

FROM ANGRY YOUNG MAN TO SIMMERING OLD GURU

party he recently fought a long constitutional battle with senior party members to make it easier for ethnic minority candidates to get selected. As a result, the party's first elected ethnic minority candidate, and the North West Region's second MEP, is Saj Karim. In the House of Lords, with (Lord) Chris Rennard, he has used his long experience of elections to lead the hard-fought opposition to Labour's extension of all-postal voting, which he believes to be wide open to corruption. 'They are treating votes like Eurovision Song Contest votes. They have lost all sense of an individual vote cast in person in secret and counted as one vote.'

Although he supports the principle of devolution, he has fought equally hard against the government's proposed referendums and structure for the English regions, which he believes will be an extra layer of bureaucracy and ineffective. Time and again he cites local government experience as being an invaluable tool when arguing a case in the House of Lords.

'I am a person who has a whole series of individual personal campaigns running at the same time. If you are a radical politician you should see life in terms of projects and adventures. Other people can deal with the administration and bureaucracy that needs to be done. That's fine.'

The Greaves volcano still simmers but these days rarely does it spit directly at the party, which, I suspect, now sees him more as a shrewd guru than an angry rebel. Unlike most other senior Liberal Democrats he does not indulge in speculation about prospects, but he is prepared to give his three reasons why people should vote Liberal Democrat rather than Labour or Tory.

'Firstly, because we are the only remaining democratic major party left in politics. We still have a party where policy is made mostly by its members, and I think that is important to electors as well as activists. Secondly, public services. I think we are holding the line in the

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party that public services ought to be run in the public sector by elected public bodies, and not by market economics. Both the other parties are veering off into short-term privatisation. Thirdly, local government. We believe in democratically elected local government, probably by STV, with enough real powers and freedom from government interference to do a proper job. And I believe STV will happen. Look at Scotland. Thirty years ago, who would have thought it?'

It is hard to tell whether Tony Greaves has merely become more accepting of the party or whether the party itself has become more Liberal and therefore more acceptable to him. What still differentiates him from most Liberal Democrats is that, from a radical and democratic perspective, he has always seen Labour as the

principal enemy. He is virulent in his opposition to Labour centralism and conservatism, and his closing advice to Charles Kennedy is to attack the government more sharply right across the board. He expected the Leicester South win and believes that the recent by-election results could change British politics significantly, particularly for the Tories. 'He [Charles Kennedy] has been asking the right questions on Iraq but now he has got to be much sharper in challenging Labour'. On what particularly? 'On everything.'

If he does, he can count on the very full support of this unpredictable but hard-working peer.

A shorter version of this interview was first published in Liberal Democrat News in September 2004.

LETTERS

Speeches and names

Issue 43 was amongst the mountain of papers and magazine I've just carted back to Kinshasa after a few days back in Leeds.

Re the continuing SDP ('Fourth Party, Fifth Column?') I recall the count at the Bootle by-election which was the final debacle for the SDP. As the article points out, Jack Holmes finished seventh, but he claimed his right to make a speech in the time-honoured descending order of votes polled. It was chutzpah at its best! He began by saying, 'I came here tonight with a victory speech in my pocket – and it will have to stay there', and continued, 'I would like to thank all those who voted for me – and it won't take long.'

Second, C.H. Pritchard's letter on the change in the law to permit party names on ballot papers was valuable evidence, but the 'direct action' that finally

provoked the change – as was pointed out in an earlier issue of the *Journal* – was Frank Davis' change of name by deed poll to 'Frank Liberal Davis' when he contested the Acton by-election.

Third, no doubt many readers have pointed out, in connection with David Boyle's review of David Walters' book, that it was George Dangerfield, not Trevor Wilson, who wrote the important but idiosyncratic book *The Strange Death of Liberal England*. Trevor Wilson wrote a different though still important book, *The Downfall of the Liberal Party*.

Michael Meadowcroft

Counterfactuals

I read Mark Pack's review of *Prime Minister Portillo and Other Things that Never Happened (Journal of Liberal History 44)* with interest, and would agree that it steers a middle course between

a serious academic work and a more popular book. However, I am not sure that I would share his analysis. For example, John Charmley's essay on Halifax contains the suggestion that Hitler deliberately held his panzers back to allow the British Expeditionary Force to escape at Dunkirk, when it is just as likely that the German high command was worried that their armour had advanced too far ahead of the main army. A failed counter-attack by light tanks at Arras had shown them to be vulnerable. The chapter is more than 'twee' – it contains a considerable amount of wishful thinking.

Whilst some of the counterfactuals devote a considerable amount of attention to antecedent events, the analysis is not always complete. Richard Grayson, for example, does not give due attention to the fact that the change of allegiance in the working-class vote had begun before the First World War. The schism had already occurred when the bulk of trade unions leaders changed their allegiance to Labour, but it was a rift over leadership rather than dogma, a bit like Henry VIII's split with Rome. Socialism was never particularly popular with the working class, and the trade union movement has been more pragmatic than ideological.

James Parry ignores the strength of social Liberalism, which was by no means restricted to New Liberalism and the Lloyd George era. It had been present in local government in Joseph Chamberlain's Birmingham, with the progressives on the London County Council, and in some London boroughs where Liberals and socialists stood on a platform of greater municipalisation, a point that the *Orange Book* authors would do well to remember.

It has been suggested, in *BBC History*, that counterfactuals appeal to people who support lost causes. I would agree that there is an element of wishful thinking in some of the essays,

particularly Robert Taylor's 'What if Harold Wilson and the unions had agreed *In Place of Strife*', which contains no antecedent evidence. With the exception of those essays that avoid the horrors of the Thatcher era, I think I prefer the existing course of events.

Andrew Hudson

Spectacular victories

In his article on 'Spectacular victories' (*Journal of Liberal History* 44), Jaime Reynolds spotlights Charles Masterman's gain of Manchester Rusholme as 'the most impressive' result of the 1923 election, citing his widow Lucy's account from her 1934 biography. As his papers' first processor (L. Iles, 'The Papers of Charles and Lucy Masterman', Heslop Archives, Edgbaston, 1987), I must add some notes of cautious appreciation.

First, the seat was not regarded, contemporaneously, as an 'unexpected' gain. The *Manchester Guardian* correctly anticipated the Liberal gain, though, as Lucy's account conceded, by Winston Churchill! Masterman was, in fact, a last-minute candidate, parachuted in when Churchill decided to contest a Leicester seat on an anti-socialist platform against the ex-Liberal, now Labour, F. Pethick Lawrence, an old colleague of Masterman's from the Cambridge Union.

Second, and more in line with Dr Reynolds' conclusions, Masterman's gain of the seat, and his loss a year later were the product and the failing of local Liberal organisation. In 1923, the Liberals won all the Manchester seats bar one (held by J. R. Clynes for Labour), due to the hard local work and 'community politics' style of the paid organiser and secretary of the Manchester City Liberal Federation, Lloyd George's personal assistant Colonel Thomas Tweed, a convert from Labour. Unfortunately, Masterman, himself an Asquithian, ignored much of Tweed's advice and in particular

demonised the Rusholme Labour supporters as 'communist'. His private correspondence shows that many local Christian socialist vicars refused to support him in 1924, preferring Labour's William Paul.

Larry Iles

Auntie Nell, the mole

When working for the BBC at Bush House in the early 1960s, I would often meet up with my honorary aunt, Nell Perryman. She was a quiet lady from Honiton in Devon, who rented a room in a flat in Dulwich and was a long-term member of St John's Ambulance. Her greatest love was to go to Gilbert and Sullivan operas at the D'Oyly Carte Opera House in North London – I think we saw the lot.

Auntie Nell used to work as a telephonist at the National Liberal Club. Regularly on a Tuesday after work, I would walk along the Embankment and join her in her small cubicle on the ground floor. 'Come to see Miss Perryman?' I would be greeted by the doorman. Her supper was served at 6pm and she always shared it with me.

There were many notable members who would drop by to make calls but I remember Jo Grimond in particular. 'Put me through to my constituency, Miss Perryman', he would declare. 'Very well, Mr Grimond', Auntie Nell would reply. 'I'll page you as soon as the call comes through'. Ten minutes later he would take the call in an adjacent box.

In 1962 I migrated to Canada, travelling onwards to New Zealand and Australia. By the time I returned, Auntie Nell had died. One day, my mother and I was discussing her over the washing up. 'You know, Anne', she said, 'it was a strange thing – she voted Conservative all her life!'

Cllr Anne Roberts

Editor's note: some of these letters have been edited for length and clarity. Readers are encouraged to submit letters by email.

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