

A life well lived

Philip Goldenberg, *Walking through Different Worlds: Annoying people for good* (The Book Guild, 2019)

Review by **William Wallace**

THIS IS A personal memoir by a life-time active Liberal, who also had a successful career as a City lawyer, and with the CBI, the Royal Society of Arts and other organisations. Those interested in Liberal history will turn first to the chapters on his involvement in the national party, his experience in local government as a councillor in Woking, his campaigns in parliamentary and European elections, and the often-fraught relations within his local and regional parties – though the interaction between his Liberal commitments and the other strands of his public and private life provide an insight into the astonishingly wide number of activities that hyper-active Liberals find themselves caught up in.

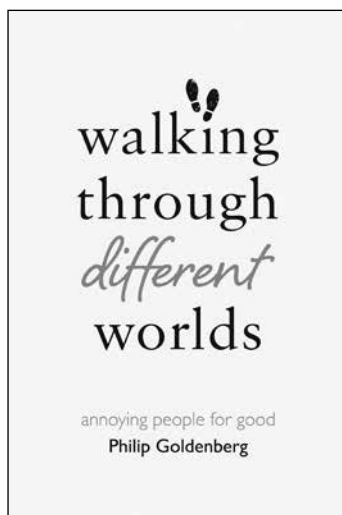
Full disclosure: I first met Philip at the Young Liberal conference where I first met my wife and have worked with him on many political groups since. As his memoir explains, his political career involved a good deal of back-room work for the party, and a number of near-misses as a parliamentary candidate and a European parliamentary candidate. He played an important role in drawing up

the constitution of the Liberal Democrats, in negotiations which were often tense and in which legal skills were valuable. He was one of the team in 1996–97 (as was I) who prepared for the possibility of a coalition or other arrangement with Labour after the 1997 election by conducting discreet conversations with various constitutional advisers who might play a role in shaping a different sort of government. He tells us about the occasion when the cabinet secretary pointed out ‘the door that Sir Humphrey Appleby was locked out of’, which fans of *Yes Minister* will remember. He is extremely discreet about our conversations with royal advisers, though more explicit on our prompting Peter Hennessy to deliver a public lecture on the construction of any future coalition. I would have welcomed even more detail on the preparations undertaken in 1996–97, perhaps in comparison with those undertaken in 2009–10.

Philip is candid about his own often acerbic wit; the sub-title, ‘annoying people for good’ says it well. He notes, for example, that he once began a speech as leader of the Liberal Democrat

group on Woking Council by congratulating the controlling Conservative group on ‘what Dr. Spooner would have described as a succession of shining wits.’ This refusal to suffer fools gladly may explain some of his clashes with other Liberal activists in Woking and beyond – though his descriptions of the faction-fighting within his local party will be familiar to others with experience of the personality conflicts within so many voluntary organisations. He was also chair of his regional party – often a thankless but necessary task.

This, then, is a useful source book for students of Liberal history, on how one talented and energetic party member contributed an enormous amount to the party over several decades, with limited recognition or reward. It provides an individual perspective on the pressures of combining



campaigning and policy advice with professional and family life. He touches on the undertone of anti-Semitism that forced him to move from one City law firm to another, and that on occasion marked his relations with his Conservative counterparts. He notes the efforts he and his wife to care for their disabled child, and how that led him on to chair the charity concerned. He is proud of the contribution he made to the RSA's working group on 'Tomorrow's Company', putting forward a series of reforms of which too few have yet been enacted. He found himself, as a councillor, a practising Jew representing a Russian Orthodox monastery and a Muslim cemetery. He became actively involved in interfaith groups in Woking – another field in which relations are often delicate and open to misunderstanding.

And – like me and many other active Liberals – he has been a prolific writer of articles and letters to newspapers whenever opportunity arose, many of which he includes at the end of chapters and in an appendix. A life well lived, with insufficient reward, at least in this world.

William Wallace (Lord Wallace of Saltire) is a member of the Journal of Liberal History editorial board. He is currently Liberal Democrat Cabinet Office spokesman in the Lords.

Brexit and social democracy

Adrian Williamson, *Europe and the Decline of Social Democracy in Britain* (The Boydell Press, 2019)

Reviewed by **Neil Stockley**

THE BREXIT REFERENDUM of 24 June 2016 was a traumatic event for liberals. Membership of the European Union provided Britain with economic and trading opportunities, cooperation on huge challenges such as climate change, influence in world affairs, social and environmental protections and access to culture. But the British electorate turned its back on all these benefits and liberals are still struggling to process the outcome.

In this tightly argued and well-researched account, Adrian Williamson traces the decision back to the massive political changes that shook Britain over the previous fifty years. From the end of the Second World War until the late 1970s, he contends, successive Labour and Conservative governments pursued policies in line with a broadly 'social democratic' consensus. These policies comprised an explicit commitment to full employment as a central goal of macro-economic strategy; egalitarian and redistributive approaches to taxation and public spending; strong trade unions, with a substantial role in both industrial and political affairs; a mixed economy, with utilities held in public

ownership; comprehensive education; the welfare state; and a substantial public rented housing sector.

There was little room for extremes of any type. Just as Enoch Powell and other 'free marketeers' were pushed to the margins of the Conservative Party, so were the left factions within Labour marginalised, though the latter steadily gained strength in the party after the defeat of the Wilson government in 1970.

Crucially, Williamson argues, the dominant One Nation Conservatives and Labour right shared a deep conviction that the UK should be part of a joint economic venture with continental Europe. Conversely, the loudest voices against Britain's involvement in Europe came from the Tory right who advocated 'a fundamentalist form of free-market nationalism', and the Labour left who believed that membership would constrain their ability to build a socialist society.

Williamson goes on to contend that the post-war consensus reached its zenith at the time of the 1975 referendum, when Britons voted by a two-to-one margin to stay in the European Economic Community (EEC). But soaring