

Gladstone was able to use the patriotic card to good effect in his Midlothian campaign against Disraeli's unmanly approach to the Bulgarian atrocities and the Congress of Berlin. Rather, Gladstone was working against a less favourable environment in which it was possible for Liberals to remain true to their philosophy yet arrive at opposing solutions to the most prominent problems.

Two key factors were at work. Firstly, Continental developments were less favourable. The threats from France and technological developments in naval warfare began to undermine Liberal economic and tax policy. Secondly, the Franco-Prussian War undermined the balance of power and was a significant factor in the Liberal defeat at the 1874 election. In addition, Bismarck's more assertive Germany not only sustained pressure on British defence expenditure but also helped to contrive greater Franco-British misunderstandings over Egypt, forcing Gladstone to maintain an occupation of parts of the Turkish empire in which he had intended a short-duration policing action. (It is hard to avoid thinking of Iraq when reading this section, though it is not part of Parry's case.) Secondly, Ireland failed to conform to the Liberal model. Its Catholicism and eagerness

for extra-parliamentary violence was closer to continental models than to the responsible lobbying of those British groups pressing for reform. Parry's book is especially valuable in his analysis of why Gladstone failed to 'pacify' Ireland in 1868, why education was so controversial in the 1870s and why Irish home rule was so divisive in 1886.

Since Parry is seeking to explain both the successes and failings of Liberal politicians over the whole mid-Victorian period, this is a complex work sustained by a mastery of the sources and a sensitivity to the intricacies of the various upholders of Liberalism, particularly of the religious groups which sustained the party. As an explanation of Liberal foreign policy it is valuable, as foreign policy has tended to be seen either from an 'official' or a Conservative perspective, with books on Liberal foreign policy much thinner on the ground. As an additional factor in the analysis of domestic policy it becomes an invaluable aid to the debate among professional historians.

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¹ Yale University Press, 1993. The first of the trilogy is *Democracy & Religion, Gladstone and the Liberal Party 1867-1875* (Cambridge, 1986).

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among the Grand Old Man's admirers has been J. L. Hammond, whose *Gladstone and the Irish Nation* (1938) portrayed the great Liberal Prime Minister in a heroic light, trying to bring justice and peace to Ireland and being frustrated by the representatives of wealth and privilege. By contrast Cooke and Vincent in *The Governing Passion* (1973) saw the 1885-86 home rule crisis as a jockeying for position among the political elite in which short-term political tactics were more important than high principle.

Whatever view they have taken of Gladstone's motivation, recent historians of the Liberal Party have tended to see his adoption of home rule as a wrong turning. Some have argued that embracing home rule was a departure from the traditional Liberal approach of trying to integrate Ireland into the United Kingdom, while others have seen Irish entanglements as a distraction for the Liberal Party from addressing the concerns of the working-class electorate in Britain – in particular social and welfare questions.

One of the many virtues of Dr Biagini's book is that it addresses much more than just the high politics and electoral consequences of the relationship between Irish Nationalism and British Liberalism. This includes questions of party organisation and the wider political outlook both of parliamentarians and grassroots party workers. In doing so he questions the conclusion of many historians that the Liberal Party with its strong Nonconformist influences and the Roman-Catholic-dominated Irish parliamentary party were strange bedfellows. By locating Irish nationalism within the context of European, rather than simply British, liberalism, the author shows how Liberal Radicals and Irish nationalists shared a view of politics that emphasised democratic and constitutional

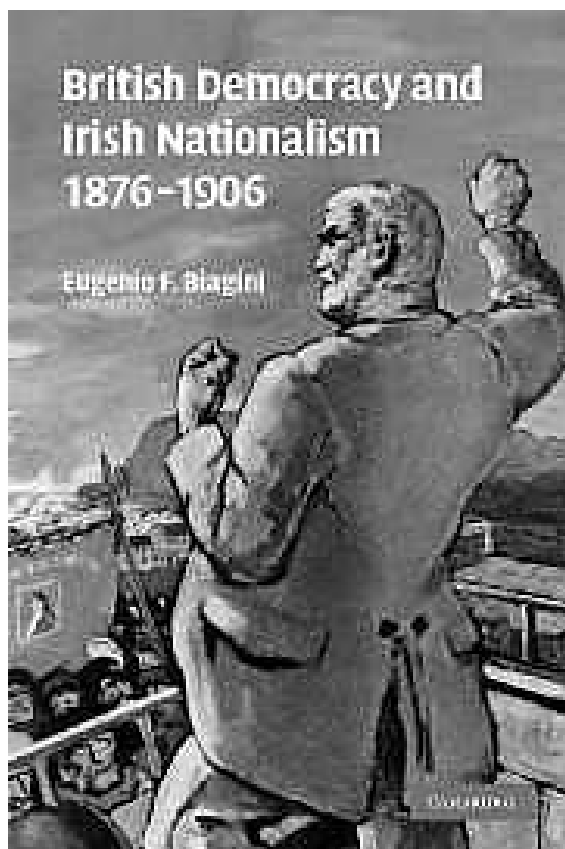
British Liberalism and Irish Nationalism

Eugenio F. Biagini: *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism 1876-1906* (Cambridge University Press, 2007)

Reviewed by **Iain Sharpe**

THE RELATIONSHIP between Irish Nationalism and British Liberalism in general, and the Liberal Party's attitude towards Irish home rule in particular during the late

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, have been as much a source of controversy among historians as they were among contemporaries of Gladstone, Chamberlain et al. Foremost



freedoms, as well as humanitarian sympathies, rather than economic collectivism.

Indeed, the book highlights a number of often forgotten episodes in the history of the period. For example, it shows that Irish nationalists as well as Gladstonian Liberals shared a sense of outrage at the Unionist government's failure to act decisively over the Turkish government's Armenian atrocities in 1895–96. And, in the course of a fascinating chapter on Joseph Chamberlain and Radical Unionism, Dr Biagini describes the unlikely career of T. W. Russell, the Ulster Liberal Unionist MP, who refused to accept that the campaign for land reform should be subservient to the greater imperative of preserving the Union, who combined virulent anti-Catholicism with a willingness to co-operate with Irish nationalists on land issues, and who eventually ended up back in the Liberal Party.

The book offers an account of the Liberal–Irish Nationalist relationship that is multi-dimensional and rich in

complexity, while offering at its core a very clear thesis. This is that Gladstone's adoption of home rule helped to delay the advent of class-based politics in Britain by fostering a radical political outlook that was Chartist rather than Marxist in nature – championing democratic reforms, ethics in foreign policy and support for free trade rather than socialist economic determinism. Paradoxically, however, the Liberal government of 1905–15 (and to a lesser extent that of 1892–95) had more success in addressing social questions, such as old age pensions or employers' liability for workplace accidents, than constitutional questions such as home rule for Ireland (let alone for Wales and Scotland). Even after the eclipse of the Liberal Party and its replacement by Labour after the First World War, Labour leaders such as Ramsay Macdonald appeared more comfortable defining their politics in essentially Gladstonian humanitarian terms rather than as distinctively socialist, ensuring the continuation of this aspect of Liberal politics.

This is very much history for a post-class-war era. Whereas in the 1970s and 1980s, much of the historical debate on Liberalism, labour and democracy focused on the inevitable development of a socialist versus capitalist division in British politics, Dr Biagini argues that in the last decades of the nineteenth century, even in an electorate with a working-class majority, social and welfare reforms had limited appeal at the ballot box when compared with constitutional questions. He suggests that this phenomenon undermined the Radical Unionism of Joseph Chamberlain, which was strongly based on outcomes rather than democratic processes, as well as hindering the growth of socialist organisations.

Much of this is convincing, yet there are still problems with

the thesis which the author does not properly confront. Not least of these is that Gladstone's adoption of home rule initiated a period of unprecedented electoral failure for the Liberal Party. However complementary the dynamics of Irish nationalism and British radicalism may have been, neither appears to have gone down particularly well with English floating voters. The four general elections after the 1886 home rule crisis saw the Liberals suffer three landslide general election defeats and one unconvincing victory that left the Gladstone/Rosebery administration largely impotent.

In order to achieve its landslide victory of 1906, the Liberal leaders explicitly disavowed any intention of legislating for home rule in the next parliament. This was largely at the insistence of Liberal Imperialists, such as Grey, Haldane and Asquith (although the latter disavowed such a label), whose importance the author somewhat underestimates. In the end Liberalism prospered electorally when it presented a moderate image to the electorate and where the leadership rather than the party grassroots was clearly in charge of the direction of policy. Strong currents of radicalism have not generally led to electoral success for the left, whether in the 1880s, 1950s or 1980s.

These are matters that will of course continue to exercise historians of the Liberal Party and of British politics of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Dr Biagini is greatly to be congratulated on having produced a highly readable volume that offers new and original perspectives on the relationship between Liberalism and Irish nationalism. This book will surely be essential reading for all students of the period.

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WORKING WITH OTHERS: THE LIB-LAB PACT

From March 1977 to October 1978, the Liberal Party kept Jim Callaghan's Labour government in power through the Lib-Lab Pact. Labour ministers consulted systematically with Liberal spokespeople across a wide range of policy areas. Arguably, the Pact restored a degree of political and economic stability to the country, but its achievements from a Liberal point of view were highly limited and it did not appear to be popular with the country at large.

Yet, in the longer term, the Pact can be seen to have paved the way for the concept of different political parties working together – which led in the following decade to the Liberal–SDP Alliance and may – ultimately – lead to coalition government at Westminster.

Twenty years on from the Pact, key participants from both sides discuss its history and impact.

Speakers: **David Steel** (Leader of the Liberal Party 1976–88); **Tom McNally** (Head of the Prime Minister's Political Office 1976–79); **Michal Steed** (President of the Liberal Party 1978–79, and academic psephologist). Chair: **Geoff Tordoff** (Chairman of the Liberal Party 1976–79).

7.00pm, Monday 14 July

National Liberal Club, 1 Whitehall Place, London SW1

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which was quite apparent by the time of Lloyd George's visit to Germany in 1936, which was followed by his notorious praise of Hitler. Even Lloyd George's much vaunted pro-Zionism can be seen to have nothing to do with the Nazi persecution of the Jews – he never offered that as a reason for supporting the establishment of a Jewish national home. Rather, his support had a decidedly anti-Semitic base. Even though his belief in Zionism was partly based on sincerely felt Christian Zionism, he also believed in the old canard of the

international influence and power of the Jews to determine world events. 'The Jewish race', Lloyd George wrote in his memoirs, 'had world-wide influence and capability, and the Jews had every intention of determining the outcome of World War I – acting in accordance with their financial instincts'. In other words his support for Zionism was a bribe to enlist the support and 'world influence of international Jewry' – a myth that Hitler was soon to shatter.

Lloyd George was also an admirer of the fascist

Oswald Mosley, and Lloyd George's recorded criticism of fascism was mild indeed. The similarity of Lloyd George to Marshal Pétain is striking. Both were war leaders, vain men who admired strong autocratic rulers, and both were easily seduced by Hitler. George Orwell alluded to Lloyd George as a potential Pétain, writing in his diary that: 'There are rumours that Lloyd George is the potential Pétain of England. It is easy to see him playing this part.' Churchill in 1941, in reply to a speech by Lloyd George in the House

of Commons, said: 'It was the sort of speech with which, I imagine, the illustrious and venerable Marshal Pétain might well have enlivened the closing days of M. Reynaud's Cabinet.'

Whilst it is right that we should acknowledge the tremendous achievements of Lloyd George, we should not ignore these major non-liberal flaws in his character.

Harry Davies