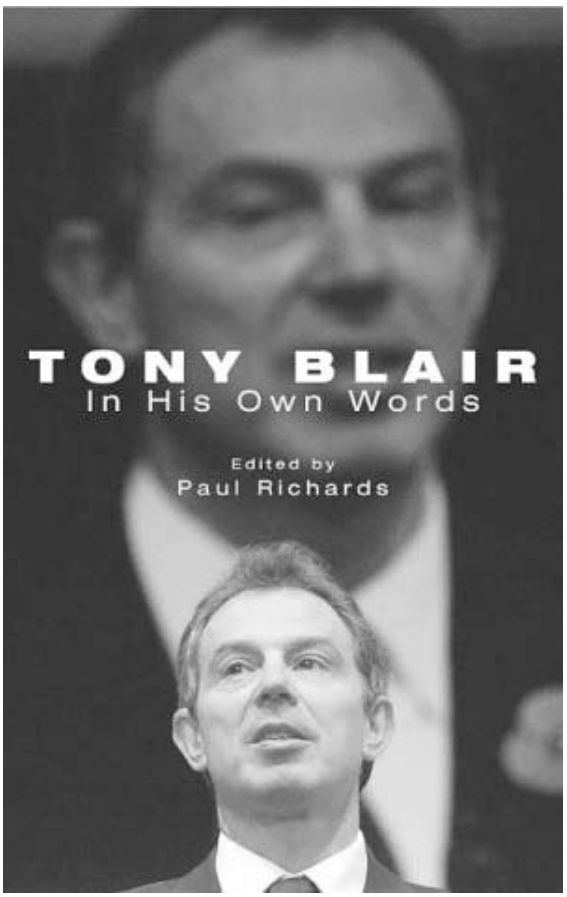

Labour right for basking in praise from the *Financial Times*, *The Times* and *Guardian* – yet seeking praise from at least the first two would later become an obsession of New Labour.

Other early items also clearly show traits that have become emblematic of Blair. In his 1990 interview with *Marxism Today* we have the family man changing nappies, and a determination verging on insolence and wrapped in self-deprecation. He happily admits – even boasts about – unpopular aspects of his beliefs and background.

Many of the items have dated very little. This reflects Blair's tendency to talk on larger and more enduring themes than on policy detail. It also reflects his failure to deliver on many of them in government – he is still talking about the same issues now because his government has failed to move the debate on.

Blair's *New Statesman* article on crime is also here with the 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime' approach that made his name as a national politician and helped bring about a major shift in the Labour Party's attitude towards crime. For such an important shift, the article itself is curiously disappointing. It is a fairly banal romp through the horrors of crime with the usual superficial mêlée of statistics showing that crime is at its worst since the Creation. There is no serious analysis of the levels of crime, their trends or their causes. Yet the soundbite helped bring about a substantive shift in Labour's policies and priorities.

The importance of his religious beliefs comes through in pieces such as his foreword to *Reclaiming Socialism: Christianity and Socialism*. Here we see how his religious beliefs underpin and give justification to his self-righteous stridency and directness on some issues, notably Iraq: 'Christianity is a very tough religion … There is right and wrong. There is good and bad … We should not hesitate to make such judgements. And then follow them with determined action.'

The religious tenor appears in many of the speeches and writing which were not aimed at a specifically religious audience, as in his 1996 conference speech and its quasi-biblical exhortation about '1,000 days to prepare for a 1,000 years', the references to Old Testament prophets and the rallying cry – 'let us lead [the nation] to our new age.'

His justification of the war in Iraq is often couched in similar moralistic tones: 'This is a tough choice. But it is also a stark one … I believe we must hold firm … to show at the moment of decision that we have the courage to do the right thing.'

As with any good collection of speeches there are a few gems of detail to cherish, such as Blair's approving quotation of Lenin on the importance of being willing to compromise.

The Liberals and Liberal Democrats barely feature in the book, despite the fact that Blair's views on the possibility of realignment and on deals to entrench an anti-Conservative majority had a major role in much of his political thought for several years.

The production qualities are the usual Politico's mix – good paper and clear print, but sloppiness creeps in during the production process, in this case evidenced by a rather hit-and-miss index.

Mark Pack has a doctorate in nineteenth century English elections, and now works in the Liberal Democrats' Campaigns and Elections Department, specialising in internet and legal matters.

Political studies

British Elections & Parties Review: Volume 13 (edited by Colin Rallings, Roger Scully, Jonathan Tonge and Paul Webb; Frank Cass, 2003) and *Volume 14* (edited by Roger Scully, Justin Fisher, Paul Webb and David Broughton; Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2004)

Reviewed by **Mark Pack**

Over the years the volumes in this series have maintained a consistent house style despite a large number of different editors. These two volumes, as with previous ones, contain a collection of new research in the field of political science. There is the usual smattering of chapters which make a nod to the outside world, and a few which do not rely on the

detailed consideration of residuals, coefficients and significance levels. But the core of these publications is the detailed statistical analysis of modern British politics. They are the place to turn to for an overview of the latest statistical analyses of the UK political system, by both established and new academics.

The fourteen chapters of Volume 13 and the twelve in Volume 14 mainly cover elections held in 1999–2003. The non-UK content of Volume 13 is higher than normal in the series, due to its coverage of various European elections in 2002.

Both contain the usual triple-layered approach familiar to readers of previous volumes. There are summaries of each chapter, which give a brief fifteen-second overview of the content, then the full chapters, and then detailed footnotes and bibliographies which often provide pointers to much deeper levels of detail.

Volume 13 has a trio of chapters on overseas elections in 2002 – in France, Ireland and Netherlands. All three in their different ways illustrate the crisis of legitimacy of mainstream parties in modern Western democracies. In Ireland, Fine Gael could not turn dissatisfaction with the government into support for itself, whilst in both France and Holland an extreme party managed to force itself centre stage.

These studies are followed by five chapters on devolution within the UK. They are largely contemporary, with very little historical rooting to the stories they tell. What there is, though, serves as a useful reminder of the paucity of support for devolution over many years in Wales. Important though it may have been to Welsh Liberal politicians, it was much less of an issue for the public.

Although many of the academics genuinely engage with their subject areas, there is still a degree of ivory tower otherworldliness lingering in the background. How else could a statement such as the following be reported as a newsworthy research finding? 'In general, the more intense a party's campaign in a constituency relative to its opponents', the better its performance,' we are solemnly told. Many campaigners may wonder why it has taken academics so long to accept that campaigning has an impact. One reason, of course, is that much of the most effective constituency campaigning has been carried out by those outside the two main political parties – and so considered until relatively recently as fringe parts of the political system (and therefore not worthy of much study).

Volume 14's first two chapters examine how voters decide whom to support. In the theoretically perfect world of a rational voter, people base their preferences on careful consideration of the parties' views on a range of issues. In reality, two major shortcuts are taken. First, there is the retrospective evaluation of the incumbents – support them if they've done a good job and oppose them if not, regardless of future policy promises. Second, views on issues can be influenced by the positions parties take. Thus, rather than backing a party because of its views on issue X, a voter may have take a view on issue X because that is the view taking by their favoured party.

Whilst the particulars of the evidence and the statistical models are very specific to modern British electoral politics, the general theoretical points raise interesting issues for historians of the Liberal Party. Both suggest that some caution should be attached to identifying a straightforward link between changes in party policy on issues such as free trade with consequent levels of public support for the Liberal Party.

Four chapters then examine the issue of modern political citizenship and participation in social movements – what shapes it and what encourages it. As with voter choice, these chapters attempt to quantify and then analyse statistically a range of possible factors.

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Two chapters on devolution follow, one on the record of Scottish opinion pollsters and one on the 2003 Welsh Assembly elections. The former, in going through a range of explanations for the poor performance of political pollsters in Scotland, provides a useful primer on the pitfalls of conducting political polling.

The three overseas chapters in Volume 14 – on New Zealand's AMS PR system and on a leadership election by party members and grassroots campaigning in Ireland – cover topics of relevance to UK elections. The one other chapter deals with the voting records of Labour MPs since 2001 (rebelling frequently by historical standards, though not in large numbers).

There are some production blemishes in Volume 13, such as the mysterious footnote three in Chapter 2 that does not refer to the main body of the text and the wrong labelling of part of Table 5 in Chapter 1. More notable is the decline in the quality of what should be one of the most useful appendices. This volume, as with the others, includes in its appendices a narrative diary of the main political events, details of election results and similar. This makes the full collection of volumes a handy reference source. But the collection of public opinion polls in Volume 13 is much thinner than usual. Volume 14 sees a welcome and marked improvement.

Despite these blemishes, the series remains an interesting and useful collection of new research, packaged in a relatively accessible way and suitable for a wider audience than just specialist academics.

Mark Pack works in the Liberal Democrats' Campaigns and Elections Department, specialising in internet and legal matters. The British Elections and Parties Review *series has now been replaced by the* Journal of British Elections and Parties Review*, also published by Taylor & Francis.*