

Another aspect of political thinking could perhaps be labelled by the theological term 'apologetics', where you looked at your faith in terms of others, and other faiths in terms of your own; Michael believed that almost all he had written – for example, *Liberalism and the Left*, or *Liberalism and the Right* – could be so categorised. This exercise helped enable politicians to defend the ideas of their party in any political arena. What had often saddened Michael was the lack of confidence many Liberals had displayed in their own beliefs, when trying to discover 'short-cuts to success'.

Michael felt that there was often a lack of intellectual rigour about what Liberals do. He cited the general statement of opposition to discrimination in the preamble to the Liberal Democrat constitution, while pointing out that clearly we would discriminate against paedophiles; general statements needed to be examined with care. Another example was the mutation of community politics from an ideological exercise into a way of winning elections – and one of its offshoots, the recruitment to the party of people who liked particular local Liberal campaigns, but had no real attachment to liberalism; they tended to drift away after a year or two. The problem was that the party tended not to think that its members actually needed any real grounding in liberalism, or that it needed to make any special effort to recruit the relatively small number of people who were instinctive liberals.

Michael agreed with much of David Howarth's arguments. One conclusion he had drawn from his work in emerging democracies was that elections were not the cause of democracy, but the result of it, and unless a democratic structure already existed, elections by themselves would not deliver democracy, and could often make things worse – a

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lesson that President Bush, for example, seemed unable to grasp. Parties that were not based on some sort of ideology were too ephemeral. Parties based on tribal loyalties, or on charismatic leaders, could be positively dangerous: 'all leaders are bad, and the best leaders are worse', because they all fall foul of their own self-importance. Parties based on regions were also problematic, as were those on religions. But perhaps even more importantly, parties based on *programmes* do not work:

manifestos are simply snapshots of moments in history which almost immediately become obsolescent – unless they are rooted in a political ideology.

So unless there are those amongst us who are prepared to do the thinking and the writing, and to do something about it thereafter, the party will be wafted about by every passing political breeze. We need the anchor of political thought.

Duncan Brack is the Editor of the Journal of Liberal History.

REVIEWS

Political patriarch

Michael Foot and Alison Highet (eds): *Isaac Foot: A Westcountry Boy – Apostle of England* (London: Politico's Publishing, 2006)

Reviewed by Robert Ingham

IF ISAAC Foot is remembered at all today, it is as the patriarch of a political family. Four sons made it to Parliament: Dingle, as first a Liberal and then a Labour MP and a Solicitor General in the 1960s; Michael, as a left-wing firebrand and Leader of the Labour Party; Hugh (known as Mac) was made a peer after a distinguished diplomatic career; and John was a long-serving Liberal peer. In addition, grandson Paul was a distinguished campaigning journalist. But Isaac was a significant figure in his own right. He was Liberal MP for Bodmin from 1922–24 and 1929–35 and was briefly Minister of Mines in the National Government of 1931; a

councillor in Plymouth for over twenty years and Lord Mayor of the city in 1945–46; and President of the Liberal Party in 1947. Michael Foot and his niece Alison Highet have, in this volume, set out to illuminate the life of a remarkable man, long eclipsed by the successes of his children.

Isaac Foot is not a conventional biography, however. Rather it is a collection of source materials – reminiscences, letters, broadcasts, even a paper on Foot's vast library – spliced together by the editors to tell the story of Foot's life. The result is highly readable, although there is perhaps too much detail in one or two areas and some frustrating gaps for those interested in Foot the Liberal politician.

Foot's first election campaign was a defeat at Totnes in January 1910 and his last came thirty-five years later when he was unsuccessful at Tavistock. Parts IV and V of the book deal with his political career. Although initially attracted to Lloyd George, he remained loyal to Asquith after 1916 and bitterly opposed Lloyd George's use of the 'coupon' to designate supporters of the coalition in 1918. Foot opposed couponed candidates on three occasions, losing at Bodmin in 1918 and to Lady Astor at Plymouth Sutton in 1919 before winning the Bodmin by-election in 1922. The name of Lloyd George was 'most accursed' in the Foot household at this time and the two men engaged in a hostile correspondence through the newspapers about the extent to which Lloyd George remained true to the principles of his party. Foot was re-elected for Bodmin in the general elections of 1922 and 1923, lost in 1924, regained the seat in 1929, retained it in 1931 and lost again in 1935. In another era, five election victories would have guaranteed twenty years or more service in the House of Commons rather than a mere eight.

There is a detailed account of his by-election victory in 1922, with some wonderful photographs, and a well-structured summary of his parliamentary contributions after he resigned as a minister in 1932. He spoke on legal aid, Malta, the opening of places of entertainment on Sundays, gambling, road safety and electoral reform. He was a Liberal spokesman at the round-table conferences on India's demand for self-government and earned the sobriquet 'the Member for the Depressed Classes' as a result of his interest in the 'untouchables'. He was regarded as the leader of the pro-temperance bloc in the Commons and the brewers crowded with delight at his defeat in 1935.

However, Foot's political career continued despite his

defeat. He was narrowly beaten in a by-election at St Ives in 1937, occasioned by Walter Runciman's elevation to the peerage. This contest provided an opportunity to settle scores with Runciman, a former protégé of Foot's, who had stayed loyal to the government and had issued an address to the electors of Bodmin in 1935 urging them to vote for the government candidate. Foot campaigned vigorously against appeasement, bravely speaking out against the Munich settlement despite the popular enthusiasm for Chamberlain's foolish claim to have achieved 'peace in our time'. During the Second World War he undertook a strenuous speaking tour of the United States, intended to tackle isolationist elements head-on, and afterwards served as Lord Mayor of Plymouth (on the invitation of the newly-elected Labour council). He remained active as an elder statesman in the Liberal Party into the 1950s.

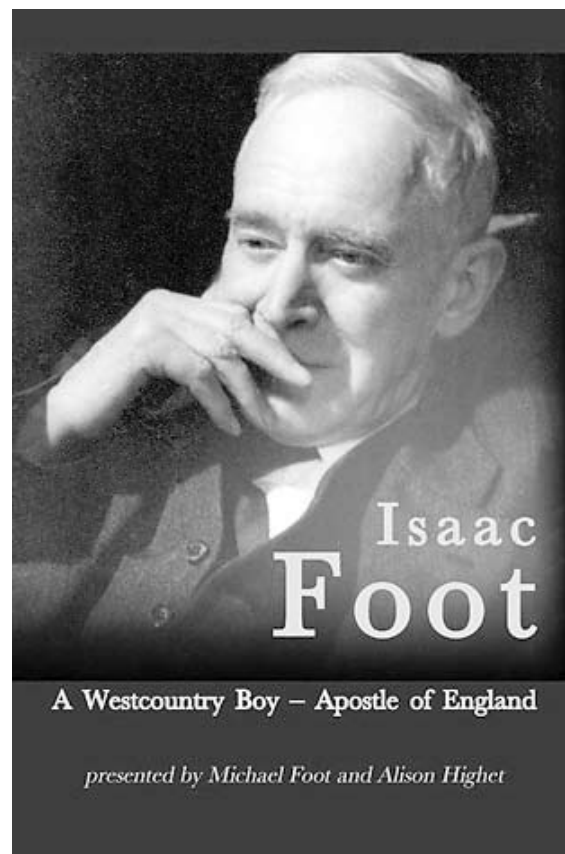
The Liberal historian is left wanting more about Foot's election campaigns, his period as a minister and his career in the Liberal Party, particularly during the late 1940s and early 1950s when the party was at risk of disappearing altogether. Two of Foot's sons left the Liberals for Labour – what did their father think? Did Isaac support Clement Davies as Liberal Leader? What did he make of the party's increasing reliance on pacts and arrangements with the Conservative Party during this time?

If the details of his political career are sketched only in outline, the bases of Foot's Liberalism are deeply etched throughout the book. Methodism was at the centre of Foot's political career, indeed at the centre of his life. He was a vigorous and popular lay-preacher, and was installed as Vice-President of the Methodist Conference in 1937.

His religious beliefs and the special place in his life held by William Tyndale, the first

translator of the New Testament into English, are amply covered. Foot's marriage was based first and foremost on the religious convictions he shared with his wife, Eva. The highlight of *Isaac Foot* is the correspondence between Isaac and his wife during their courtship. They met on 4 April 1901 at a church outing in Cambridge and, for Isaac, it was love at first sight. By the middle of the month he was writing to propose marriage. Eva, a remarkable woman who deserves greater attention for her contribution to the development of such a significant family, was understandably cautious. The letters show how Isaac got his woman. They also do more than any biographer could to demonstrate the warmth and humour in his personality. Isaac Foot emerges as an eminently likeable man.

Foot was also devoted to the institution of Parliament and, as a result, to Oliver Cromwell and the other parliamentarians who had stood up to Charles I. He founded the Cromwell



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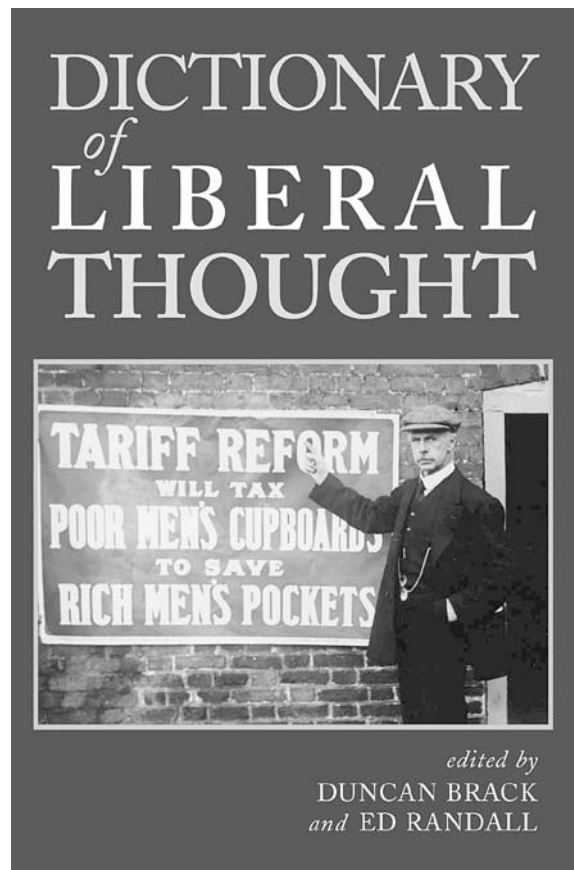
Association and was its first Chairman, and played a leading role in marking the sites of the main battlefields of the Civil War and in commemorating the three-hundredth anniversaries of various events associated with Cromwell's rise to power.

Isaac Foot will also appeal to those interested in the history of Plymouth. There are some excellent accounts of Plymouth in the late nineteenth century and of the devastation wreaked on the city during the Second World War. Foot played a key role in reviving Plymouth during his period as Lord Mayor. The other main theme of the book is Foot's obsession with books. He read for at least four hours every day and amassed an enormous library. In 1959 he paid his grandchildren to count the books – they found almost 60,000: after Foot's death they were sold to the University of California. Foot sought to buy every book by or about the people or causes in which he was interested. He had an impressive collection of early bibles, and 3,000 Civil War tracts; he

also collected literature by the likes of Hardy, Wordsworth and Conrad. It is worth bearing in mind that, in addition to his political career, religious activity, and learned interests, Foot was, throughout his life, a Plymouth solicitor who commuted from Cornwall each day – a journey which in his younger days involved a four-mile walk each way to the station. Foot not only had an exceptionally broad range of interests, he excelled across their whole range.

There are a few minor disappointments with *Isaac Foot*: the typesetting is flawed in that there are unusual gaps within words and the contents page is inaccurate. These are minor gripes about an important book on a significant man. Foot deserves a fuller biography, however, or perhaps someone will attempt to write a long-overdue political biography of the Foot family, giving due prominence to Isaac as head of the clan.

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biographies are more than that: they are quick guides to the overall significance of each of their respective subjects and his or her key ideas. The latter are first introduced in bullet-point format, and then discussed in analytical and detailed sections on the subject's career and political thought. Each article is completed by a short bibliography of primary and secondary sources ('Key Works' and 'Further Reading'). The scope is formidable and includes, besides all the major British figures, also a number of Continental European and American thinkers, ranging from Condorcet and Constant to von Humboldt, Mazzini, Tocqueville and Thoreau. The 'Ideas' discussed range equally widely and comprehensively from 'Anarchism' and the 'Austrian School', to 'Pacifism', the 'Social Market' and 'Whiggism'. As for the 'Organisations', the *Dictionary* covers an amazing variety of associations and leagues – a true reflection of the liberal presence in British society – from the

Think Liberal

Duncan Brack and Ed Randall (eds): *Dictionary of Liberal Thought* (London: Politico's Publishing, 2007)

Reviewed by **Eugenio Biagini**

THE *DICTIONARY of Liberal Thought* is an important reference work which will be much appreciated (and frequently used) both by politicians and scholars. The editors have brought together an impressive team of historians, political scientists and political practitioners to complete – in record time – a highly original publication which will set new standards in its genre.

The *Dictionary* consists of over 170 entries covering the

principal thinkers, ideas and organisations which shaped or influenced three centuries of liberal philosophy in Britain. As a reference work this is brilliant and user-friendly. Although the articles are in alphabetical order, a series of indexes (to 'Ideas', 'Organisations' and 'Thinkers') provides readers with a unique table of contents – an intellectual map which maximises the usability of this *Dictionary*.

Each entry is clearly structured. Furthermore, the