

such as the revision of the Versailles Treaty and dependency on the League of Nations for resolution of international conflicts during the 1920s. He is sceptical about the Liberal belief and advocacy of collective security as an answer to the aggression of Hitler's Germany. However, as Grayson argues, there was at least as much chance of the Liberals' policy of peace through collective security working as there was of appeasement containing Hitler. Ultimately, on the big issues concerning international relations during the 1930s the Liberal Party was more right than wrong, which is more than can be said for either the Tories or the Labour Party. On the ultimately crucial issue of

Hitler, Sinclair's opposition to appeasement was absolutely correct, and it is an appalling shame that the electoral facts of life prevented the Liberal policy of opposing German aggression from being put into practice prior to the invasion of Poland in 1939.

*Ian Hunter is completing a part-time doctorate on the Liberal Party and the Churchill Coalition.*

- 1 The book is 194 pages long including some very useful appendices on the Liberal Summer Schools, Liberal conferences and extracts from contemporary documents on Liberal policy.
- 2 Richard Grayson has previously published *Austen Chamberlain and the Commitment to Europe: British Foreign Policy, 1924–29* (Frank Cass, 1997).

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## Labour and Liverpool

**Peter Kilfoyle: *Left Behind: Lessons from Labour's Heartland* (Politico's Publishing, 2000)**

**Reviewed by Chris Rennard**

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Peter Kilfoyle's fascinating account of Liverpool Labour politics has particular interest for me, as so much of his career parallels some of my own. His story is one of internecine warfare within the Liverpool Labour Party. His account is that of a Labour Party activist, official and then MP whose major battles were never as clearly focused on winning over the electorate as they were on winning internal party battles, most notably with the Militant Tendency.

I grew up in the part of Liverpool where *Focus* leaflets first began, in the first ward in the city to elect a Liberal councillor and in the only city in modern times to be governed by the Liberal Party. As a twelve-year-old activist I remember the sense of excitement on the streets during the 1973 city elections, when we won 48 of the 99 seats on the new council.

Peter Kilfoyle describes the opposite emotions about this election, although *Left Behind* also served to remind me of

the debilitating rows within my own party, as its probably too rapid accession to power meant that the first Liberal administration included more than a few members with dubious backgrounds. Of course, the author also recognises the sincerity and decency of many of the leading Liberals of the early '70s, including the late Cyril Carr (who recruited me to the party) and Mike Storey, who remains a very close friend and who is now proving to be the most formidable and effective leader that the city has ever seen.

Liverpool council politics were at their most notorious in the Militant era, when Labour unexpectedly gained overall control of the council in 1983, in what was probably a reaction against the Thatcher Government and the perceived closeness to it of the then Liberal Leader, Sir Trevor Jones. For the first part of this period, Peter Kilfoyle had emigrated to Australia. He missed some of the classic battles in the city's media and in the annual elections

between the Militants, relying on strong anti-Thatcher sentiments, and the Liberals, who sought to highlight the corruption of the Militant regime and the damage that they were doing to the city's reputation and finances.

A number of people who watched Alan Bleasdale's drama about these times (*GBH*) have suggested to me that things could not possibly have been as bad as it portrayed. They were far worse. The thuggery, intimidation and corruption were very real. It is hard to describe the damage done to the city when all 31,000 city council employees were declared redundant. My wife was a teacher, whose redundancy notice was in a package for all the staff thrown through the school kitchen window by one of the many taxi drivers hired to deliver them. Any possible promotion within the city's education system was clearly blocked as she was a known opponent of the regime and, in common with many professional people, she was amongst those effectively forced to leave the city.

I still feel resentment that Neil Kinnock's Labour Party only started to act against the Militants when their antics became too embarrassing and electorally damaging to the Labour Party elsewhere. Around the time I left Liverpool, Peter Kilfoyle returned and was put in charge of the Labour Party's organisation. His book describes the tough approach required as he attended up to four branch meetings per evening, trying to ensure that rules were upheld and not exploited by the Militants and their allies. But it was a battle that was won at least as much by the courage of the Liberals (and then Liberal Democrats), who continued to present the only electoral opposition to the Militants, and by the courts, who eventually disqualified forty-six members of the Labour group from membership of the council when they failed to set a legal rate.

Peter Kilfoyle considers his battle against the Militants was won when he was elected as Eric Heffer's successor in the 1991 Walton by-election. I think that he was actually a lucky man, who ironically owed his by-election win to the Militants. But for a totally false impression, in an ignorant media, that



the by-election was a straight Labour versus Militant fight, I am confident that Liberal candidate Paul Clark (who had succeeded Trevor Jones) would have

won. As it was, Paul Clark polled 36% of the vote, the Militant candidate lost her deposit (as did the Tory) and Peter Kilfoyle held the seat with Eric Heffer's majority cut from 23,000 to 6,000.

I met Peter Kilfoyle recently, found him to be a charming man and told him how much I enjoyed his book. I chose not to tell him, however, of my own role in running Paul Clark's campaign, and how I felt that with a bit of luck I would have kept him out of Parliament – and this very good book would probably never have been written.

*Chris Rennard (Lord Rennard of Wavertree) was Secretary of the Liverpool Wavertree Constituency Liberal Association in 1976, agent to David Alton (Lord Alton of Liverpool) when he first won his Liverpool Mossley Hill Constituency in 1983, and has been the Liberal Democrats' Director of Campaigns and Elections since 1989.*

this book. Melbourne, we are told, could smile at anything; it seems his biographer is inclined to do the same.

It is not all smiles, however, for Melbourne's life was frequently touched by sadness. His marriage to Caroline Ponsonby was an unhappy one. A romantic dreamer, who saw the world as an epic poem with herself cast as the heroine, Caroline was easily bored and soon turned to men other than her husband for romantic gratification. Had she merely confined herself to discreet affairs there would not have been a problem: the era of rigid Victorian morals (or hypocrisy depending on your viewpoint) had not yet dawned, and it was still possible to retain your place in polite society even when someone other than your spouse was occupying their place in your bedchamber. However, Caroline overstepped the mark by the degree to which she publicised her liaisons, not least a stormy affair with the poet Byron, which culminated in her cutting her arms with broken glass in a fit of rage over being spurned by him at a ball. Such tantrums were a serious embarrassment to the future Lord M, and to the families on both sides. As a result, repeated efforts were made to persuade William to separate from his wife, but on more than one occasion he backed down in the face of emotional demonstrations of regret from Caroline and, as a result, they were not to be finally separated until her death in 1828.

Further sadness was to follow with the illness and premature death of his son and only child, and with Melbourne being named in a divorce case as a result of an apparently innocent relationship with Caroline Norton – all of which gives Cecil plenty of material with which to spin a good old historical yarn.

The dramatic episodes of Melbourne's marriage are not the only aspects of this book that keep it from being a dry-as-dust political biography. Wit is also present. In a phrase characteristic of this biographer's engaging style, Cecil points out that: 'Like the other young men of his circle, he thought chastity a dangerous state: and he seems early to have taken practical steps to avoid incurring the risks

## 'When in doubt what should be done, do nothing'

David Cecil: *The Young Melbourne & Lord M*  
(Phoenix Press, 2001)

Reviewed by David Nolan

William Lamb, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Viscount Melbourne (1779–1848) was Home Secretary at the time of the Great Reform Act in 1832 and went on to lead the Whig government that held office from 1835 to 1841. In the first of these roles he was tasked with suppressing the violent disturbances that accompanied the passage of the reform legislation through Parliament; in the latter, more famously, he guided the young Queen Victoria through her early years as head of state.

David Cecil's *The Young Melbourne* appeared in 1939; *Lord M*, his study of Lamb's ministerial career, followed fifteen years later. The two are now reissued in a single volume, although they amount to more than a single

'life', not least because the first part is as much about his wife Caroline Ponsonby as it is about the future Prime Minister. Both sections, even that dealing with the late blossoming of Melbourne's career, are more personal than political biography. Yet this is almost inevitable given that Melbourne always gave a higher priority to personal rather than political considerations.

Reading Cecil's book, it is almost possible to forget that England in the years following Waterloo was a country beset by fear of revolution, nonetheless going through a period of significant change and reform. Riot and disorder are mentioned, but they somehow lose their sting amid the mood of calm that prevails through