

Tyler said that, whilst campaigning had always been an important aspect of the party's identity, it was not always a defining feature of certain leading individuals. Grimond and Jenkins were, for instance, not the most 'hands on' when it came to doorstep campaigning. However, Thorpe, by contrast, was very involved and was good at ensuring that the party focused its resources on the key by-election wins that shaped the 'revival' stage of his own of leadership. All of these individuals were known, though, to maintain an intimate knowledge of and curiosity about local campaigners and their families, and would as assiduously seek updates on the health and well-being of local party members' families as on salient matters of state. Tyler concluded that this was another important aspect of leadership.

Tyler wryly critiqued the tendency within the party to be less zealous in its embrace of power as it should be, remarking that this was not a new characteristic. In the early twentieth century, the great Liberal MP Isaac Foot remarked that he was met with hostility

by party members when he went in to government as part of the National Coalition in 1931, and a shower of gifts when he was removed from parliament a short period later. This characteristic was evidenced on a number of occasions by the party with regards to its attitude to the coalition.

Building on the theme of patient persistence which Hughes had explored, Tyler mentioned that whilst hard work is key for a third-party leader, the reality of the position, with the media often apathetic, meant the position of Liberal Democrat leader often had to deal with 'boredom', as you would have to continue to quote the liberal position time and time again, with little means of easily transmitting it to the wider electorate.

With this in mind, Tyler said he felt that a knowledge of the tight details of policy are not always essential, but that it was critical to have a strong vision. In Ken Clarke's Westminster office during the coalition years there was a Punch cartoon which showed Gladstone running to deliver his budget, and not taking his 'policy' bag with

him, and that this holds some truth for all politicians, who often have to think nimbly, and to adapt according to rapidly changing events.

Nonetheless, Tyler concluded that the party would need to be careful that it did not rush too quickly into 'fight-back' mode without taking the time to decide exactly what it was it was fighting for – and that although the lack of attention being paid to the party in the short term was troubling, it did provide a useful opportunity to reflect upon the party's *raison d'être*.

Tyler's final remark of the main discussion was to chide the authors for the use of an analytical league table which ranked the quality of their leadership. In his view, leadership was a more subtle, subjective and heterodox skill that was difficult to record in such a way. Instead, he urged readers to focus on the portraits of the different leaders offered by their respective chapters.

When it came to questions from the floor, David Williams reflected that image was an increasingly significant issue for politicians, which restricted

their activities, and that politicians like Palmerston, who had fathered an illegitimate child, would have struggled in the modern age. Simon Hughes responded that giants like Gladstone – who could be considered as Britain's Lincoln – still are manifesting in society as a whole, but that nowadays they are often less attracted to politics because of its high risks and exposure, so instead they seek reward from other things. For Hughes, this was a big danger for public service. As a response, he felt 'we [in all parties] have got to carry on recruiting people from outside politics'.

Tyler concluded that the party must not just rely on the leader to exhibit the virtues evidenced by previous leaders, but should also seek to exercise them itself. The Liberal Democrats will need to be patient and reflective in order to continue the long march back to political recovery, and that will involve careful thought about what it means to be Liberal, as well as the self-discipline in order to achieve that end.

Douglas Oliver is Secretary of the Liberal Democrat History Group.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Targeting

Michael Meadowcroft is mistaken (*Journal of Liberal History* 89, Winter 2015–16) when he writes of 'twenty years of targeting under which, year by year, the party's financial and campaigning resources were concentrated on fewer and fewer constituencies'. In fact, the exact opposite happened. The introduction of serious targeting for Parliamentary elections ahead of 1997 certainly resulted in a concentration of resources, but then through the 2001, 2005 and 2010 general elections the number of seats targeted grew steadily. Far from the party's resources being concentrated on 'fewer and fewer'

constituencies, the resources went on more and more at each of those subsequent elections. If anything, a criticism of targeting by 2010 was that it was too widespread, not too narrow.

I wrote more about this in the special 25th anniversary edition of the *Journal* (issue 83, Summer 2014) and that piece too set out the evidence that it was indeed targeting which produced the big increase in seats in 1997 (an election at which the Liberal Democrat vote fell whilst the number of seats won by the party leapt upwards). Far from being, to use Michael Meadowcroft's word, 'assumed' that targeting produced the increase in

seats, there is strong statistical evidence – including several different analyses by non-Liberal Democrat political scientists – which shows that targeting did indeed cause the increase.

As for the impact of targeting on seats that were neither initial targets nor part of the very large growth in the number of seats which were targets, there could be an argument to make based on what happened in membership, councillor numbers, local party income and other such evidence comparing target seats with non-target seats. Alas, Michael Meadowcroft's piece does not provide such evidence. My reading of those numbers

is that the turning points for both membership and councillor numbers at different points over the years have been unconnected with the rise of targeting, as they happened at significantly different times. That reading is, I concede, not based on rigorous analysis of the numbers but rather eyeballing the graphs, but it is certainly stronger evidence for what happened overall than the one council that Michael Meadowcroft refers to.

Targeting did not stop the party increasing its national share of the vote – it went up for three general elections in a row between 2001 and 2010. Nor, however, could it rescue the

party from the plunge in support in 2010–15. When there is only 8 per cent of the vote to go round, with or without targeting the results are necessarily grim in all sorts of seats.

Mark Pack

Madam Mayor

Jaime Reynolds' piece 'Madam Mayor' (*Journal* 89, Winter 2015) is a formidable piece of research. It clearly represents a remarkable commitment to produce such a comprehensive article. He deserves congratulations for producing such a piece which is a great addition to the record.

I can add one small additional point. The penultimate paragraph refers to Miss Kitson in Leeds. She was actually always known by her second name, Beatrice, rather than her first name, Jessie. She in fact became Lord Mayor under the most curious circumstances.

After long decades of party wrangling over the Mayoralty (from 1897 Lord Mayoralty), a concordat was signed between the Conservatives and Liberals in 1902 to alternate the office annually between the two parties. In 1918 the concordat was amended to include the Labour Party. Perhaps surprisingly, the arrangement continued even when the Liberals were reduced to a handful of members on the Council.

In 1942 it was the Liberals' turn to nominate the Lord Mayor. They put forward Alderman Arthur

Clarke. He was duly proposed, seconded and voted in. He made his acceptance speech, sat down in the Lord Mayor's chair – and died! He was Lord Mayor for ten minutes.

The Town Clerk approached the Liberal Leader, Eric Morrish, and gave him ten days to nominate a replacement. Morrish believed that in the circumstances it would be appropriate to put forward a Liberal who was not regarded as unduly partisan. Miss Kitson was certainly known as a Liberal but she had contested elections, unsuccessfully, as a candidate of the Citizens' Municipal Association. Despite this she was certainly not regarded as 'non-political' in the city and, being a member of a strongly Unitarian family that had been in poverty only two generations earlier, was not really 'elite'! And, of course, as the first woman Lord Mayor, she was quite a radical appointment, and made an excellent job of the task.

It was her uncle, Sir James Kitson, later Baron Airedale, who developed a vast engineering works which made the family extremely wealthy. He had a conspicuous role in Liberal history nationally – see 'Leeds and the Liberal Pantheon' in *Journal of Liberal History* 69 (Winter 2010/11).

The real question to ask is why Leeds has almost completely failed to produce influential women politicians, right up to the current Leader of the Council, Judith Blake.

Michael Meadowcroft

on polling day drove me round all the polling stations in his black Humber. We were clearly better organised in the eight towns than the Tories (thanks to funds and the persuasion of Jeremy to draft in six party organisers from around the country), but we came across one village where the enemy were manning a caravan outside the polling station surrounded by blue posters. When we left Jeremy wryly commented: 'I think we had better concede Romanno Bridge'.

His personal victory in building up North Devon over two elections is well recounted. His extraordinary ability to record names and faces, and even details of their children and pets; his adoption of local grievances with his inimitable slogan of 'mains, drains and a little bit of light'; the devotion in which he was held by his constituents are all faithfully portrayed in detail, and will bring joy and encouragement to party readers.

His later establishment of the winnable seats strategy during Jo Grimond's leadership was the first real attempt at national priority targeting which eventually paid off and without which the party would have remained floundering.

The author also provides us with detail about his early upbringing, very much in Conservative circles, and his youthful display of gifts – as well as some manipulation – in his time at the Oxford Union. The fact that he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth did inevitably colour his political career, though, as Bloch credits, he chose to break away from his surroundings to adopt the Liberal cause. On big issues such as human rights, the Commonwealth and the European Community he gave the Liberal Party distinctive leadership.

His much derided 'bomb the railway line' proposal to end the Smith rebellion in Rhodesia was in fact remarkably sensible, had he just used the word 'cut' instead of 'bomb'; and his decisive leading of his MPs into the lobbies in support of EEC membership deserves to be recalled as one of the highlights of his career.

But Jeremy was not, nor did he pretend to be, an ideas man. He was less interested in party policy than in the theatre of the political process. The famous hovercraft tour is well described. I was not involved

Jeremy was not, nor did he pretend to be, an ideas man. He was less interested in party policy than in the theatre of the political process.

REVIEWS

Jeremy's story

Michael Bloch, *Jeremy Thorpe* (Little, Brown, 2014)

Review by David Steel

MICHAEL BLOCH HAS WRITTEN a most thoroughly researched book on the life of Jeremy Thorpe. Unfortunately but predictably, the newspaper serialisation dwelt on the man's private life, thus overshadowing the considerable impact Jeremy

had on the politics of our country. Bloch gives full credit to his campaigning skills, and I personally have good cause to remember them. When I was fighting my by-election in 1965 he spent several days acting as a well-known draw as supporting speaker, and indeed