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CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN

The concept of 'New Liberalism' has played an important part in historical debate about the political health of the Liberal Party before the First World War and the inevitability or otherwise of its subsequent decline. **Iain Sharpe** argues that in reality it is hard to detect any clear transition from Old to New Liberalism. The Liberals continued to base their appeal on being a moderate, patriotic and pragmatic party of the political centre, capable of governing effectively and responding sympathetically to social problems, but avoiding class rhetoric.

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LIBERAL POLITICS 1889–1914

The focus on the contribution of New Liberalism to the success of the Liberal Party is particularly a result of the seminal works by Peter Clarke and Michael Freeden.[1] Clarke's argument that, by adopting 'New Liberalism', the party had by 1914 adapted itself to class-based politics and was in a strong position to repel any challenge from the Labour Party, remains controversial. Nonetheless, references to New Liberalism as an organising principle of the welfare and social reforms of the Asquith government have become commonplace in the work of historians discussing this period.[2]

The impression conveyed can be that New Liberalism was an identified and recognisable intellectual and political movement that was responsible for repositioning the Liberal Party away from 'Manchester School' economics, individualism and constitutional reform towards giving priority to social and welfare measures. This article questions such an understanding of the pre-First World War Liberal Party and the extent to which it embraced a new approach to politics. It highlights the paucity of contemporary references to New Liberalism in party propaganda, political speeches and press reporting of the party's campaigns, and argues that the concept was not really part of the contemporary political language of Liberalism. It suggests that the continuities within Liberal politics are more striking than any 'New Liberal' departure.

At first sight this may seem tangential to the reasons for the decline of the Liberal Party and the rise of Labour. However, it tells us something about the party's political outlook and appeal to the electorate. While the Asquith government introduced significant welfare reforms, such as old age pensions, national insurance and greater employment rights, the Liberal Party never became defined by its commitment to such causes, nor did it abandon the identification with political reform that had been an essential element of Liberal politics through much of the nineteenth century. Liberal leaders saw social and welfare questions as deserving to be addressed, and treated them with a mixture of principle and pragmatism: a combination of genuine belief and a perceived need to compete with the Unionists. However, social reform was a secondary component of the party's political mission, not its raison d'être. This was a source of strength as long as the Liberal Party remained in a position to compete for power, but it left the party in a weak position to combat Labour if social reform and welfare politics became dominating issues.

The meanings of 'New Liberalism'

A stereotypical outline of Liberal attitudes towards state action on social reform might see the party as having been dominated for much of the late nineteenth century by a commitment to laissez-faire 'Manchester School' economics and a belief in individual responsibility, its chief causes being, as one historian has put it: 'free trade, sound finance, religious toleration and a pacific foreign policy'.[3] However, Jonathan Parry has questioned how far such attitudes really did dominate Victorian Liberalism, highlighting the importance Liberals placed on the moral improvement of society and the state's role in promoting this. He describes the legislation of Gladstone's first administration in the fields of education, public health and other matters as 'part of a general burst of activity for social and moral improvement against vice, crime, ignorance and pauperism'.[4] Parry concludes by arguing that:

> Increasing interest in communal social action prefigured the so-called New Liberalism of the twentieth century, which only appears as a sharp break from nineteenth-century practice if nineteenth-century practice is misconceived as dominated by principles of laissez-faire rather than constitutional inclusiveness.[5]

Parry's argument suggests a need to rethink not only the nature of Victorian Liberalism, but also how far Liberals in the Edwardian period saw themselves as engaged in a significant departure from the work of their predecessors.

The first use of the term 'New Liberalism' in the context of social reform has been identified in an

Architects of the New Liberalism? – David Lloyd George and Winston Churchill as Liberal ministers

article by the radical Liberal MP L. A. Atherley-Jones in the August 1889 edition of *Nineteenth Century* magazine.[6] Atherley-Jones argued that 'The battle of the middle class has been fought and won' and that 'the reforms of the future menace, or appear to menace the interests of the middle class'. He concluded that the Liberal Party should embrace a 'new Liberalism' that addressed itself specifically to the material needs of the working classes. However, Atherley-Jones' argument was not quite the ideological shift or articulation of a new political strategy that it might at first sight seem. The bulk of his article is concerned with questioning (with good reason, as things turned out) whether Irish home rule would prove an electorally successful cause for the party. His discussion of the social questions that he believed the Liberals should embrace appears almost an afterthought, taking up just two paragraphs. In addition, his argument that social reform would not only achieve 'a wider diffusion of physical comfort' but also a 'loftier standard of national morality', was very much an echo of the mid-nineteenth century Liberal moralism that Parry describes.

The article provoked two immediate responses in *Nineteenth Century*. The first was from former Liberal MP, G. W. E. Russell, who endorsed Atherley-Jones' arguments about social reform and saw hopeful signs in the programme of the Progressive group on the newly established London County Council, of which he was a member. His article included a thinly veiled appeal to Lord Rosebery to lead the Liberal Party in the direction of social reform.[7] The second was from the Nonconformist divine. J. Guinness Rogers, who argued the orthodox Gladstonian case that the Liberals needed to retain middle-class support and to deal with the Irish question before they could successfully tackle other reforms.[8]

However, there the debate about 'New Liberalism' ended for the time being. The expression does not appear to have become widely used in the sense that Atherley-Jones coined it. Indeed, one of the curiosities of studying the career of New Liberalism before the First World War is the paucity of references to the phrase in contemporary writing. It was also not necessarily used in the context of social reform. James Douglas Holms' article in the *Westminster Review* of July 1890 asking 'Is there a new Liberalism?' was a reaction to Joseph Chamberlain's use of the term to describe the post-1886, home-rule-supporting Liberal Party, which he considered 'cannot claim the inheritance of the great party from whose principles they have so widely departed'.[9] The purpose of Holms' article was to rebut the suggestion that support for Irish home rule represented a 'new Liberal' departure from the party's traditional principles. Over subsequent years, the phrase occurs in similar contexts as a term of disparagement for the Gladstonian, home-rule-supporting Liberal Party. For example, the Unionist Duke of Argyll denounced Gladstonian sympathy for Scottish disestablishment as 'new Liberalism', while *The Times* criticised the Liberal minister Earl Spencer's support for the Liberal government's Evicted Tenants Bill, as 'an illustration of the depths to which the new Liberalism may bring a politician who was once a respectable Whig'.[10]

The expression did occur occasionally in the context of social reform. For example, Liberal MPs R. B. Haldane and R. Wallace put forward alternative views on the subject in the first edition of the *Progressive Review* in 1896. Their exchange, however, illustrates once again that this was a more nuanced debate than it might at first sight appear. In describing New Liberals as 'those who esteem a progressive policy in social matters more highly than anything else at present in Liberalism', Haldane was trying to move the party away from the faddism of the 1891 Newcastle programme, which he believed had burdened it with a set of unachievable and electorally unpopular policy commitments. By contrast Wallace pointed out that legislation had been passed over many decades on issues from education to factory hours to municipal reform and that 'the "New" Liberalism is not new. It is simply a continuation of what had been well begun before. A continuation is not a novelty.' Wallace criticised the '*de haut en bas* attitude' of Haldane's version of New Liberalism, arguing that the party must stand for democratic as well as social reform.[11] Similarly, in 1898 there was a discussion in the *Daily News'* correspondence columns about whether 'New' and 'Old' Liberalism were compatible, with the newspaper's editorial concluding, in conciliatory manner:

> Liberalism, whether 'old' or 'new', 'individualist' or 'collectivist' aims at substituting for class interests and class privileges the social good of the whole community.[12]

One of the curiosities of studying the career of New Liberalism before the First World War is the paucity of references to the phrase in contemporary writing.

In general, however, throughout this period, debate about New Liberalism in terms of the emphasis on social and welfare issues is rare.[13] Even Michael Freeden's bibliography in his study *The New Liberalism: an ideology of social reform* only identifies eight articles and one book published before 1914 that incorporate the phrase in their title.[14]

Liberal continuities

In practice, well before the post-1909 New Liberal heyday, Liberal leaders were neither strongly attached to individualism nor resistant to demands for social reform. Although the 1892–1895 Liberal government lacked an outright majority and spent much time on doomed attempts to legislate for Irish Home Rule, temperance and Welsh disestablishment, it could point to some achievements in terms of wealth redistribution and social reforming legislation. This included Harcourt's 1894 budget, which provided for graduated income tax, the Railway Servants Act (1893), the Factories and Workshops Act (1895) and the Local Government Act (1894) which not only created parish councils but gave them compulsory purchase powers to enable them to create smallholdings. There were also constructive administrative measures, such as Asquith's strengthening the factory inspectorate and Mundella creating a separate Labour department at the Board of Trade. The government also unsuccessfully attempted to legislate for employers' liability to compensate workmen injured in industrial accidents. Liberals were adapting themselves to evolving political circumstances without identifying this as a change

of political direction. At the 1895 general election, while social and welfare issues other than temperance were only a secondary feature of Liberal candidates' election addresses, nonetheless half of them mentioned the need for employers' liability legislation and just under a third referred to old age pensions.[15] Such issues were not in the forefront of the Liberal Party's appeal to the electorate, but enough candidates mentioned them to suggest they were hardly heterodox.

Likewise, the rhetoric of Liberal leaders embraced social reforming goals, albeit in ambiguous language that avoided committing the party to specific measures. In his first major speech after the Liberals' 1895 general election defeat, the party leader, Lord Rosebery, told an audience at Scarborough that while the Liberals had previously emphasised enfranchisement and removal of constitutional disabilities, this 'noble, though negative period has passed away and we are face to face with an era of constructive legislation'.[16] Such sentiments were common in the speeches of other leading Liberal politicians. Asquith told an audience at Morley, shortly after Rosebery's speech, that although he believed the state should not interfere in matters that could be best settled by individual or voluntary effort,

> … he did hold most strongly that, where there were social wants that only the community could meet, then the community – by which, after all, he meant merely the concerted and organised action of individuals, with a right of recourse, if need be, to compulsion – had … not only a title but a duty to interfere.[17]

He cited the problems of 'undrained towns', 'insanitary and overcrowed factories', child labour, terms and conditions of employment, and the need for provision of a pure water supply, lighting, baths, libraries and open space, as matters that the state should address.

At successive annual meetings of the National Liberal Federation (NLF), the main democratic body for the party's grassroots, speeches by leading Liberals often preached the need for more state action to tackle social problems. Herbert Samuel, at this time secretary of the Home Counties Liberal Federation, told the NLF annual meeting in 1896 that 'the main purpose and object of Liberalism in this day [is] to carry out such wise legislative proposals as would enable the powers of the State to be used to improve the condition of the masses of the population', a statement which met with approval from the assembled delegates.[18] Although Rosebery's successor as party leader, Sir William Harcourt, was temperamentally inclined to pure opposition rather than positive policy ideas (other than on his own pet cause of temperance reform), he criticised the Unionist government on the basis that its social legislation benefited the rich not the poor.[19] Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, in his first address to an NLF conference as party leader in March 1899, attacked the government for failing to introduce old age pensions after making them a key part of the 1895 general election campaign, and specifically supported the principle of help for the 'elderly poor'. He urged this as one of three key social questions that the state needed to address, along with 'housing of the very poor' and temperance reform.[20]

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In his election address to his constituents at the 1900 general election, which was inevitably dominated by discussion of the war in South Africa, Campbell-Bannerman reiterated his support for government action on these three social questions, attacking the Unionists for having spent public funds on the war that could have been devoted to social reform.[21] Such sentiments were echoed, rather surprisingly, by Harcourt, campaigning in his West Monmouthshire constituency. He argued for the need to improve workers' health through regulation and shortening working hours. However, he warned that 'Social reforms for the good of the people cannot be carried out without large funds, and the resources available … have already been mortgaged' [by the costs of the war].[22] Asquith, who was arguably the second most senior member of the Liberal front bench after Campbell-Bannerman, also took the Unionists to task for having evaded 'their social and political duties' and promised that a Liberal government would tackle such problems as 'intemperance, overcrowding, industrial risks of danger, the relations of labour and capital', along with education and land reform.[23] The official manifesto of the NLF mentioned the need for land, housing and temperance reforms.[24] Leaflets issued by the Liberal Publication Department strongly attacked the Unionist government's failure to legislate on social questions, particularly old age pensions. These stopped short of pledging the Liberal Party to specific measures, but they were implicitly supportive of social legislation.[25] Yet they did not refer to this as a new form of Liberalism.

Such references formed at most a minor part in the Liberals' electoral appeal. They put forward no specific legislative programme of social reform. Indeed there was a strong sense shared by leading frontbenchers that detailed programmes were an electoral liability rather than an asset. In particular, they felt that NLF's Newcastle programme, agreed in 1891 and endorsed by William Gladstone as party leader, had been a double disadvantage to the party by provoking the hostility of those opposed to any single measure in the programme, while disappointing party supporters when the government failed to achieve its proposed reforms.[26]

'Piecing together Gladstonian rags'?

By 1900, therefore, the Liberals could hardly be regarded as a party wedded to individualism. Of course, there were some frontbenchers, such as John Morley and the Liberal imperialist H. H. Fowler, who were less than sympathetic to the emerging social reform agenda. Indeed Morley had lost his seat at Newcastle in 1895 over his opposition to miners' eight-hour legislation.[27] There was a tendency for those who were impatient for social reform to see the Liberals as stuck in such a Gladstonian rut. Sidney Webb's famous 1901 article in *Nineteenth Century*, 'Lord Rosebery's escape from Houndsditch' portrayed the party in this light, claiming that:

> With amused dismay the new generation of Progressives have lately witnessed Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman piecing

> together the Gladstonian rags and remnants, with Sir William Harcourt holding the scissors, and Mr John Morley unctuously waxing the thread.[28]

Ironically, given the former prime minister's later hostility to much of the 1906–1915 Liberal government's welfare agenda, Webb regarded Rosebery as the one person who could lead the Liberal Party from a laissez-faire past to a collectivist future.

The future Cabinet member and party leader Herbert Samuel, in his book *Liberalism*, published in 1902, emphasised the need for the party to embrace a more active role for the state.[29] Such sentiments were also articulated by another future Cabinet minister, C. F. G. Masterman, who stood for parliament for the first time in 1903. Masterman's widow later wrote of this period that: 'in internal politics *laissez-faire* had both parties in its grip', something she portrayed Masterman as seeking to change.[30] Had this genuinely been the case, the Liberal Party would have been unlikely to promote the candidature of someone like Masterman who was passionate about state action to ameliorate the condition of the poor. In reality, although Masterman was a sensitive and difficult character, the chief whip Herbert Gladstone recognised his abilities and went to great lengths to arrange his candidature in the winnable seat of West Ham North, for which he was elected in 1906.[31] In December 1904 Gladstone visited the constituency to speak for Masterman and was confronted by a deputation of unemployed men demanding to know what a Liberal government would do to enable them to find work. There was much heckling on the subject during the meeting. Gladstone responded by writing and circulating a memorandum to members of the Liberal front bench setting out proposals for providing relief to the unemployed. He argued that: 'There are great works which can be started by the Gov[t] which cannot be considered by individuals & companies, but which in time would repay their cost'. This included: 'reclamations on the coast & inland, harbours, docks, waterways, afforestments'. He entered the caveat that such work should not compete with other industries, although wages should be fair and 'not demoralisingly low'.[32] This produced a mixed response from his front-bench colleagues. Asquith, Bryce and Lord Spencer agreed that Gladstone's proposals had merit. Jack Sinclair, H. H. Fowler and Morley were less sympathetic.[33] However, Campbell-Bannerman was clearly convinced: he devoted part of his next major speech, at Limehouse, to advocating measures along the lines set out by Gladstone.[34]

Both José Harris and H. W. Emy have highlighted this as an episode that showed the Liberals' lukewarm attitude towards welfare reform, the former arguing, for example, that this 'did not really signify a redirection of Liberal unemployment policy'.[35] There is some truth in this, and as Harris points out, Campbell-Bannerman's speech was partly a response to Joseph Chamberlain's comments about tariff reform and unemployment in a speech the previous week, also at Limehouse. The Liberals did not make unemployment a significant campaigning theme through 1905. They supported the Unionist government's Unemployed Workmen Bill, which provided for some outdoor relief for unemployed workers, without making any more far-reaching proposals of their own.[36] While the Liberal leadership was willing to support state action to tackle pressing social questions, this was primarily a tactical response to political events.

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The need to compete with the Unionists was indeed a further reason for supporting social and welfare legislation. While Liberals were critical of the gap between Unionist promises and performance in office on issues such as old age pensions, the Unionists could claim some past successes such as free elementary education (1891), the Workmen's Compensation Act (1897) and various factory acts. More pressingly, Chamberlain's tariff reform campaign, launched in 1903, was aimed at winning the support of working-class voters through the promise of welfare reform and guaranteed employment. Herbert Gladstone recognised the need for the Liberal Party to counter this, pressing Campbell-Bannerman to put forward more constructive policies:

> … if everyone dives into fiscal statistics there will be a feeling that it is with the object of hiding nakedness … It is all right to knock Chamberlain out but that doesn't tell the country what a Liberal Govt. wd. do if & when it comes in.[37]

Gladstone was clear that the party would have to defend free trade on practical rather than ideological grounds, writing to one of his party officials: 'Interests and not theories are going to settle this business'.[38]

Protecting the poor

In his study of free trade, Anthony Howe has pointed out that Liberal opposition to tariff reform was not based on doctrinaire laissez-faire attitudes, but rather on a wide-ranging appeal that included; 'a theory of international trade, a doctrine of empire, a prescription for revenue and welfare, together with a concept of the Liberal democratic state'.[39] Similarly, Frank Trentmann points out how the defence of free trade used innovative campaigning techniques, with the loaf of bread as an emotive symbol of the practical importance of free trade to people's ordinary lives.[40] By contrast, other historians have seen the Liberal campaign in defence of free trade as essentially negative. David Dutton considers that in the approach to the 1906 general election 'Much of the Liberal campaign looked back to the nineteenth century, rather than forward into the twentieth.' G. R. Searle describes free trade as a setback for Liberal social reformers since it enabled the party to win without putting forward a social welfare programme.[41] However, the Liberal campaign, which stressed opposition to taxes on the food of the working classes, was compatible with support for constructive measures to help the poor and certainly not a display of doctrinaire laissez-faire economics. In a leaflet issued in 1904 the Liberal Publication Department sought to highlight the increased taxes paid by the poor under the Unionist government, which Liberals would seek to remedy through:

> A peaceful government
> An economical War Office
> A smaller national expenditure, and

> A reform of our system of taxation so that the burdens shall be lighter on the poor and heavier on those who are better able to bear them.[42]

Therefore, the Liberal government that assumed office in 1905 was sympathetic to social and welfare reform and the need to improve the condition of the poor, without having an agreed legislative programme to achieve such ends. Soon after becoming prime minister, Campbell-Bannerman received a deputation of the unemployed at Downing Street, and devoted a portion of his first major speech in office, at the Albert Hall on 21 December, to social reform proposals, including land reform, the creation of a Royal Commission on canals and waterways, the need for Poor Law reform and mitigating the 'evils of non-employment'. He claimed that such ideas were 'a reiteration of things which I have been saying up and down the country for the last three or four years'.[43] In the 1906 general election campaign more than two-thirds of Liberal candidates mentioned the need for Poor Law reform and old age pensions in their election addresses, although there were six other issues more frequently mentioned.[44] A similarly high proportion mentioned land reform. Just under half discussed the need for action to tackle unemployment, while just over a third referred to housing reform.

The Liberal government's attitude towards social reform was in line with the attitude the party had taken in opposition. It recognised that these were issues that it needed to tackle, although its flagship bills on education, licensing and plural voting were more traditional Liberal fare. While these were being blocked by the Unionist dominated House of Lords, the government brought in free school meals, increased trade union rights through the 1906 Trade Disputes Act, a Workmen's Compensation Act that increased the scope of the Unionists' 1897 Act, a Smallholdings Act and prison reform in 1907, the Children's Act and the Old Age Pensions Act in 1908. All this took place before the 1909 'People's Budget', which is often seen as initiating the era of 'New Liberal' legislation.

Problems with New Liberalism

This did not stop those who wished to push Liberalism in a more overtly collectivist direction from identifying a clear distinction between Liberalism before and after 1909. As the battle over the budget was in full swing, J. A. Hobson, one of the leading thinkers associated with 'New Liberalism', published his book *The Crisis of Liberalism*. Although he acknowledged that 'the Liberals of this country as a party never committed themselves either to the theory or the policy of this narrow laissez-faire individualism', he claimed that over the previous quarter century 'old laissez-faire individualism' had been 'too dominant' among Liberal leaders and that as a result the party had 'wandered in this valley of indecision'. Hobson was keen to stress the newness of 'New Liberalism'.[45] He saw the 1909 crisis as involving 'the substitution of an organic for an opportunist policy, the adoption of a vigorous, definite, positive policy of social reconstruction'. By this he seems to have meant that such measures should become fundamental to the Liberals' political mission, rather than a tactical response to events and external pressure.

However, even within key New Liberal texts, there is an ambivalence about how far the Liberal Party was heading in a new direction, reflected in a lack of references to the term 'New Liberalism'. In L. T. Hobhouse's classic work, *Liberalism*, the expression only occurs once, in a reference to John Stuart Mill.[46] Likewise, in the collection of Winston Churchill's speeches published in 1909 as *Liberalism and the Social Question*, at least half the text is devoted to matters other than social reform. The expression 'New Liberalism' is not mentioned in Churchill's text, although it is used twice by H. W. Massingham in his introduction to the volume.[47] The expression is equally absent from Charles Masterman's *The Condition of England* which, along with Churchill's book, is one of the texts most often cited as showing the engagement of active politicians with New Liberalism.[48]

Even for Hobson and Hobhouse, traditional Liberal concerns could conflict with their desire for social reform. They each combined support for degrees of collectivism with opposition to imperialism. The politician whom Hobhouse particularly venerated and hoped would assume the Liberal leadership was John Morley, who had opposed the South African war, but who was more hostile than other leading Liberals to social and welfare reform. Yet this does not seem to have tempered Hobhouse's admiration for him.[49] Equally, Hobson's hostility to jingoism led him to censure all Liberal imperialists who supported the South African war, even though some of them, such as Herbert Samuel and R. B. Haldane, were sympathetic to collectivism.[50] In other words, even Hobson's and Hobhouse's collectivist views were trumped by their support for a traditional, Gladstonian imperial policy.

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The Liberal leaders did not appear to recognise any change of direction after 1909, introducing welfare reforms but not putting these at the heart of the party's popular appeal. For example, although Asquith devoted substantial portions of his first NLF conference speech as prime minister to social questions, he did not suggest that this marked a new direction for the Liberal Party. He stated that 'the aims which for the last three years we have followed … continue to be the purposes and the inspiration of our policy'. Somewhat defensively he cited the Liberals' record of social legislation as evidence to rebut Unionist accusations that 'when the Liberal Party is in power it devotes all the time and energy of Parliament to tinkering with constitutional changes to the sacrifice … of social reform'. He claimed that the Liberals were enacting measures that the Unionists had merely talked about. In doing so he was arguing that the Liberals were a more effective vehicle their Unionist opponents for achieving social reform. This did not mean, however, that he was trying to cast social reform as the new dividing line between the parties.[51] Even Lloyd George, in his famous and inflammatory address at Limehouse in July 1909, justified the taxes proposed in the budget by the need for both greater spending on defence and old age pensions, but did not suggest that this was a new departure for the Liberal Party.[52]

In December 1909, when Asquith opened the Liberal Party's

general election campaign with a speech at the Albert Hall, he referred to social legislation as 'the greatest' of all outstanding questions facing the country and to old age pensions as 'the first chapter in a new volume of social legislation'. Yet this was relegated to a short section close to the end of his speech. Although old age pensions and social reform generally were the fourth and fifth most popular topics in Liberal candidates' election addresses in the January 1910 general election (behind the House of Lords, tariff reform/free trade, and the budget), no candidate ranked these issues first. The proportion of Liberal candidates mentioning them actually declined at the December 1910 general election.[53] Although Peter Clarke has described this as a period when 'the apostles of the new Liberalism were triumphant',[54] the continuities are more evident than the changes in Liberal campaigning themes.

When Asquith addressed a dinner in his honour in March 1912 to celebrate the passage of the Parliament Act, he described the Act as a 'means to other ends'. However, the 'ends' he cited were largely the unfinished 'old Liberal' business of Irish home rule, Welsh disestablishment and licensing. He referred to the government's social legislation in extravagant terms as an achievement that would 'be found in the long run the greatest boon ever conferred upon the working people of the country'. But this was a short section of a long speech that was largely devoted to explaining why the National Insurance Act was leading to government by-election defeats.[55] Even where Liberals did acknowledge new political directions, it was more in the context of changes in society rather than a conscious political strategy or philosophy. Addressing a meeting in Manchester in 1913, Haldane, the Lord Chancellor, said:

> The democracy are awake. Between the rich and the poor there was a great gap – a gap which is being more and more realised as education and enlightenment spread, and the justice of which is being challenged, and rightly challenged.[56]

Liberals were also keen to place their welfare legislation within a patriotic context. Party leaflets gave increased spending on defence and social reform as justifications for increased taxation, appealing to patriotic as much as class sentiment. Whereas Hobhouse and Hobson viewed social reform and imperialism as contrary impulses, Lloyd George was keen to argue for welfare reform as strengthening the Empire. For example, speaking at Aberdeen in November 1912, he told his audience:

> Now we have got a great Empire for the first time walking the hospitals, visiting the sick, inquiring how the infirm are getting on, helping them to mend, and curing and assisting them. It is a new dignity and glory added to the British Empire.[57]

The Liberal Publication Department produced more leaflets in 1910 on free trade and constitutional reform (mostly the power of the House of Lords) than on welfare, land or employment issues.[58] Similarly, the leaflets and pamphlets it issued between 1911 and 1914 reflected continuity of purpose rather than an attempt to rebrand the party as 'New Liberal'. The party was keen to win the centre ground and rebut charges that it had drifted to the left. Among the leaflets issued in 1911 was one entitled 'What the government has done for the middle classes'. Another defended the government against the charge of extravagance by pointing out that money has been needed for a strong navy, as well as old age pensions.[59] The leaflet 'What has Liberalism done for Labour?', which was updated and reprinted several times over the years, highlighted not just recent reforms since 1906, but went back as far as the 1833 Factory Act, and referred to the legislation of successive nineteenth-century Liberal governments on education reform, trade union reform and measures to limit working hours.[60] Rather than trying to suggest that the party had changed direction and adopted new objectives, party propagandists were seeking to emphasise a continuing tradition of Liberal measures to benefit working people.

The Liberals continued to try to straddle class divisions. For example, in May 1911 the *Liberal Magazine*, an official journal for party workers, quoted Keir Hardie as saying he 'feared the Liberals, with their social reform, much more than he did the Tories' and it added the comment: 'We can well believe it. For Social Reform as put into practice by the Liberal Party since 1906 is the true barrier against Socialism.'[61] On the question of land reform, which has been seen as the key to the continued success of Liberal social reform, the party was keen to mollify rather than antagonise farmers and landowners.[62] Similarly, a Liberal leaflet on the National Insurance Act sought to reassure doctors, whose professional body had opposed the Act, that they had nothing to fear from the measure.[63] In both official printed propaganda and platform rhetoric leaders, there is no indication of the Liberal Party trying to rebrand itself as a party whose core purpose was social and welfare reform – it had simply absorbed these issues into its agenda alongside more traditional concerns.

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Conclusion

In his classic work *Lancashire and the New Liberalism*, Peter Clarke concluded that the Liberal Party had made a crucial transition to a new form of politics, arguing that 'The Liberals were by 1910 the party of social reform, and it was upon this that electoral cleavages were based'. In his view, by the time of the January 1910 general election, 'the change to class politics was substantially complete'.[64] Clarke's view remains contentious, and there has been much debate about how far New Liberalism permeated the Liberal Party or was responsible for its electoral success.[65] Yet the assumption has become commonplace that New Liberalism was a significant element of pre-First-World-War Liberal Party's electoral appeal.

In reality it is hard to detect any clear transition from Old to New Liberalism. The Liberals continued to base their appeal on being a moderate, patriotic and pragmatic party of the political centre, capable of governing effectively and responding sympathetically to social problems, but avoiding class rhetoric. The term 'New Liberalism' itself appears to have been at best marginal to political debate. If anything, it was a construct of

intellectuals such as Hobson and Hobhouse, who were not in the front line of party politics, rather than part of the language of Liberal politicians. There was certainly no attempt by the Liberal Party to rebrand or reposition itself as New Liberal or as a party primarily committed to social and welfare legislation. Such issues were absorbed by the Liberal Party as it reacted to changing political circumstances and sought to compete with the Unionists as the most effective vehicle for improving the condition of the working classes. In offering this conclusion, it is important to state that this study is limited and tentative. There is much scope for further exploration of party rhetoric, propaganda and internal debates to shed further light on how Liberals, from party leaders to local activists, saw the evolution of party ideology and how far this involved a 'New Liberalism'.

The suggestion that the Liberal Party had not become 'New' by 1914 does not mean that it was poorly prepared for the political future or that it could not have enjoyed continuing electoral success. As Ian Packer has argued,

> The 'old' Liberalism was far from dead or irrelevant in 1905–15. When the Liberal government finally ended in May 1915 … it was not because its ideology had been unable to withstand the challenges of early twentieth-century politics.[66]

E. H. H Green has suggested that the Conservatives were in greater danger than the Liberals before the outbreak of the First World War, pointing out that to a great extent 'the Liberal governments' innovative but careful and wide-ranging policy priorities satisfied the bulk of their own and their allies' supporters'.[67] The Liberal Party had constructed a coalition of support, encompassing Labour, Irish Nationalists and its own traditional voters that was sufficient to keep it in power, provided that no external factor disrupted the political system. But of course the outbreak of war provided just such a disruption. After the First World War, a divided Liberal Party found itself in competition with a collectivist and overtly class-based Labour Party. Once overtaken by Labour, the Liberal Party could no longer claim to be the most effective vehicle for social and welfare reform. Instead it retreated into a rhetoric of 'retrenchment' and 'economy'.[68] Whether or not, in Winston Churchill's expression, war was fatal to Liberalism, certainly the Liberal Party was not prepared for the kind of politics that the war brought about, based on new dividing lines between political parties, defined by social class and collectivism.

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This article was originally published in Revue Francaise de Civilisation Britannique *Vol. 16(2), 2011. The author is grateful to the editors of that journal for permission to reproduce it here.*

Iain Sharpe completed a University of London PhD thesis in 2011 on 'Herbert Gladstone and Liberal Party Revival 1899–1905'. He is a Liberal Democrat councillor in Watford.

1 P. F. Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (London, 1971); *Liberals and Social Democrats* (Cambridge, 1978); Michael Freeden, *The New Liberalism: An ideology of social reform* (Oxford, 1978).

2 For example, see Stephen Koss, *Asquith* (London, 1976), Chapter 5, 'From the Old Liberalism to the New'; Martin Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics 1867–1945* (Oxford, 2002), originally published 1982, pp. 107–15; Alan Sykes, *The Rise and Fall of British Liberalism 1776–1988* (Harlow, 1997) pp. 173–175; G. R. Searle, *A New England? Peace and War, 1886–1918* (Oxford, 2004) pp. 212–13, 394–95; David Dutton, *A History of the Liberal Party* (Basingstoke, 2004, pp.12–13).

3 Dutton, *Liberal Party*, p. 6.

4 Jonathan Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe, 1830–1886* (Cambridge, 2006) p. 109.

5 Ibid. p. 396.

6 Duncan Brack, 'New Liberalism', in Duncan Brack and Ed Randall (eds.), *Dictionary of Liberal Thought* (London, 2007) pp. 300–04; L. A. Atherley-Jones, 'The New Liberalism', *Nineteenth Century*, vol. 26, no. 150, Aug. 1889, pp. 186–93.

7 George W. E. Russell, 'The New Liberalism: a response', *Nineteenth Century*, vol. 26, no. 151, Sept. 1889, p. 492. On Rosebery: 'I do not see a heaven-born leader for the movement; but sometimes, Radical as I am, I fancy that he may be found in the House of Lords.' Rosebery was also the founding chairman of the London County Council.

8 J. Guinness Rogers, 'The Middle Class and the New Liberalism', *Nineteenth Century*, vol. 26, no. 152, Oct. 1889, pp. 710–20.

9 James Douglas Holms, 'Is there "A New Liberalism?"', *Westminster Review*, vol. 134, no. 1, July 1890, pp. 134–47; Joseph Chamberlain speaking at the opening of a Liberal Unionist Club in Birmingham, reported in *The Times*, 11 Apr. 1890.

10 *The Times*, 31 Aug. 1893 (Argyll letter), and 14 Aug. 1894 (editorial on Spencer).

11 R. B. Haldane, 'The New Liberalism', and R. Wallace 'The New Liberalism', *Progressive Review*, vol. 1, 1896, pp. 133–37.

12 *Daily News*, 10, 11, 13 Jan. 1898.

13 An electronic search of the Manchester Guardian archive at http://archive.guardian.co.uk/ reveals sixty-five references to 'New Liberalism' during this period, while a similar exercise on *The Times* digital archive at http://0-infotrac.galegroup.com.catalogue.ulrls.lon.ac.uk/ revealed just fifty-one for the same period. While allowance has to be made for fallibilities in the search engines and variations in wording, mentions of 'New Liberalism' are relatively few and far between given the importance that has been attributed to it. Both accessed 31 Mar. 2011.

14 Freeden, *New Liberalism*, pp. 261–79. Those not cited elsewhere in this article are: E. T. Cook, 'Ruskin and the New Liberalism', *New Liberal Review*, no. 1, 1901, pp. 18–25; H. Crossfield, 'The Ethical Movement and the New Liberalism', *South Place Magazine*, no. 7, 1902, pp. 181–85. The only book published during the period that incorporated the phrase was David Lloyd George, *The New Liberalism: Speeches* (London, 1909).

15 Paul A. Readman, 'The 1895 General Election and Political Change in Late Victorian Britain', *Historical Journal*, vol. 42, no. 2, June 1999, pp. 467–93.

16 Speech at Scarborough Liberal Club, *The Times*, 19 Oct. 1895.

17 *The Times*, 17 Oct. 1895.

18 NLF meeting at Huddersfield, *Leeds Mercury*, 28 Mar. 1896.

19 Harcourt's speech to NLF conference at Norwich, *Daily News*, 18 Mar. 1897.

20 Speech to NLF conference at Hull,

The Times, 9 Mar. 1899.
21 *Glasgow Herald*, 22 Sept. 1900.
22 *Daily News*, 22 Sept. 1900.
23 *The Times*, 29 Sept. 1900.
24 *Leeds Mercury*, 26 Sept. 1900.
25 Liberal Publication Department (LPD), *Pamphlets and leaflets 1900* (London, 1901). For example: leaflet nos. 1824 on child labour; 1825 on old age pensions, 1827 on Liberal support for extending the Unionist government's 1897 Workmen's Compensation Act to include seamen, and 1832, showing a cartoon of Lord Salisbury writing 'Nonsense' over a poster of Chamberlain's social programme.
26 See the speeches of Lord Rosebery and Herbert Gladstone at the 1896 NLF conference, *Leeds Mercury*, 27 and 28 Mar. 1896. For Liberal dissatisfaction with programme politics see D. A. Hamer, *Liberal Politics in the Age of Gladstone and Rosebery* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 211–13, 257–59, 280–81.
27 For Morley's views on welfare reform, see D. A. Hamer, *John Morley: Liberal intellectual in politics* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 353–55.
28 Sidney Webb, 'Lord Rosebery's Escape from Houndsditch', *Nineteenth Century and After*, vol. 50, no. 295, Sept. 1901, pp. 366–86.
29 Herbert Samuel, *Liberalism: An attempt to state the principles and proposals of contemporary Liberalism in England* (London, 1902), pp. 20–21.
30 Lucy Masterman, *C. F. G. Masterman* (London, 1939) p. 47.

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

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

Letters of Richard Cobden (1804–65)

Knowledge of the whereabouts of any letters written by Cobden in private hands, autograph collections, and obscure locations in the UK and abroad for a complete edition of his letters. (For further details of the Cobden Letters Project, please see www.uea.ac.uk/his/research/cobdenproject). *Dr Anthony Howe, School of History, University of East Anglia, Norwich NR4 7TJ; a.c.howe@uea.ac.uk.*

Dadabhai Naoroji

Dadabhai Naoroji (1825–1917) was an Indian nationalist and Liberal member for Central Finsbury, 1892–95 – the first Asian to be elected to the House of Commons. This research for a PhD at Harvard aims to produce both a biography of Naoroji and a volume of his selected correspondence, to be published by OUP India in 2013. The current phase concentrates on Naoroji's links with a range of British progressive organisations and individuals, particularly in his later career. Suggestions for archival sources very welcome. *Dinyar Patel; dinyar.patel@gmail.com or 07775 753 724.*

The political career of Edward Strutt, 1st Baron Belper

Strutt was Whig/Liberal MP for Derby (1830-49), later Arundel and Nottingham; in 1856 he was created Lord Belper and built Kingston Hall (1842-46) in the village of Kingston-on-Soar, Notts. He was a friend of Jeremy Bentham and a supporter of free trade and reform, and held government office as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Commissioner of Railways. Any information, location of papers or references welcome. *Brian Smith; brian63@inbox.com.*

The emergence of the 'public service ethos'

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

The life of Professor Reginald W Revans, 1907–2003

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

Recruitment of Liberals into the Conservative Party, 1906–1935

Aims to suggest reasons for defections of individuals and develop an understanding of changes in electoral alignment. Sources include personal papers and newspapers; suggestions about how to get hold of the papers of more obscure Liberal defectors welcome. *Cllr Nick Cott, 1a Henry Street, Gosforth, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE3 1DQ; N.M.Cott@ncl.ac.uk.*

Four nations history of the Irish Home Rule crisis

A four nations history of the Irish Home Rule crisis, attempting to rebalance the existing Anglo-centric focus. Considering Scottish and Welsh reactions and the development of parallel Home Rule movements, along with how the crisis impacted on political parties across the UK. Sources include newspapers, private papers, *Hansard*. *Naomi Lloyd-Jones; naomi.n.lloyd-jones@kcl.ac.uk.*

Beyond Westminster: Grassroots Liberalism 1910–1929

A study of the Liberal Party at its grassroots during the period in which it went from being the party of government to the third party of politics. This research will use a wide range of sources, including surviving Liberal Party constituency minute books and local press to contextualise the national decline of the party with the reality of the situation on the ground. The thesis will focus on three geographic regions (Home Counties, Midlands and the North West) in order to explore the situation the Liberals found themselves in nationally. Research for University of Leicester. Supervisor: Dr Stuart Ball. *Gavin Freeman ; gjf6@le.ac.uk.*

The Liberal Party's political communication, 1945–2002

Research on the Liberal party and Lib Dems' political communication. Any information welcome (including testimonies) about electoral campaigns and strategies. *Cynthia Boyer, CUFR Champollion, Place de Verdun, 81 000 Albi, France; +33 5 63 48 19 77; cynthia.boyer@univ-jfc.fr.*

The Liberal Party in Wales, 1966–1988

Aims to follow the development of the party from the general election of 1966 to the time of the merger with the SDP. PhD research at Cardiff University. *Nick Alderton; nickalito@hotmail.com.*

Policy position and leadership strategy within the Liberal Democrats

This thesis will be a study of the political positioning and leadership strategy of the Liberal Democrats. Consideration of the role of equidistance; development of policy from the point of merger; the influence and leadership strategies of each leader from Ashdown to Clegg; and electoral strategy from 1988 to 2015 will form the basis of the work. Any material relating to leadership election campaigns, election campaigns, internal party groups (for example the Social Liberal Forum) or policy documents from 1987 and merger talks onwards would be greatly welcomed. Personal insights and recollections also sought. *Samuel Barratt; pt10seb@leeds.ac.uk.*

LIBERAL HISTORY QUIZ 2013

Answers to the questions set out on page 7.

1. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman at Meigle; Lord Rosebery at Dalmeny
2. Winston Churchill; Dundee
3. Russell Johnston
4. Sir Robert William Hamilton
5. Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey
6. Sir William Harcourt to Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, in 1894
7. Nicol Stephen
8. James Davidson (Aberdeen West)
9. 1966; Labour (Robert Maclennan)
10. 1920; Paisley
11. A scar on the forehead
12. Ray Michie
13. Tales from the Tap End
14. Secretary of State for Air
15. Fife
16. John Bannerman
17. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman in 1908
18. Duncan McLaren
19. The Master of Elibank
20. W. E. Gladstone; 1880, Midlothian

31 See, for example, Herbert Gladstone diary, 17 Mar. 1903, 19 July 1905. British Library, Herbert Gladstone papers (henceforward HGP), Add. Mss. 46,484 f. 32 and 46,485 f. 35; Masterman–Gladstone, 16 Dec. 1904, HGP 46,062 ff. 53–54; 30 Aug. 1905, HGP 46,063 ff. 60–61.

32 Herbert Gladstone memorandum, HGP 46,110 ff. 143–45.

33 Bryce–Gladstone, 14 Dec. 1904, HGP 46,019 ff. 84–85; Campbell-Bannerman–Spencer, 13 Dec. 1904, British Library, Spencer papers, Add. Ms. 76874; Asquith–Campbell-Bannerman, 1 Jan. 1905, British Library, Campbell-Bannerman papers (henceforward HCBP), Add. Ms. 41,210 ff. 241–42; Spencer–Campbell-Bannerman, 16 Dec. 1904, HCBP 41,229 ff. 286–90; Sinclair-Campbell-Bannerman, 30 Jan. 1905, HCBP 41,230 ff. 76–78; Morley–Campbell-Bannerman, 5 Jan. 1905, HCBP 41,223 f. 135; Buxton–Campbell-Bannerman, 16 Jan. 1905, HCBP 41,238 ff. 8–11; Fowler–Campbell-Bannerman, 26 Dec. 1904, HCBP 41,214 ff. 258–59; Gladstone–Fowler (copy) 1 Jan. 1905, HGP 46,062 ff. 67–69.

34 *The Times*, 21 Dec. 1904.

35 José Harris, *Unemployment and Politics: A study in English social policy 1886–1914* (Oxford, 1972) pp. 219–25; H. V. Emy, *Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics 1892–1914,* (Cambridge, 1973) p. 140.

36 See debate on second reading of the bill, *Hansard* (series 4), vol. 147, cols. 1174–1203 (20 June 1905).

37 Gladstone–Campbell-Bannerman, 12 Oct. 1903, HCBP 41,217 ff. 22–23.

38 Gladstone–Robert Hudson, 20 Sept. 1903, HGP 46,021 ff. 18–19.

39 Anthony Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England, 1846–1946* (Oxford, 1997) p. 251.

40 Frank Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation* (Oxford, 2008), Chapter 2, 'Bread and circuses'.

41 Dutton, *Liberal Party*, p. 17; G. R. Searle, *The Liberal Party: Triumph and disintegration 1886–1929* (Basingstoke and London, 1992) p. 60.

42 LPD, *Pamphlets and leaflets 1903* (London, 1904), leaflet no. 2009.

43 *The Times*, 14 Dec. 1905; *Liberal Magazine*, Jan. 1906, pp. 711–12.

44 These were free trade, education, Ireland, licensing, Chinese labour and the Unionists' misuse of their 1900 mandate: A. K. Russell, *Liberal Landslide: The general election of 1906* (Newton Abbot, 1973) p. 65.

45 J. A. Hobson, *The Crisis of Liberalism* (London, 1909), pp. vii–viii, 92.

46 L. T. Hobhouse, *Liberalism* (London, 1909), reprinted in James Meadowcroft (ed.), *Hobhouse: Liberalism and Other Writings* (Cambridge, 1994).

47 Winston Churchill, *Liberalism and the Social Problem* (London, 1909); for Massingham references see pp. xix and xxi. Online (and thus searchable) edition available at www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/18419. Accessed 31 Mar. 2011.

48 Charles F. G. Masterman, *The Condition of England* (London, 1909). Online at www.theconditionofengland.com/england_original.txt. Accessed 31 Mar. 2011.

49 For Hobhouse on Morley, see Stefan Collini, *Liberalism and Sociology: L. T. Hobhouse and political argument in England 1880–1914* (Cambridge, 1979) pp. 85–87.

50 Hobson, *Crisis of Liberalism*, p. viii.

51 Asquith speech to NLF conference in Birmingham, *The Times*, 20 June 1908.

52 *The Times*, 31 July 1909.

53 Neal Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People: The general elections of 1910* (London and Basingstoke, 1972) pp. 317 and 326.

54 Peter Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats*, p. 118.

55 *The Times*, 9 Mar. 1912.

56 Haldane speech at Manchester, 10 Jan. 1913, LPD, *Pamphlets and leaflets 1913* (London, 1914), pamphlet no. 5.

57 Quoted in LPD, *Pamphlets and leaflets 1913*, pamphlet no. 3, p. 7.

58 By this author's calculation, there were thirty-two leaflets or pamphlets primarily about free trade, forty-four about constitutional matters and twenty about labour, land and welfare issues. See LPD, *Pamphlets and leaflets 1910* (London, 1911).

59 LPD, *Pamphlets and leaflets 1911* (London, 1912), leaflet nos. 2372 and 2391. The latter leaflet, 'Has the Liberal Government been "Extravagant?"' was repeated in updated form in 1913 (leaflet no. 2459) and 1914 (leaflet no. 2511).

60 LPD, *Pamphlets and leaflets 1912* (London, 1913), leaflet no. 2429.

61 *Liberal Magazine*, May 1911, p. 264.

62 LPD, *Pamphlets and Leaflets 1913*, leaflet no. 2481, 'The Nation's Treasure House: How it is to be Opened?'.

63 LPD, *Pamphlets and leaflets 1912*, leaflet no. 2422.

64 Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism*, pp. 398 and 407.

65 For an overview of this debate, from a viewpoint broadly sympathetic to Labour, see Keith Laybourn, 'The Rise of Labour and the Decline of Liberalism: The state of the debate', *History*, vol. 80, no. 259, 1995, pp. 207–26.

66 Ian Packer, *Liberal Government and Politics, 1905–15* (Basingstoke, 2006) p. 6.

67 E. H. H. Green, *The Crisis of Conservatism 1886–1914* (London & New York, 1995) p. 310.

68 Dutton, *Liberal Party*, pp. 82–84.