

REVIEWS

good case exists to warn that in a real world of considerably different levels of development, income and power, trade liberalisation has reinforced poverty in the poorest parts of the world. Paine's and Condorcet's vision of the benign and pacific force of free trade was a radical utopian idea at the time but it had little to offer social democratic movements in the early twentieth century dealing with international crises, trusts and cartels or seeking to provide social justice and fair prices for both consumers and producers. There are good historical reasons why successive generations of social democrats moved away from a free trade ideal to explore alternative forms of coordination, regulation, or 'fair trade'. It is not at all clear how social citizenship and social equality can be achieved under free trade conditions. Historians are not prophets, but judging

from the overwhelmingly hostile position of current social movements to global free trade, it is unlikely that a plea for reviving the original social democratic utopia of free trade, social insurance and citizenship will make for very popular politics.

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he also enjoyed the nickname Lord Cupid and his dedication to the social pleasures, on which Chambers elaborates more fully than most previous biographers, may have been too ostentatious for him to be taken seriously as a statesman.

All that changed with the death of Canning. As anti-Catholic as he remained in his personal beliefs, Palmerston saw Catholic Emancipation as a necessity of state, electoral reform as inevitable and a liberal foreign policy as desirable. Consequently, he and the other Canningites parted company with Wellington and Peel, who swallowed emancipation but resisted reform. Under the 1830 Whig administration of Grey, he took the Foreign Office and held that position in the succeeding Melbourne and Russell governments. Despite his reputation of being over-ready to send a gunboat to intimidate some poor defenceless smaller nation, Palmerston's pugnacious foreign policy was more concerned with keeping the peace between European rivals than making marginal additions to the Empire. To that end, he worked hard for the creation of Belgium as a buffer to French expansion and interfered in the politics of the Iberian peninsula to promote constitutional government and limit French influence. Similarly, his endorsement of Italian nationalism was partly a reflection of his Liberal values, but more significantly he sought to limit the over-extension of the Austrian autocracy so that the Austro-Hungarian Empire remained a valuable counterweight to Russian ambition. Everywhere he was aware of the risk of revolution to the unreformed European monarchies, though his brash warnings were rarely heeded by those he sought to protect. Chambers makes the complexities of these Continental affairs clear and this book will serve well those with only a sketchy prior knowledge.

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A very distinguished tightrope dancer

James Chambers, *Palmerston: 'The People's Darling'*

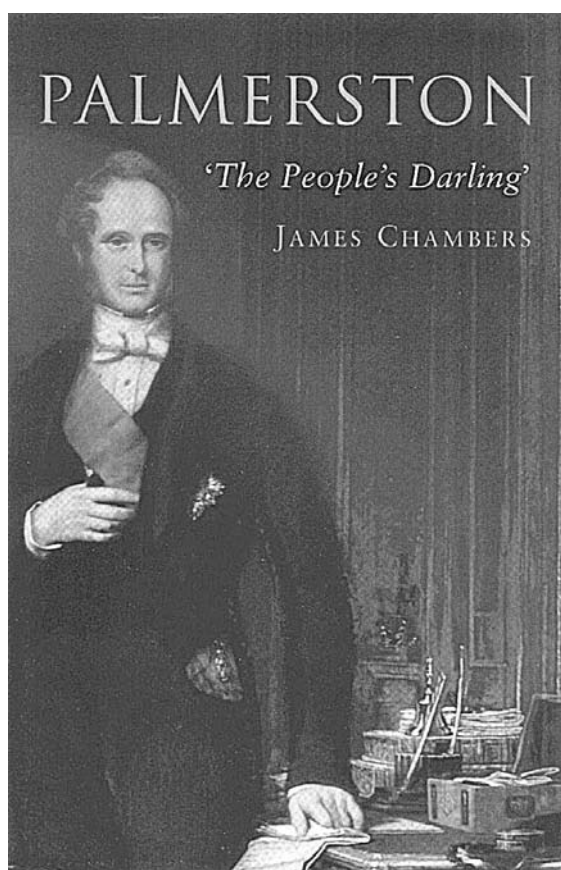
(John Murray, 2004)

Reviewed by **Tony Little**

Henry John Temple, Viscount Palmerston, began his ministerial career in 1807, at the age of twenty-two, fresh from university and before he found a parliamentary seat. Yet he did not reach the premiership until he was seventy, the oldest first-time prime minister. His career took him from the Napoleonic wars and the lax aristocratic morality of the Regency period to British Imperial dominance and the height of Victorian conformity. In his preface, Chambers suggests that Palmerston's career was, 'without doubt, the most entertaining; and it was probably the most influential internationally'. Although not a claim that Chambers makes, it can also

be argued that Palmerston was crucial to the success of the Liberal Party.

By family background and an Enlightenment education in Edinburgh, Palmerston should have been a Whig but, in the face of Revolutionary France, he accepted junior office under the Tories. His two-decade apprenticeship in junior office was unusually long and not easily explained. Throughout his life, Palmerston could irritate superiors, from the Queen downwards, combining his insistence on the prerogatives of his own office with disregard for the responsibilities of others, while expressing himself so bluntly that he earned the nickname Lord Pumicestone. As a young man,



A jolly way of looking at disasters

Palmerston was rather less clear in explaining his purpose to Queen Victoria and Prince Albert whose Germanic and monarchist sympathies clashed with their Foreign Secretary's broader vision. Palmerston ignored his wife's sound advice that 'You always think you can convince people by Arguments' and the Queen 'has not reflection or sense to feel the force of them ... I should treat what she says more lightly & courteously, and not enter into argument with her, but lead her on gently, by letting her believe you both have the same opinions in fact and the same wishes, but take different ways of carrying them out' (p. 287). He continued irritating the royal family until, in frustration, the monarch and her consort conspired with Lord John Russell to sack him at the end of 1851. But the plot was so inept that the sacking was the making of Palmerston's career rather than its finale. Within weeks, Palmerston had his tit-for-tat with Russell over a

militia bill, ending the minority Whig administration.

A minority Conservative government under Lord Derby proved unable to survive without Palmerston's blessing, and in Lord Aberdeen's 1852 coalition Palmerston was restored to office as Home Secretary. This meant that 'Pam' avoided the blame for the Crimean War and its inefficient conduct despite being a senior member of the government, while Russell was discredited for deserting the sinking ship when he resigned in advance of a critical Radical motion to the Commons. In consequence, the seventy-year old Palmerston assumed the premiership as the inevitable war leader.

Equally inescapable was his return to meddling in foreign affairs and, while he still did not see eye to eye with Victoria and Albert, he kept his provocations below a level which required dismissal. If he had overpowered the royal family, he had not yet mastered the Commons where his speeches, polished for publication, read better than they sounded. He spoke from notes, and Chambers describes his delivery as 'stuttering' with 'hesitations and grasping for words' (p. 138). Defeated over the inept handling by officials of the Chinese seizure of the *Arrow* in 1857, his position was only retrieved by victory in the ensuing general election. His subsequent defeat over the Orsini plot to assassinate the French emperor ended his first government – a rare case of Palmerston appearing to act not as the British bulldog but as a poodle to the French who demanded a change in British law to allow the prosecution of asylum seekers accused of terrorist plotting (*plus ça change*).

The Conservative administration, again headed by Derby, which replaced Palmerston's first government, was itself short-lived and, while it unfairly claimed the full credit for the resolution of the Indian Mutiny, it failed to secure its Reform Bill and called the resulting election

in the middle of a European crisis over Italy. Palmerston capitalised on the British public's sympathy for the Italian nationalists, which contrasted with the apparent Conservative bias towards their Austrian enemies. After the election, Italy served to reunite the squabbling Liberal factions in the famous 1859 meeting in Willis's Rooms. Queen Victoria's attempts to avoid sending for either Russell or Palmerston played out in a manner which guaranteed Palmerston the job; Palmerston was blessed in his enemies.

Palmerston described his role as that of 'a very distinguished tightrope dancer' and Chambers presents a clear narrative of this confusing period in British politics, although he concentrates on foreign affairs and succumbs to the temptation of including well-known stories from the Crimean War because they are well known rather than because they aid our understanding of Palmerston. He deals less well with the complexities of domestic politics and the motivations of the Liberal factions, which, intermittently, combined in opposing their nominal leader.

Palmerston's second government weathered all its trials and he died, still in office, six years later, shortly after his victory in the 1865 general election. The story of this period is usually told in terms of foreign policy crises, which included an Anglo-French arms race, the American Civil War and the notorious Schleswig-Holstein problem. Chambers follows this standard pattern and gives a clearer presentation of the Schleswig-Holstein crisis, in which Bismarck called Palmerston's bluff and Britain left a small powerless ally in the lurch, than I have seen elsewhere.

So much more in earnest than he appeared

However, this focus on foreign policy also represents the book's chief weakness. Chambers finds foreign affairs more exciting than

REVIEWS

domestic and he writes well on them but he is following a well-gleaned path while neglecting the less well-harvested field of Palmerston's domestic policies, politics and achievements. Palmerston's period in the Home Office is briskly despatched, and if the first Palmerston government had domestic achievements they are little noticed. Palmerston's second government consolidated the existence of a Liberal Party and habituated its components to working together. This required considerable skill in the management of men and, in the case of Gladstone, almost superhuman tolerance. Yet this tricky exercise, so suggestive of the Blair–Brown relationship, and Gladstone's extraordinary management of the Treasury under Palmerston, the principal domestic achievement of the government, are passed briefly over. Indeed the whole of the second government is given only 10 per cent of the book's length.

Chambers subtitles his book 'The People's Darling' because Palmerston embodied the spirit of John Bull. In his most famous speech he ended by asserting 'as the Roman in the days of old, held himself free from indignity, when he could say "Civis romanus sum"; so also a British subject, in whatever land he may be, shall feel confident that the watchful eye and strong arm of England will protect him against injustice and wrong' (p. 322).^a Electors and non-electors alike recognised more readily than MPs that Palmerston put the interests of the nation first and foremost. But Palmerston was also the first premier to court popularity. Though at odds with his hostility to electoral reform after 1832, he sought to incorporate the working classes into the political nation through speaking engagements outside his own constituency. He was an early and skilled protagonist of press management. His wife's much-sought-after social entertainments were carefully designed to bind MPs to him and his cause.

Palmerston was a mass of apparent contradictions. A keen exporter of reforming Liberalism abroad and a fierce opponent of slavery, he felt little need to keep adding to the statute book at home. Not a religious man, his carefully thought-out ecclesiastical appointments, within the Church of England, rallied nonconformists to Liberalism; despising Irish Catholicism, he provided Catholic education on his Irish estates. Florence Nightingale was a neighbour of Palmerston and her admonition, 'though he made a joke when asked to do the right thing, he always did it ... He was so much more in earnest than

he appeared' (p. 431), captures an essential component of the man which leaves room for a more analytical approach than Chambers adopts. Nevertheless Chambers makes the most of his opportunities to provide a tempting introduction to an engaging character whom Clarendon described as having a 'jolly way of looking at disasters' (p. 437).

Tony Little is Chair of the Liberal Democrat History Group.

¹ For an extensive selection from the speech see Duncan Brack and Tony Little, *Great Liberal Speeches* (Politics, 2001), pp. 109–119.

What the voters saw

Emily Robinson & Justin Fisher, *General Election 2005*

– *What the Voters Saw* (New Politics Network, 2005)

Reviewed by **Mark Pack**

The 2005 general election has already seen a plethora of books published, ranging from the latest volume in the Nuffield election studies (Kavanagh and Butler, *The British General Election of 2005*) through to probably the most detailed polling analysis ever published of a campaign, the fruits of the extensive opinion polls commissioned (at a cost of hundreds of thousands of pounds) by Tory peer Lord Ashcroft (*Smell the Coffee: a Wake-up Call for the Conservative Party*).

In this menagerie, Robinson and Fisher have found a distinctive and interesting niche as their work reports on a study, conducted by the New Politics Network and funded by the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust, into what electors really received through their letterbox, over the phone or in person on the doorstep during the election. A panel of 313 volunteers across 223 different seats recorded all the

contacts they received and this book analyses the results.

To Liberal Democrat campaigners many of the results will be less surprising, perhaps, than to others – but as it is a staple complaint of Lib Dem election organisers that academics and pundits do not understand how their local campaigns really work, that is not necessarily a bad thing (though doubtless quite a few eyebrows will be raised at the omission of the Liberal Democrats from the list of parties who it is said – on page 11 – 'have the capability to target different voters with different leaflets within the same constituency!').

The study provides very clear evidence for more leaflets bringing more votes, with the seats the Lib Dems gained often showing double-figure number of contacts for electors from the Liberal Democrats. One lucky – or unlucky, depending on your point of view – soul in Hornsey & Wood Green received no less

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