

Jo Grimond's Liberalism

Book Review
by Malcolm Baines

Peter Joyce: *Giving Politics a Good Name:
a Tribute to Jo and Laura Grimond*
(Liberal Democrat Publications, 1995)

Apart from the possibility of reading Grimond's own memoirs, published as long ago as 1979, the life and career of Jo Grimond has remained relatively obscured from most latterday Liberal Democrats until the publication of this slim volume earlier this year.

Peter Joyce, a lecturer at Manchester Metropolitan University, has given a handy summary of Grimond's political life and views. The latter in particular are emphasised by his stylistic quirk of quoting Grimond frequently and placing the great man's words in italics. However there is very little here which is not better and more interestingly expressed in Grimond's own memoirs. The historical part of this work is not its main strength; though it is useful in providing a potted summary of Liberal history since 1950. Joyce does not capture anything of either Jo or Laura's personal contribution and the book is rather dry as a result. The chapter dealing with Grimond's ideological beliefs is more interesting. This is partly because his views were quintessentially Liberal, particularly in terms of worker participation, the importance of the individual and the diffusion of economic and political power. These are interests deeply unfashionable in the modern Liberal Democrats and to read them expounded in such a coherent way is refreshing.

Joyce is also interesting in the final chapter, almost an afterthought, on the Grimonds and Scottish politics. In the light of more recent coverage, Grimond's views on the devolution debate in the 1970s are worth revisiting. In particular, their emphasis on starting with the wishes of the people rather than Westminster is a salutary reminder that government is made for people, not people for the government.

In conclusion, Joyce's book is a valuable contribution to Liberal history not because of its rather tired summary of the party's disappointments over the last forty years but because it provides a platform for Grimond's Liberal philosophy to be aired. Nowhere is this more welcome than in the area of economic debate and ownership where the Liberal Democrats have so far failed to do more than echo the prevailing consensus.

A copy of the new History Group publication, The Liberal Party and the 1945 General Election, by Peter Joyce, accompanies this Newsletter for all History Group members. Additional copies are available, price £2.50.

Membership Services

The History Group is pleased to make the following listings available to its members.

Mediawatch: a bibliography of major articles on the Liberal Democrats appearing in the broadsheet papers and major magazines and academic journals (all those listed in the British Humanities Index, published by Bowker-Saur). Starting in 1988, this now extends to September 1994.

Thesiswatch: all higher degree theses listed in the Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research under the titles 'Liberal Party' or 'liberalism' (none yet under SDP or Liberal Democrats!)

Any History Group member is entitled to receive a copy of either of these free of charge; send an A4 SSAE to Duncan Brack at the address on the back page.

Mediawatch: Liberal Democrat Journals

This is a new column extending the service provided by the History Group in its 'Mediawatch' listing. Each issue of the Newsletter will list articles of historical interest appearing in the previous three months in the three main Liberal Democrat journals: Liberal Democrat News, Liberator and The Reformer. The items will also be added to the full Mediawatch listing. This first listing covers the period March - August 1995.

Ever so staunch in Scarborough! (on Osbert Sitwell's Parliamentary campaign in 1918) (Jonathan Fryer, *Liberator* 227, March 1995)

Lloyd George 100 years ago (Cllr W. George (Lloyd George's nephew), *Liberator* 227, March 1995)

Liberals, Labour, and social liberalism in modern Britain (Andrew Adonis, *The Reformer* 2:3, spring 1995)

25 years on: the birth of funded focus (Martin Kyrle, *Liberal Democrat News* 355, 7 April 1995)

Propaganda secrets which beat Goebbels (on the Liberal Noel Newsome, in charge of BBC broadcasts to Europe 1939-45) (David Boyle, *Liberal Democrat News* 359, 5 May 1995)

Why education takes us back to our roots (Tony Little and Duncan Brack, *Liberal Democrat News* 364, 9 June 1995)

A very Liberal coup (on the London Liberal Party in the 1980s) (Mark Smulian, *Liberator* 229, June 1995)

Sir John Bowring (George Bartle, *Liberator* 230, July/August 1995)