

Anti-Corn Law League in the 1840s to the Institute of Economic Affairs, the Rowntree Trust and the Tawney Society in the twentieth century.

This book is not only a goldmine as a reference work, but also a pleasure to read. Many entries are authored by leading specialists in the field – such as Jon Parry on ‘Lord John Russell’ and John A. Thompson on ‘Woodrow Wilson’ – and all are stimulating and sometimes controversial in a thought-provoking and challenging way. ‘Hobhouse’ and ‘Rawls’ – spanning, between them, twentieth-century Anglo-American thought on justice and liberty – are discussed by David Howarth, a scholar and a Liberal Democrat MP. He examines clearly both the established and classical priorities of liberalism, and some of its present-day concerns (such as sectarianism, highlighted by Rawls’ concept of ‘public reason’, which excludes ‘the use in politics of references to holy texts and religious reasons that not all participants in the debate would recognise as authoritative. [Rawls] wanted political actors to confine themselves to reasons that could count as reasons for all participants in the debate’, p. 339).

The entry on ‘Freedom’ is penned by Ralf Dahrendorf (himself the subject of an elegant entry by Julie Smith), and is an incisive treatment of a highly complex subject in 3,600 words. However, it is also a one-sided view which will leave many Liberal Democrats perplexed. Dahrendorf defines freedom as ‘absence of constraints’ (in the Hobbesian tradition) and neglects the ‘republican’ notion of liberty as participatory citizenship and civic obligation. The latter is not only central to British liberal thought – from John Milton to J. S. Mill and the New Liberals – but is also a vital dimension of twentieth and

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twenty-first century Liberal and Liberal Democrat practice, and one of the differences between Liberal and Thatcherite conceptions of freedom, as Conrad Russell stressed in his *An Intelligent Person’s Guide to Liberalism* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co Ltd, 1999, p. 66). Indeed, participatory citizenship was an important component of Lord Russell’s strategy regarding ‘the use and dispersal of power’, as Duncan Brack shows in his *Dictionary* entry on the late Liberal Democrat peer: for, ultimately, there can be no security from state oppression in the private sphere without citizens’ active involvement in, and control over, the running of the state.

Unfortunately there is no entry on ‘Citizenship’. Neither is there one on ‘Religion’ – although the latter must be a major concern for the friends of liberty in the present century.

But there is a very able article on ‘Nonconformity’ (by Keith Robbins), which goes a long way towards addressing the Liberal approach in these matters. For, as Robbins points out, “‘Nonconformity’, in any era, presents itself in opposition to a prevailing “‘Establishment”” (p. 304), whether religious, economic or political. This comes together with the maxim that ‘whatever was morally wrong [can]not be politically right’ (p.305) – a maxim certainly difficult to interpret, and yet essential to the integrity and the coherence of British Liberalism since Gladstone.

I can recommend this book wholeheartedly to readers of this *Journal*.

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Things that never happened

Duncan Brack (ed.), *President Gore ... and other things that never happened* (London: Politico’s Publishing, 2006)

Reviewed by Robert Ingham

COUNTERFACTUAL HISTORY – the study of ‘what ifs?’ – is fun; but does it tell us anything about the individual decisions and choices, and wider socio-economic factors, which shape our existence? Historians are divided on this question, as Duncan Brack’s excellent introduction to this volume – the successor to *Prime Minister Portillo ... and other things that never happened* (Politico’s, 2003) – makes clear. Unsurprisingly, Brack is himself convinced of the value of counterfactual history: ‘It can reinforce the analysis of what actually happened by identifying the points at which things could have happened differently, and the relevance

at each of these key points both of individual choices and of broader socio-economic forces.’

In seeking to explain why things turned out as they did, historians consider the relative importance of different potential causal factors. One aspect of this process is to ponder the circumstances in which different outcomes would have been likely, and to think about the consequences of such differences for the broader sweep of history. For example, if Frank Byers had held his North Dorset seat in 1950 (and subsequently) might he have been elected Liberal Leader in preference to Jo Grimond in 1956? Would the Liberal Party have revived under Byers, or

revived in the same sort of way as it did under Grimond? And would this have made any difference to British politics in the 1960s and beyond?

These sorts of questions should always be at the back of a historian's mind but is it worth bringing such debates to the forefront? Careful consideration of routes not taken can quickly develop into whimsical flights of fancy – the 'parlour games' dismissed by E. H. Carr. Brack argues for the policing of counterfactual history to ensure that its results are analytically useful. His book provides an opportunity to assess whether this is achievable.

Firstly, however, *President Gore* is a highly entertaining read. All of the essays are interesting and there are some excellent jokes intermingled with the weightier points. In discussing what might have happened had the UK joined the Common Market in 1957, Peter Riddell imagines Margaret Thatcher being dispatched to Brussels as a

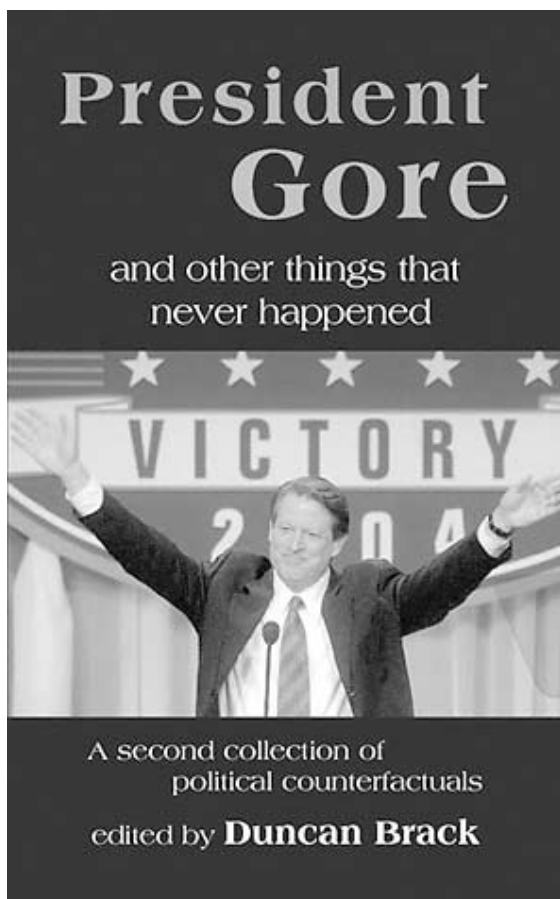
Commissioner and winning the Charlemagne Prize for achieving 'legendary success ... in implementing the single market programme'. R. J. Briand, writing about the British political scene in the 1990s, cleverly suggests that the real events of the decade featured in a brilliantly counter-intuitive essay in a volume entitled *Prime Minister Blair ... and other things that never happened*. Mark Garnett imagines Michael Howard becoming Tory leader in 1997, using crates of ale from Rotherham to win William Hague's support.

Several authors examine alternatives to the realignment of British politics which marginalised the Liberal Party in the early decades of the twentieth century. David Boyle questions the reasons why the Labour Party emerged committed to the bureaucratic socialism of the Webbs rather than, for example, the co-operative movement, which would have been more congenial to the Liberals. His suggestion that a different outcome could have resulted from Beatrice Potter marrying Joseph Chamberlain, rather than Sidney Webb, seems preposterous at first but is plausibly argued. Robert Waller's look at the 1903 pact between the Liberal and Labour Parties is a succinct analysis of the arguments for and against the inevitability of Labour's rise. The complex political situation of the early 1920s is well suited to counterfactual speculation and Jaime Reynolds and David Hughes do not disappoint. Reynolds, in arguing against the inevitability of a Liberal decline, makes some telling points about the resilience of the established party system. His suggestion that Ramsay MacDonald's election as Labour Leader in 1922 was a key turning-point in the Liberal Party's history deserves further investigation. Hughes uses fictitious diary entries and memoirs to show how Asquith could have taken power in

1924 and thereby revived his party, although it seems a little implausible to suggest that the bulk of the cabinet of 1914 could have returned ten years on.

There are only a handful of nineteenth-century counterfactuals, but these essays are amongst the best in the volume. Tony Little tackles perhaps the greatest 'what if?' in British politics – the failure to secure Home Rule for Ireland in 1886. His account of how things could have gone differently is entirely convincing and raises fresh questions about who was to blame for an outcome the ramifications of which continue to be felt well over one hundred years later. Mark Pack and Matt Cole look at the alignment of parties in the mid-nineteenth century. Pack takes as his starting point the very narrow vote in the Commons in favour of the 1832 Reform Bill and suggests that the Peelites would have been in the ascendant had the vote gone the other way, largely at the expense of the ultra-Tories. In this scenario, the Liberal Party might never have come into existence. Cole suggests that the fortunes of the Liberal Party would have been marred if Robert Peel had lived beyond 1850, leading to the earlier emergence of Labour – 'seeking to preserve the eighteenth century, [Peel] had hastened on the twentieth'.

Some of the chapters on foreign issues are also very strong. Richard Grayson suggests that the premature death of the moderate but popular German politician Gustav Stresemann may have been a crucial moment in the story of Hitler's rise to power. Helen Szamuely makes the case for Czechoslovakia initiating the Second World War by standing up to Hitler in 1938, although her suggestion that this could have exposed weaknesses in Hitler's position seems ambitious given the events of 1939–40. Byron Criddle and John Gittings offer



expert views on developments in French politics since the 1980s and an attempt by Mao Zedong to make contact with President Roosevelt in 1945, respectively.

Two well-written chapters show the limitations of counterfactual history. Simon Buckby and Jon Mendelsohn argue how Yitzhak Rabin's assassination in 1995 might have prevented a peaceful settlement being reached between Israel and the Palestinians but also recognise that peace would only have been possible if Yasser Arafat had displayed a degree of statesmanship otherwise absent throughout his long career. Duncan Brack gives a blow-by-blow account of how the dispute between the Liberal Party and SDP over defence policy in 1986 should have been avoided, but also recognises that the row was to some extent driven by

the different personalities and perceptions of the two party leaders. Although that specific dispute could have been avoided, the tensions between Owen and Steel which undermined the performance of the Alliance in the 1987 general election were surely inevitable.

In conclusion, *President Gore* presents an interesting range of essays and will appeal to anyone with an interest in political history. Few of the chapters disappoint or, forgetting that counterfactual history is meant to be a technique for analysing what actually did happen, lapse into pure fiction. Few, however, live up to the aims of the editor's introduction and shed new light on old questions.

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professional careers independent of their partners.) The forty spouses whose lives are summarised in these pages are of necessity a very motley bunch. Some remain well-known and relatively famous. Others have lapsed into obscurity. Many of the earlier individuals, like Anne North, Joan Canning, Catherine Wellington, Georgina Salisbury and Hannah Rosebery, are now largely forgotten figures. Other, more contemporary, ladies like Clemmie Churchill, Mary Wilson, Audrey Callaghan and Norma Major, are widely remembered, even admired, by many readers. Of all these married couples, only the Melbournes (formerly Caroline and William Lamb) formally separated, although Dorothy Macmillan repeatedly pestered Harold to release her from a loveless marriage, and for more than thirty years, as is well known, Lloyd George's lifestyle was close to that of a bigamist – and an unfaithful one at that!

There is a huge variation, however, in the amount of space given to each entry. By far the longest piece in the book is on Clementine Churchill (pp. 159–86), herself the subject of a fine biography published in 1979, two years after her death, by her sole surviving child Mary Soames, but there are also substantial essays on Mary Anne Disraeli, Catherine Gladstone, Margot Asquith, Margaret Lloyd George and Dorothy Macmillan. Some consorts such as Anne Grenville, Julia Peel, Sarah Campbell-Bannerman and Annie Bonar-Law are given notably short shrift in about half a page. It would be interesting to know how the author decided on the allocation of space and detail: do these reflect the available amount of published material on each individual, or simply the personal interest of the compiler in each one?

Readers of this journal would be most attracted by the absorbing accounts of

From Catherine Walpole to Cherie Blair

Mark Hitchens, *Prime Ministers' Wives – and One Husband*

(London: Peter Owen, 2004)

Reviewed by Dr J. Graham Jones

THE APPEARANCE of this fascinating and unique volume is to be warmly welcomed. The characters and personalities of the 'better halves' of leading politicians constitute an endlessly absorbing theme. Indeed, this highly readable tome is an admirable companion volume to Roger Ellis's and Geoffrey Treasure's *Britain's Prime Ministers* (Shepherd-Walwyn, 2005) (reviewed in *Journal of Liberal History* 53 (Winter 2006–07)), with which it can profitably be read in conjunction. The author is a well-known biographer and historian and a retired history teacher. In this timely study, Mark Hitchens examines these thirty-nine wives and one husband (Denis

Thatcher) in the light of their own personalities and achievements as well as the roles they have indirectly played in British history.

The volume provides us with biographies of varying detail of each Prime Minister's consort from Catherine Walpole, the ultimately unfaithful wife of Sir Robert Walpole (generally considered to have been the first British Prime Minister) who predeceased her husband by eight years, to Cherie Blair, wife of the just-departed Prime Minister, and notable for pursuing a professional career in her own right as well as bringing up four children. (Previously only Audrey Callaghan and Denis Thatcher had also enjoyed