

reconstituted 'largely on a Labour basis'.¹³

It is right to admit that Edwardian Liberalism was relatively successful in drawing its support from across the social spectrum. But it had made markedly less progress in broadening the class base of its parliamentary candidates. Just 27 of those nominated in 1906 could be styled manual workers.¹⁴ The typical Liberal MP of this era remained a middle-aged, middle-class businessman or lawyer. Most local Liberal associations had shown themselves extremely reluctant to adopt working-class candidates and it was this more than anything else which had driven working men towards independent political action to further their own sectional interests. Figures such as Keir Hardie, Arthur Henderson and Ramsay MacDonald had all sought adoption as Liberal candidates before deciding that only a new party could secure their goals.

Yes, the Labour threat to Liberalism was by no means fully apparent in 1906, or even 1914. But we should be careful not to understate the extent of Labour's achievement in a period of less than a decade and a half since the Labour Representation Committee was first set up. And, if Labour was not doing well in the by-elections of 1911–14, Keith Laybourn and Jack Reynolds have pointed to considerable Labour progress at a municipal level as early as 1906, and possibly irreversible Liberal decline by 1914. 'By any yardstick', they conclude, 'Labour had made substantial political gains in West Yorkshire between 1906 and 1914. Whilst Liberalism remained the preponderant force at the parliamentary level, the roots of its parliamentary success were being rapidly eroded by Labour at the local level'.¹⁵

The extent to which the ideas of the New Liberalism had genuinely permeated the ranks of the party remains open to question.

- p. 421.
- 2 T. Wilson, *The Downfall of the Liberal Party 1914–1935* (London, 1966), p. 17.
 - 3 G. Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (London, 1936), p. 10.
 - 4 See, for example, P. Rowland, *The Last Liberal Governments: the Promised Land 1905–1910* (London, 1968), p. 30: 'One can hardly escape the conclusion that the victory was largely undeserved'.
 - 5 A. Sykes, *The Rise and Fall of British Liberalism 1776–1988* (London, 1997), p. 270.
 - 6 M. Childs, 'Labour Grows Up: the Electoral System, Political Generations and British Politics 1890–1929', *Twentieth Century British History* 6, 2 (1995), pp. 123–44.
 - 7 R. Douglas, 'Labour in Decline 1910–14' in K. D. Brown (ed.), *Essays in Anti-Labour History* (London, 1974), pp. 105–25.
 - 8 J. M. McEwen (ed.), *The Riddell Diaries: A Selection* (London, 1986), p. 44.
 - 9 G. R. Searle, *The Liberal Party: Triumph and Disintegration 1886–1929* (Houndmills, 1992), p. 85.
 - 10 D. Dutton, *His Majesty's Loyal Opposition: The Unionist Party in Opposition 1905–1915* (Liverpool, 1992), p. 294.
 - 11 A. K. Russell, *Liberal Landslide: The General Election of 1906* (Newton Abbot, 1973), p. 65.
 - 12 *Ibid.*, p. 115.
 - 13 T. Wilson (ed.), *The Political Diaries of C. P. Scott 1911–1928* (London, 1970), p. 88.
 - 14 Russell, *Landslide*, p. 62.
 - 15 K. Laybourn and J. Reynolds, *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890–1918* (London, 1984), p. 154.

REVIEWS

Prime Ministers of the 20th century

HAUS PUBLISHING'S new series of biographies of British Prime Ministers covers every incumbent of No. 10 from Salisbury to Blair. All are written to a uniform template of 176 pages in length, with three illustrations. The authors are a mixture of historians and 'journalists with a deep sense of the past and a track record of writing history'. Here we review the four biographies of most relevance to the 1906 election and its aftermath. (See advert on page 2.)

Campbell-Bannerman

Roy Hattersley, *Campbell-Bannerman* (London: Haus Publishing, 2006)

Reviewed by **Alison Holmes**

FULL MARKS are due to Haus Publishing for their new series. That said, the use of a very broad range of authors, while not in itself a bad thing, especially as so many of them are notable in their fields, seems to have resulted in a lack of consistency of voice and style of analysis that would have been

helpful for lay readers and academics alike.

Roy Hattersley's contribution on Campbell-Bannerman seems a good case in point. As a particular kind of historical writer, Hattersley makes many insightful points about CB's career. However, whatever his political pedigree in terms of

1 M. Brock, 'The Strange Death of Liberal England', *Albion* 17, 4 (1985),



ROY HATTERSLEY

CAMPBELL-BANNERMAN

the subject matter, his approach also had three specific limitations in this context.

First, Hattersley's own political experience gives him a particularly interesting perspective and response to many of the events in CB's life – but a political reflex is not the same as history. The book suffers slightly from a sense of not quite knowing if it was meant to be an historical analysis or a political comment on Campbell-Bannerman's term in office and the events of the period.

Second, no doubt due to his own ability and political perspective, Hattersley moves quite quickly through some rather complicated political manoeuvres and sometimes leaves the reader wondering about some of the personal and political background to various issues. Meanwhile, he tends to linger over other points that do not really seem, to the political outsider, to warrant such attention. His experienced eye is caught by the tell-tale detail, but some of these are made interesting

because of his existing in-depth knowledge of the topic; readers less in the know could be left a step behind as he uses history to make interesting but more subtle political points. This is useful as far as it goes, but does give the work a rather uneven feel at points.

Finally, he combines a chronological with a thematic structure, which means he moves forward and back in time according to his particular point. This is easy enough to follow if one is broadly familiar with the period and personalities in question, but may present problems for anyone approaching Campbell-Bannerman's life, not to mention the machinations of the Liberal Party in this period, for the first time. This approach also makes more apparent the habit of a regular writer of repeating certain turns of phrase under different headings. This is not a problem in terms of the content as much as it makes more obvious in this deliberately brief format the devices used for speed by the time-pressed author.

For readers already broadly familiar with Campbell-Bannerman's leadership, the most important aspect of the book is the bringing together of an examination of CB's young life and key points in his early political career with his time as Prime Minister. It seems clear

that his personality and his background, as well as those first experiences in the political arena, shaped this steady – some might even say boring – man into the radical or progressive he became. The juxtaposition of his personality and political position on various topics of the day is of enduring interest to all those involved in the study of this period of history.

The enjoyment of the book is derived not from being an attempt at a definitive history of a Prime Minister – because it is not. Instead, Hattersley provides a light touch and the easy style of an author happy in his task and familiar with his subject. Hattersley brings his own command of a broad sweep of political history to bear in such a way that you can almost feel that he is writing about friends. To the satisfaction of the reader, the subject matter lends itself to his more intimate political style. This approach may not work so well for other Prime Ministers in this series, but this volume is well worth a read.

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Asquith

Stephen Bates, *Asquith* (London: Haus Publishing, 2006)

Reviewed by **David Wrench**

WHEN C. L. Mowat, writing in 1955, referred to the 'giants of the Edwardian era, and of the war', he undoubtedly regarded Herbert Henry Asquith as one of the foremost among them.

The last custodian of a Liberal majority, and the last leader of a Liberal government, he has had few equals in the art of looking and sounding the part of Prime Minister. Revelations about his drinking and his infatuations