect of Powell's inflammatory speeches … has been to inhibit liberals from having a more rational discussion of immigration without being accused of racism' (p. 117). Understanding the complexities of Powell's thinking, Bogdanor has no place in his analysis for the crude and simplistic denunciations to which Powell has often been subjected. This was a man who once insisted that he regarded 'many of the peoples in India as being superior in many respects – intellectually for example … – to Europeans'.[3] 'There is no evidence', asserts Bogdanor, 'that he ever discriminated against non-white people' (p. 86).

Powell's belief in the nation state and the sovereignty of parliament should have made him an obvious opponent of British membership of the body he knew as the European Economic Community. In fact, he only reached this position in around 1970. When he did so, it was on the basis of an intellectually compelling case. He understood, 'while many others – including senior ministers and legal academics – did not, that the EC was not just an international organisation based on intergovernmentalism … but a new legal order which would take precedence over British law, with the British government and British courts being under a duty to enforce it (p. 104). Had he still been alive at the time of the 2016 referendum, Powell would at least have contributed an intellectual rigour to the 'Leave' campaign that it sadly lacked.

Perhaps surprisingly, Bogdanor says little about Powell's resignation from the government in 1958 over its failure to reduce expenditure at the peril of growing inflation, a moment which some have identified as an early manifestation of what became known as monetarism. Questioned about this moment towards the end of his career, Powell bemoaned – perhaps jokingly but perhaps not – that his stance had not won him the Nobel Prize for economics.

Bogdanor offers an equally persuasive assessment of Sir Keith Joseph. Many critics have tended to dismiss Joseph on the basis of his three spells as a cabinet minister, with little to show in terms of lasting legislative achievement. But his importance derived from the period 1974–79, when he was out of office and working out the intellectual underpinning of what developed into 'Thatcherism'. Granted that much of his thinking on the market economy was tacitly endorsed by the Labour governments of 1997–2010, Joseph 'has a claim to be thought of as, with Nigel Farage, the most influential politician of the postwar period' (p. 169). Bogdanor describes a man of integrity, willing to agonise in public over his beliefs, to admit mistakes and to apologise for them. These traits are both attractive and, for the most part, unusual in a politician, but they probably explain why Joseph could never have become prime minister. Even so, the 'Britain we now live in is in large part a Britain that Joseph played a decisive role in creating' (p. 213). This judgement may fail to take account of the

revival of 'Big Government' in the years since the pandemic and the imposition of record levels of taxation, but it contains more than a grain of truth. And it perhaps places Joseph closer to the idea of 'making the weather' than any of the other figures considered in this book.

But the essay which is likely to be of most interest to readers of this journal is that on Roy Jenkins, a Labour MP for nearly thirty years and then, after a spell as president of the European Commission, co-founder and first leader of the SDP and finally leader of the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords. For most of his long career Jenkins was a 'liberal', if not necessarily a nominal 'Liberal'. Of his last period in government (1974–76) at the Home Office, Jenkins later said that 'I had felt neither at ease in, nor derived pride from my membership of that [Labour] Government … and I ought to have got out before'.[4]

Jenkins is a figure whom Bogdanor clearly admires. He lists his qualities as 'integrity, consistency, determination, intellectual distinction, considerable sensitivity to the changing winds of politics, and a generous nature' (p. 168). Jenkins was, suggests Bogdanor, 'perhaps the last really literate and civilised member that the House of Commons has seen' (ibid.) – a considerable accolade which his near-contemporary Denis Healey, who outlived him, might have disputed.

But characteristically, Bogdanor also points out the weaknesses and internal contradictions that Jenkins's version of social democracy entailed. He was a strong advocate for devolution, which was always likely to increase rather than reduce geographical inequalities in Britain. Membership of the European Union, of which Jenkins was a doughty champion, was likely to 'inhibit the policies of economic planning to which a social-democratic government should be committed' (pp. 164–5). Similarly, globalisation tended to remove many of the state controls which had the potential to protect against inequality. Indeed, according to the former Labour cabinet minister, Edmund Dell, social democrats such as Jenkins failed to see that it was not just socialism which was dead by the 1980s. 'So was social democratic Keynesianism in one country, in devotion to which they had lived their political lives.'[5] Tellingly, in 1999, Jenkins declared that he still retained three great political ambitions – a single currency, electoral reform and the union of the Liberals and Labour. None has been achieved nor, at the time of writing, looks likely to be achieved in the foreseeable future.

Where then lies Jenkins's legacy? At one point it did look as if the arrival of the SDP would 'make the weather'. Destroying the Labour–Conservative duopoly that had dominated British politics since the 1920s. But the mould was not quite broken, though it may be argued that what Jenkins did helped shape the Labour Party of the twenty-first century, the unfortunate Corbyn interval notwithstanding. Jenkins's claims rest heavily on his first, relatively brief (1965–67) tenure of the Home Office. These years saw a series of important reforms in areas such as corporal punishment, abortion, homosexuality and theatre censorship. Divorce law reform followed soon after Jenkins moved office. In Bogdanor's words: 'Through his "civilised society" reforms, Jenkins has perhaps done more good to more people than any other politician in the post-war era' (p. 137).

But it is important to define Jenkins's role more closely. Self-evidently, he did not create the societal changes of the decade which extended far beyond Britain, and which were probably irresistible in a democratic society. One of the most important measures – that abolishing the death penalty – had already reached the statute book before Jenkins took over as home secretary, during the tenure of his much-derided predecessor, Frank Soskice. The reforms as a whole were not, strictly speaking, the government's. They began with private members' bills, which Jenkins certainly supported, and his greatest service was to argue for the changes in cabinet, sometimes against the

resistance of more conservative colleagues, and to ensure the parliamentary time necessary for the bills to progress.

These qualifications are indicative of the discussion and debate to which this fine and stimulating book will give rise. If I may end with one small (but personal) quibble. Bogdanor writes of Enoch Powell winning 'classical prizes at his school, King Edward VII in Birmingham' (p. 61). The school which Powell (and I) attended is known simply as King Edward's School, without regnal number. But, founded in 1552, it has no connection with Queen Victoria's eldest son! ■

After over forty years writing books and articles on twentieth-century British politics, David Dutton has more time in retirement to pursue other interests. His latest book, *Game, Set and Championship: A History of the South of Scotland Tennis Championships* was published in 2023.

1 W. S. Churchill, *Great Contemporaries* (London, 1959), p. 63.

2 N. Lawson, *The View from No. 11: Memoirs of a Tory Radical* (London, 1993), p. 613.

3 N. Hillman, 'A "chorus of execration"? Enoch Powell's "Rivers of Blood" Forty Years on', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 1 (2008), p. 88.

4 A. Adonis and K. Thomas (eds.), *Roy Jenkins: A Retrospective* (Oxford, 2004), p. 162.

5 E. Dell, *A Strange Eventful History: Democratic Socialism in Britain* (London, 2000), p. 479.

Forgotten radical

Peter Jordaan, *A Secret Between Gentlemen: Lord Battersea's hidden scandal and the lives it changed forever* (Alchemie Books, 2023)
Review by Michael Meadowcroft

I never cease to be amazed by the number of genuinely radical Liberal politicians there were in the nineteenth century who have little resonance today. One such was Cyril Flower, the first and last Lord Battersea. Peter Jordaan brings him to life, warts and all, and for that we must be grateful. The one problem with his biography is its length and the lack of skilful editing. Within its 668 pages of text – 200 of them before we get a mention of Battersea – plus a further loo pages of appendices etc., no snippet of information on Battersea's life appears to be omitted, and a further supplementary volume is even promised encompassing Battersea's friends.

Essentially, the basic details are straightforward: a radical lawyer, he married great wealth, Constance de Rothschild, and was thus able to indulge his love of art and his progress in politics. A Liberal MP for twelve years, first for Brecon and later for Luton, he became a junior minister and a whip before acquiring a peerage, allegedly as a consequence of his large donations to the party, taking the tile Lord Battersea. Amidst his politics, his wife's circle of rich friends and his ease of socialising with high society, he mixed with gay society, not least with men of influence who were able to get teenage boys involved with apparent impunity. Jordaan names around thirty members of an upper-class circle of gay men. In addition to aristocratic