

historians to read Professor Marquand's assessments of Blair and Brown and the New Labour Project just before the longest sustained period of economic growth in our history came to an end with such a mighty bang. The fact that he was such a multi-disciplined practitioner of the political arts also makes him a shrewd and expert assessor of earlier administrations. For the answer to the question of whether the credit crunch and subsequent events will influence his assessment of the long-term influence of Thatcherism and Blairism, with their obsessive worship of the free market, we will have to await the second edition of this excellent history. In the meantime, readers

can enjoy agreeing or disagreeing with what one reviewer described as an anthropological approach to history. They can assess for themselves whether their chosen heroes or, indeed, they themselves, are whig imperialists, democratic collectivists or democratic republicans (I will excuse readers of the *Journal of Liberal History* from being tory nationalists). Whatever your conclusions, you will find this a stimulating and thought-provoking book, in keeping with the standards David Marquand has set for himself throughout his political and academic life.

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the tide of appeasement in the cabinet. He argued for rearmament, expanding the Territorial Army, strengthening air defences, even for the early introduction of conscription, but was stonewalled by a Prime Minister who never really believed that war with Germany would come, or if it did, that Britain would have to fight seriously before the conclusion of a negotiated peace. Hore-Belisha also received hostile resistance from the anti-Semitic generals who resented his programme of improvements in living quarters, pay and conditions and the lifting of petty restrictions focused on the other ranks. They eventually succeeded in getting him sacked from the War Office in 1940 and he refused Chamberlain's offer of the Board of Trade in compensation.

Perhaps one reason that Hore-Belisha's career has received less attention than it should is that, despite his efforts to persuade cabinet colleagues of the need for more soldiers, air defences, equipment production, and the creation of a Ministry of Supply, he could still be held responsible for the inadequacies of the British Expeditionary Force in France in 1940. Hore-Belisha has also suffered as a result of his membership of the Liberal Nationals, the group formed by Sir John Simon to support the Conservative-dominated National Government after 1931. This group has been vilified as traitors and turncoats, motivated by the desire for personal office and disliked for its long, slow drift towards eventual absorption by the Conservatives. Liberal MP Isaac Foot particularly resented the campaign against him (when he was unseated by the Tory at Bodmin in 1935) by two neighbouring 'National Liberal' ministers, Walter Runciman (St Ives) and Leslie Hore-Belisha (Plymouth, Devonport).<sup>1</sup>

## 'A little chit of a fellow'

Ian R. Grimwood, *A Little Chit of a Fellow: A Biography of the Right Hon. Leslie Hore-Belisha* (Sussex: Book Guild Publishing, 2006)

Reviewed by **Graham Lippiatt**

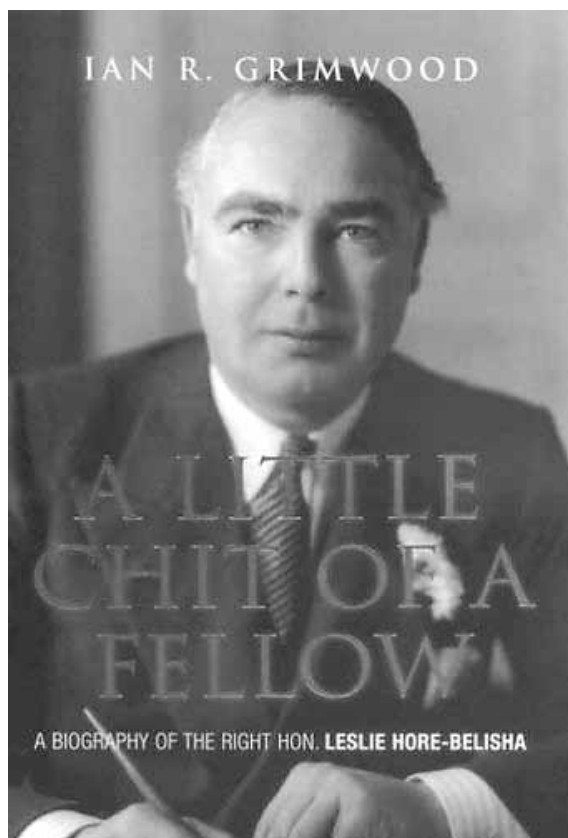
**B**ETWEEN THE years 1937 and 1940, Germany incorporated Austria into the Reich in the Anschluss, seized the Sudetenland at the Munich Conference, invaded Czechoslovakia, annexed Memel and attacked Poland, provoking war with France and Britain. In 1939, Mussolini invaded Albania and created the Pact of Steel with Hitler. Throughout this momentous period, Leslie Hore-Belisha was Secretary for War, the cabinet minister in charge of Britain's army and defence. Earlier, as Minister of Transport, he made many improvements in road safety, including the illuminated pedestrian crossing beacons which still bear his name. Yet this household name has been curiously forgotten by

biographers until the publication of this admirable book by Ian R. Grimwood (a former Mayor of Ipswich).

Why was that? It is not that Hore-Belisha left no papers for historians. There are collections in the Churchill Archives Centre at Cambridge and in the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives at King's College. There are other relevant collections, as well as government departmental records. Some of this material was used by R. J. Minney in his book, *The Private Papers of Hore-Belisha* (Collins, 1960) but this is not a full biography as it deals only with Hore-Belisha's career at the War Office.

From 1938 onwards Hore-Belisha was swimming against

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The Foots, amongst others, never forgave Hore-Belisha for his support of the Chamberlain government. In Michael Foot's book *The Trial of Mussolini* – a further attack on the guilty men of appeasement, published in 1943 under the pseudonym 'Cassius' – Hore-Belisha was picked out for his visit to Rome in 1938 when he received a bronze medallion from Mussolini, 'for fortitude and valour'.<sup>2</sup> Dingle Foot decried the Liberal Nationals as 'Vichy Liberals' and when Michael Foot beat Hore-Belisha to become MP for Plymouth Devonport in 1945, it seemed like a true come-uppance.

But Hore-Belisha's political career was not designed to win friends. After alienating former colleagues on the radical wing of the Liberal Party by joining the right-leaning Liberal Nationals and serving under Neville Chamberlain, he disappointed political friends again in 1942 by resigning from the Liberal Nationals (who supported the Churchill coalition) to sit as an independent. However

he accepted Churchill's offer to serve in the predominantly Conservative 'Caretaker' government of 1945 as Minister for National Insurance. In the 1945 election he stood as a National Independent but was defeated by Michael Foot. He then joined the Tories but never returned to the House of Commons. He did win election to Westminster City Council in 1947 and was a Conservative candidate at the 1950 general election. Churchill made him a peer in 1954.

Grimwood's approach to Hore-Belisha is sympathetic, sometimes perhaps identifying a little too closely with him. The title of the book is taken from a slight on Hore-Belisha from his Tory grandee opponent at the 1922 election; Grimwood seems to feel the insult on his subject's behalf. The rest of Hore-Belisha's career is presented as if to rebut the snub, and Grimwood reports Hore-Belisha's victory in 1923 with the rejoinder that 'The Little Chit had unseated a Conservative member of several years' standing. Leslie had won his first battle.'

Grimwood is good on Hore-Belisha's ministerial career at Transport. In the 1930s, the roads were a slaughterhouse. In 1934, the year Hore-Belisha became Transport Minister,

there were 7,343 road deaths. The figure for 2006 was 3,298 – and think of the increase in vehicle numbers since then. Grimwood carefully records the road-safety improvements Hore-Belisha introduced, things we take for granted today: a new Highway Code, 30mph limits in built-up areas, safety-glass in vehicles, restricting ribbon development, promoting trunk roads. He also provides detailed information from the content of Transport Bills and departmental plans.

Grimwood's style is thorough, factual and business-like – in fact it has echoes of a business report with its bullet point lists, statistical tables and detailed appendices. This fits well with Hore-Belisha's ministerial career, in which he was a committed and able administrator. This is a workmanlike and worthwhile biography; a useful addition to the literature of Liberal and Liberal National history, rescuing its subject from an undeserved obscurity.

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- 1 K. O. Morgan, *Michael Foot: A Life* (Harper Collins, 2007), p. 55.
- 2 'Cassius', *The Trial of Mussolini* (Victor Gollancz, 1943).

## Richard Holme remembered

Alison Holmes (ed.), *A Liberal Mind in Action: Essays in honour of Richard Holme* (Matador Publications, 2008)

Reviewed by David Steel

**R**ICHARD HOLME, whose untimely death last summer robbed us of one of the most talented people in British political life, has been commemorated by a series of essays in this remarkable little

book. Let me say straight away that its greatest shortcoming lies in the word 'little'. It was obviously and understandably put together in a hurry by the editor Alison Holmes, and therefore manages to omit reference to