

The problem was his campaign, not him being leader.

Much is made in the book about the relative success, in 2017, of twelve Lib Dem MPs being elected, as opposed to eight in 2015. But, at the same time, the party's share of the vote fell between those elections from the previous record low of 7.9 per cent to a new low of 7.4 per cent. This was the lowest level achieved 'in the Liberal tradition' since the 1950s. Five of the nine Lib Dem MPs at the start of the 2017 general election lost their seats. The party's few gains were either based on areas of Scotland opposed to both Brexit and a second independence referendum, or to the tenacity of local campaigns, mostly by returning MPs. The facts hardly justify his claim about the 2017 campaign that 'This had been a good result.'

In the meantime, the party had been positioned immediately after the Brexit referendum of 2016 to oppose its outcome and seek to reverse it. This attracted a large influx of new members. But it hardly saved the party, as it did not result in increased levels of support. Most of the new members lived in areas that were not good prospects for the party and quite a few of them were effectively making a one-off donation to try and block Brexit.

Interesting parts of the book are very critical of the Lib Dems communications strategy in coalition, starting with the Rose Garden press conference at which Clegg and Cameron looked as though they had just won the national lottery. Farron is critical of the tuition fees reverse, the bedroom tax and the Health and Social Care Act. But he is careful to deny that his positioning on these issues was all part of his campaign to become leader. He says that he did not decide to run for leader until Nick stepped down in 2015. But he had an active campaign team that did not appear to dissolve when he won the election to be party president in 2012. His book does not list the group of 'about ten' people (apart from Ben Rich) who first met at a hotel in Kendal in July 2013 to plan his leadership campaign.

He complains vociferously of media briefing against him by some of those close to Nick Clegg. People will be left

wondering who the 'anonymous colleague' was that said of the then party president to a newspaper journalist, 'What is there about the treacherous, sanctimonious, God-bothering little shit, not to like?'. His own comments to a journalist giving the party's performance in government '8 out of 10 for policy and 2 out of 10 for communications' showed support for some coalition achievements, but he doesn't say much about them. He says that his anger about the distinctive voice of the party being drowned out in the coalition had driven him to want to be president. He rightly saw that the consequences of this were catastrophic in electoral terms. He sought to avoid

a repetition of the problem by saying that he would not enter another coalition if the chance came his way after 2017. The conclusion from the book is that he did not enjoy the role as leader when it came to a general election, and that he is more comfortable evangelising his faith, representing his constituency, and campaigning well on issues that he cares about.

*Lord Rennard was the Liberal Democrats' director of campaigns and elections 1989–2003 and chief executive 2003–09. He is now a Liberal Democrat peer. His memoir Winning Here was published by Biteback in January 2018 and was reviewed in Journal of Liberal History 105 (winter 2019–20).*

---

## The question of Europe

Vernon Bogdanor, *Britain & Europe in a Troubled World* (Yale University Press, 2020)

Review by Julie Smith

FOR DECADES, ACADEMICS and practitioners have spilled ink and voiced their opinions on the question of the UK's relations with its European neighbours. Since the outset of European integration in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the UK has typically been out of sync with the project. Politicians have talked about 'Europe' and academics have offered their thoughts, opining on the UK's position as a 'late-comer' to the European Communities and as an 'awkward partner' once it finally joined in 1973. More recently, 'Brexit' as shorthand for the UK's departure from the EU – a hitherto unprecedented act for any member state – has seen a proliferation of academic and journalistic commentary by experts and newcomers to the field of studying the EU and/or British politics; in many ways it has proved to be the 'gift that keeps on giving' for those seeking to pen new publications. Is there, then, anything new to say about the UK's relations with 'Europe'? And does Vernon Bogdanor, certainly no newcomer to British or European politics, provide it?

This slim, four-chapter volume arose from the Henry L. Stimson

Lectures delivered by Bogdanor at the Whitney and Betty MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies at Yale in 2019. To an extent it reads as such and there is thus some repetition that one might not expect in a single-authored monograph, but which inevitably occurs in a lecture series as the lecturer seeks to remind the listener of key points. This is, however, but a minor criticism. For the most part, the elegant narrative reads beautifully and provides a perfect introduction to UK–EU relations. It has the advantage of being hugely readable, a far cry from the heavily footnoted articles and books that now dominate scholarly literature and which can scarcely be read for pleasure; this book is undoubtedly a pleasure to read. I shall certainly be recommending it to my students as an excellent way into this complex and controversial topic. The addition of a chronology and appendices on British prime ministers, recent general elections and referendums on Europe provide a useful additional resource for anyone wishing to put the relationship into context and to have a sense of the detailed history.



Because the original lectures were given to an American audience, Bogdanor adds some insights about American attitudes to integration, including the role of Henry Stimson – FDR’s war secretary – referred to in both the opening and closing chapters. This is a nice touch, which adds a welcome additional perspective for British and European audiences, and an element of originality. The four chapters each broadly cover a different period and have a title drawn from a quotation. Chapter 1, largely addressing the period before the UK joined the Common Market, draws on Disraeli in referring to ‘Reserve, but Proud Reserve’. Here Bogdanor touches on both the creation of the founding Communities and British reluctance to cede sovereignty, as well as the relationship between liberalism and nationalism, correctly noting that, ‘while the aim of nineteenth-century liberals was to give effect to nationalism, their successors in the latter half of the twentieth century have sought to transcend it’ (p. 7).

Chapter 2 on the UK’s accession to the EEC in 1973 and the very early years of membership, including the 1975 referendum, harks back to Ernest Bevin’s mixed metaphor about Pandora’s box and Trojan horses. Chapter 3, looking at the travails of British membership, including Margaret Thatcher’s evolving attitudes to European integration, before exploring the 2016 referendum

that mandated leaving the EU, uses Theresa May’s mantra of ‘Brexit Means Brexit’ as its title. The final chapter on ‘Never Closer Union,’ a term coined by Andrew Duff, takes a very different approach. Where the first three chapters look at the history of the relationship, in Chapter 4 Bogdanor provides his thoughts on the future of European integration and offers his views on how the EU should reform.

The first three chapters offer an elegant reminder of the complex and often fractious relationship, drawing on a variety of (for some of us, half-remembered) quotations from leading figures in British political life over the last three-quarters of a century, including Churchill and Thatcher. For newcomers, this is a perfect way into the topic, for veterans like the current reviewer, there are some less obvious quotations that supplement the well-known comments and thus ensure that the book remain fresh even if it covers quite well-known territory.

Thoughtful, measured and almost certainly correct in much of his analysis of the history, Bogdanor then turns to the harder topic of the future. Much of his prediction seems valid and may indeed be vindicated in the longer term. One might hope he is right in predicting that ‘Britain will remain a stable democracy, one of the most stable indeed in the world; and its constitutional and political structures retain their solidity’ (p. 113), yet wonder whether the tensions between the executive and legislature and judiciary post-referendum really give grounds for such optimism. It may well be the case that ‘Brexit, therefore, will lead to

a Britain more, not less, exposed to the forces of globalisation. It will prove to be the revenge of Margaret Thatcher from beyond the grave’ (p. 112). However, the expectation of opening up markets and low taxation envisaged by Bogdanor in 2019 (and indeed by advocates of leaving the EU ahead of the 2016 referendum) will inevitably be rather muddled by the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic and the consequences of the Chancellor of the Exchequer’s incomparable largesse over the course of the last eighteen months. Just as the immediate consequences of Brexit were hidden by a lockdown that rendered the effects of the ending of the transition period on 31 December 2020 almost invisible (almost no one could travel, so changes to border controls could scarcely be tested), so the impact of Covid on the economy dwarfs the effects of Brexit. Low tax might well be the ambition of the Johnson government, but it is not within reach in the foreseeable future.

In his concluding remarks, Bogdanor highlights the illiberal turn in European politics, arguing that the situation might be even worse ‘without the existence of the European Union’ (p. 142). His closing remarks are sombre: looking back to the post-war international order that Stimson helped create, he highlights contemporary concerns over the disconnect between global economics and national politics. Nationalism and Liberalism no longer go together, and Europeans need to ‘prevent our world from becoming a world disaggregated and fragmented into conflicting national or ethnic groups, a world of competing

## Liberal Democrat History Group online

### Email mailing list

Join our mailing list for news of meetings and publications – the fastest and earliest way to find out what we’re doing. Fill in the form at: <http://bit.ly/LDHGmail>.

### Facebook page

News of the latest meeting and publications, and a discussion forum: [www.facebook.com/LibDemHistoryGroup](http://www.facebook.com/LibDemHistoryGroup).

### Twitter

A daily posting of Liberal events on this day in history, plus news of our meetings and publications. Follow us at: [LibHistoryToday](https://twitter.com/LibHistoryToday).

national states' (p. 144). What he, perhaps, neglects to say at the very end is that Brexit takes the world in the opposite direction. His conclusions are, though, thought-provoking and salutary. Bogdanor does, indeed, have something new to say.

*Julie Smith is Reader in European Politics in the Department of Politics and International Studies, Cambridge University and a Fellow of Robinson College, Cambridge. As Baroness Smith of Newnham, she is the Liberal Democrat Defence Spokesman in the House of Lords.*

## Labour biographies

Keith Gildart and David Howell (eds.), *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, vol. XV (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019)

Review by Michael Meadowcroft

IT MAY SEEM perverse to recommend a series of reference books based firmly in Labour history, but I consult one or other of the fifteen volumes more often than most Liberal publications. Early Labour history is also Liberal history and most Labour pioneers, even Keir Hardie, began as members of the Liberal Party and only moved on when frustrated by the inability, as they saw it, of the Liberal Party adequately to accommodate the justified aspirations of working men and, more particularly, its failure to enfranchise women. The whole period of Lib-Labbery is portrayed within the biographies. Later, with the post-First-World-War decline of the Liberal Party and its failure to deal with internal divisions, more Liberal luminaries moved to Labour and figure in the relevant biographies. Finally, the term 'Labour' is interpreted very broadly and a number of men and women who have a Liberal background are included, including Arthur Acland, Richard Bell, Charles Bradlaugh, Henry Broadhurst, John Burns, Thomas Burt, Charles Roden Buxton, Noel Edward Buxton, William Randal Cremer, Richard Denman, Barbara Bodichon Gould, Vernon Hartshorn, John Atkinson Hobson, William Jowitt, David Low, Arthur Ponsonby and Tom Ellis.

The occasion for reviewing the whole series is the publication of volume XV. The previous volume only appeared after an interval of eight years, so a single year's gap is positively

spritely! The first volume of the series appeared in 1972 and a swift calculation shows that it has taken forty-eight years to produce fifteen volumes – certainly no race to the finish. There are now over one thousand biographies covered, plus a number of generic articles on aspects of Labour history, such as the entry in volume XIV on 'The Working Class Movement Library', alongside an essay on its two founders, Ruth and Eddie Frow. Volume XV has an essay on 'Patriotic Labour 1918'.

Biographies in the new Volume XV that have Liberal connections include William Dobbie of York, Edward Cadbury of the Quaker chocolate family, Frank Chapple and combatting electoral malpractice, Henry Charleton and Arthur Fox – both of whom had electoral battles with Leeds Liberals – Victor Grayson who, of course, took over the Colne Valley seat vacated by Liberal Sir James Kitson (who was crucial to the saving of the official party for the Gladstonians in the 1886 struggle over home rule for Ireland), Ben Spoor, the disastrous Chief Whip in the first Labour government in 1924, Richard Llewelyn Jones and his involvement with the Cardigan Liberals, and Tom Ellis, Labour and then SDP MP for Wrexham and one of the most Liberal members of the SDP.

The original editors were Joyce Bellamy and John Saville, based at Hull University, and they remained in charge until volume X – a span of twenty-eight years. The constants over the past five volumes have been Keith

Gildart, Professor of Labour and Social History at the University of Wolverhampton, and David Howell, Professor of Politics at the University of York. Gildart and Howell have followed the wise and eclectic example of Bellamy and Saville in including worthy subjects as they were available from reputable writers. Each succeeding volume contains a cumulative index of the subject biographies enabling them to be easily referred to, plus, of course, a detailed index to each individual volume. Each essay contains full references, a list of the subject's writings plus a note of related essays. In researching articles on Liberals and Liberal history, I find myself not only checking whether there is an essay on my subject, but also going through the individual indices for relevant references.

The main problem for individual historians is the high price – typical, alas, of most academic books these days. It is always worth asking the publishers, Palgrave Macmillan, whether they would give a discount for an individual purchaser. If not, then at least recommend your local library to obtain them.

*Michael Meadowcroft was a Leeds city councillor for fifteen years and a West Yorkshire metropolitan county councillor for six years. He was the Liberal MP for West Leeds from 1983 to 1987. He is a regular lecturer on political and local history.*

