

# LETTERS

## Pennine Liberal representation

In the Radio 4 interview reported in *Journal of Liberal History* 66 (spring 2010), Duncan Brack claimed that it was the West Country, along with Scotland and Wales, which kept Liberal representation in the House of Commons going during the bleak years.

Actually, only Wales provided continuous representation. Furthermore, the Pennine North made more of a contribution than Scotland or the South West. There were only 18 months between the loss of Bolton/Huddersfield in 1964 and the gain of Colne Valley/Cheadle in 1966; and of just over two years between the loss of Colne Valley/Cheadle in 1970 and the gain of Rochdale in 1972. That compares with well over four years for Scotland (1945–50) and a lot longer for the South West, between the defeat of Frank Byers in North Dorset (1950) and Mark Bonham Carter's victory in Torrington (1958), when no Liberal MP sat for these areas.

Any analysis of what sustained the Liberal Party in that period must encompass all four of these areas; awkward nonconformism, a distinct sense of geographical identity and a distance from the metropolis applied to all four.

Michael Steed

## Campbell-Bannerman

In the midst of an excellent issue on 'Liberals and the left' (*Journal of Liberal History* 67, summer 2010), there was one curious and unsupported epithet. In his piece 'The Liberal Party and the New Liberalism', Michael Freedon describes Henry Campbell-Bannerman as 'insipid'.

This description runs counter to just about every study of

Campbell-Bannerman, in which he is usually accepted as being a sound leader with radical views, who held together the different strands of Liberalism in the early years of the 1906 government.

In the course of my thesis on Leeds politics 1903–28, I was in touch with Douglas Crockatt, a distinguished elderly Liberal who was too frail to be interviewed. He had been a municipal candidate three times and contested York in 1929. He wrote to me as follows:

Campbell-Bannerman was the finest Liberal Premier we ever had – concise in speech, firm to principle, modest, and in policy and personal relations magnanimous. Even in 1905 with victory obviously just round the corner Asquith, Haldane and Grey (the Liberal Imperialist party) 'ganged up' against CB, insisting that he should go to the Lords and leave Asquith to lead the Commons. But, more than any other Liberal Leader, CB had *character*. He declined to be 'elevated' and the Liberal Imperialists had to climb down. Had CB had a five-year term things would have been very different. He died in about two years. He was magnanimous towards the 'Lib-Lab' candidates, and the history of the Labour Party and its dominance by the trade unions would have been very different if he had had a five years reign – or more.

Perhaps this is a more accurate description.

Michael Meadowcroft

## George Garro-Jones

In addition to the Liberals who joined the Labour Party in 1914–31, as mentioned by John Shepherd (*Journal of Liberal History* 67, summer 2010), the political career of George

Garro-Jones is also of particular interest. As a Liberal he gained South Hackney from Labour (Herbert Morrison) at the 1924 general election and served until he joined the Labour Party in 1929. He was then Labour MP for Aberdeen North in 1935–45, with Aberdeen North being the constituency for which another former Liberal, William Wedgwood Benn (later Viscount Stansgate) was Labour MP in 1928–31. After being created Lord Trefgarne in 1947, Garro-Jones resigned from the Labour Party in 1952 and rejoined the Liberals in 1958.

Dr. Sandy S. Waugh

## Radical Reform Group

Graham Lippiatt's very useful article on the Radical Reform Group (*Journal of Liberal History* 67, summer 2010) does not fully convey the confusion of the Liberal Party in the mid-1950s over its direction and purpose.

The group of free-trade Liberals that included S.W. Alexander and Oliver Smedley had drive, financial resources, and a clear sense of Liberalism in a libertarian, minimum-state interpretation. The almost anarchic structure of party assemblies allowed for such groups to exert real influence.

RRG, as I recall, provided the most coherent alternative definition of Liberalism – much closer to the radical Liberal tradition, and to the nonconformist beliefs which a high proportion of its members held. It helped enormously that Jo Grimond as leader was naturally sympathetic to the RRG perspective; but the existence and activities of RRG, and the arguments of its members on the Party Executive, made Grimond's task in reorienting the party much easier.

Joining the party in 1960, I caught only echoes of the arguments that had convulsed the then-tiny party in the 1950s. My future

father-in-law, Edward Rushworth, had for many years been both a member of RRG and of the party executive. He made little distinction between being a Liberal and being a teetotal nonconformist; his instincts were anti-authoritarian and socially egalitarian.

In the 1962 Orpington by-election Michael Steed and I stayed for a week with the Selton family while canvassing; Marjorie was an active party member, but her husband Arthur had 'left the party over free trade' and was engaged with others of that group in finding an alternative vehicle for their ideas – which became the Institute for Economic Affairs, through which free-market liberal ideas later influenced Margaret Thatcher and her advisers.

William Wallace (Lord Wallace of Saltaire)

## Liberator

James Graham's article about New Radicalism (*Journal of Liberal History* 67, summer 2010) correctly states that *Liberator* was never formally in alliance with New Radicalism. However, I think it is worth pointing out that (at least since it ceased to be a Young Liberal organ in 1978), *Liberator* has never been 'formally in alliance' with anything because it is a magazine, not a faction.

*Liberator's* extensive coverage of New Radicalism arose mainly simply because its driving force, Donnachadh McCarthy, was undertaking interesting activities in the party and was willing to write regularly on these, and the bulk of our readers were likely to be in broad sympathy with his aims. We occasionally shared sponsorship of conference fringe meetings, but there was never any suggestion of any formal link.

Mark Smulian (*Liberator Collective*)