

dispositions on a future leadership contest. It would have been yet another case of the need for a combination of the diverse and very different talents of two key protagonists!

Beith's treatment of the 1986 defence debate at the Liberal Party's Eastbourne Assembly is unsatisfactory. It is a longer story than can be dealt with in a book review and, fortunately, there are two accounts available: mine in *Journal of Liberal History*, No 18, spring 1998 (and on my website <http://www.bramley.demon.co.uk/liberal.html> 'Alliance – Parties and Leaders') and in *Radical Quarterly*, No 5, autumn 1987. Suffice to say here that Beith's implication that the political debacle was caused by 'the presence within the Liberal Party of a substantial minority of unilateralist views' is incorrect. The eventual post-Assembly fudge, which I introduced into a Commons debate in December 1986, was almost identical in its essence to a draft Assembly motion put to the Policy Committee in advance by William Wallace and rejected by David Steel who wanted, fatally, to go for the high-wire act.

Beith regards the account of the merger negotiations in Rachael Pitchford's and Tony Greaves' book, *Merger – The Inside Story*, as 'fairly accurate.' By and large Alan Beith's role within the negotiations was as a solid and dependable Liberal colleague, and was an important antidote to Steel's wayward and undependable role, but he fails to mention that at the key moment when John Grant resigned from the SDP team and then Bob Maclennan walked out saying he couldn't go on – to the surprise of his own colleagues, who were forced to follow him rather sheepishly – it was Alan who asked the Liberal team, 'What can we give them to get them back to the table?' It was a moment when the Liberal team could have ensured that there was a formula that would have retained party unity, and it muffed it. Ironically Beith approvingly quotes Willie Goodhart, a key SDP team member, as saying that 'the SDP team's more effective negotiating

His chapter on Liberal philosophy and beliefs, included deliberately to give positive reasons why Liberals and Liberal Democrats continue to put such time and energy into a cause which provides so little political return but which is so fundamentally important to the kind of society that is in harmony with human talents and aspirations, is an excellent exposition.

skill enabled [it] to win battles which it would have been better for [them] to lose'.

Beith's comments on the subsequent leadership contest are interesting: 'There was no way David Steel could win Liberal support to lead the new party ... [H]e had acquired far too much unwelcome baggage in the merger negotiations, and his mishandling over the policy document was the last straw, particularly for many of his parliamentary colleagues' [my italics]. Those of us who had been conscious of similar political weaknesses in our esteemed leader for many years, and who had struggled to keep the party united in the face of much provocation, would have welcomed parliamentary party action much earlier.

He is very loyal to Paddy Ashdown as leader, and recognises his later leadership skills, but makes the accurate comment

that 'he might not have won the leadership under the old system, in which only the MPs had votes'. Alan makes it clear that, as Deputy Leader, he knew of the Ashdown 'project' with Blair and that he was relaxed about it, not least because he 'thought that the coalition was never going to happen'.

All in all, this is a biography worth reading for its humanity and for its occasional political *aperçus*, but it is not for those who expect to find the insider view on the past thirty years of Liberal history.

Michael Meadowcroft joined the Liberal Party in 1958. He has been a full-time party official and a national officer. He was a Leeds City Councillor, a West Yorkshire Metropolitan County Councillor and, from 1983–87, MP for Leeds West. He has written extensively on Liberal philosophy and history.

Eight case studies of notorious political rivals

John Campbell, *Pistols at Dawn: Two Hundred Year of Political Rivalry, from Pitt and Fox to Blair and Brown* (Jonathan Cape, 2009)

Reviewed by Dr J. Graham Jones

JOHN CAMPBELL first made his (indelible) mark as the author of *Lloyd George: the Goat in the Wilderness, 1922–31* (1977), a groundbreaking study of Lloyd George's declining years which has well stood the test of time. Subsequently he has published a masterly, well-received clutch of political biographies, of Lord Birkenhead (1983), Roy Jenkins (1983), Aneurin Bevan (1986), the award-winning study of Ted Heath (1993), and Margaret Thatcher (two volumes, 2000 and 2003). His most recent work, *If Love Were All: the Story of Frances Stevenson and David Lloyd George* (2006) (reviewed in *Journal* 52, autumn 2006), was the ultimate detailed account of Lloyd George's intense relationship with

his mistress of thirty years' standing. As a full-time writer, the author is especially well-placed to produce these magisterial tomes.

For the present book Campbell presents his readership with eight notorious case studies of political rivalry – from Charles James Fox and William Pitt the Younger in the late eighteenth century to Tony Blair and Gordon Brown in very recent years. In this last chapter he comes close to writing the 'instant history' so beloved of many contemporary historians. Whereas in *If Love Were All* the author went to enormous lengths to quarry all the relevant primary source materials, in this book he relies mainly on secondary works. He makes good use of his own biographies and has read

exhaustively through the rich haul of other sources available. It is notable that in the last chapter on Blair and Brown the range of available source materials is much narrower – at least for the moment.

To the *cognoscenti*, there is little here that is new or highly original; much of the material is familiar, the stories and anecdotes, though gripping, often rehearsed many times previously. But the author's sure-footed, seemingly effortless mastery of the course of British political history over a long period is surely impressive.

Readers of this *Journal* will probably savour most the competent, thorough review of the relationship between Asquith and Lloyd George, the two Liberal Prime Ministers throughout the First World War, a brilliant account which is scrupulously fair to both parties. In spite of their dramatically contrasting backgrounds, it is striking how much they had in common in terms of their political ideas and aspirations. There emerges interesting material on their early lives and political careers, and Asquith's staunch support for his Chancellor's more radical enactments, notably the framing and introduction of the famous 'People's Budget' of 1909 (which could actually be pressed even more). There is also much fascinating material on their roles during the war and their later careers.

Gladstone devotees will also appreciate the chapter on his rivalry with his arch-enemy Benjamin Disraeli. In this section, Campbell follows fairly closely the line of argument advanced by Richard Aldous in his substantial study *The Lion and the Unicorn: Gladstone vs Disraeli* (London, 2006) (reviewed in *Journal* 58, spring 2008). Fascinating material is advanced on their duel over the 1852 Budget (p. 98 ff), when their long-running feud really began, and on Gladstone's record as a reforming Chancellor of the Exchequer, when he introduced a run of no fewer than nine budgets (a record broken only by Gordon Brown between 1997 and 2006), and earned his reputation as a financial reformer.

There are interesting thoughts in this chapter, too, on the Balkan

atrocities of the 1870s. The author has an eye for the telling quotation to enliven his writing. Here he quotes Disraeli's private opinion of Gladstone expressed to Lord Derby in October 1876 as 'that unprincipled maniac ... [an] extraordinary mixture of envy, vindictiveness, hypocrisy and superstition ... never a gentleman' (p. 133). Gladstone and Disraeli probably loathed one another more than any other pairing in the book, and the latter generally had the best lines.

Other readers, especially those interested in eighteenth-century history, will appreciate the material on Charles James Fox, arguably our greatest ever Liberal. Fox, Campbell tells us was nothing but 'an ugly little man – short, swarthy, unkempt and often unwashed [who] drank, gambled and womanised harder than anyone in London, piling up enormous debts which he never paid' (p. 11). On the other hand, in his long-going 'duel' with William Pitt, Fox (although inevitably always destined to lose) proved himself 'a wonderful orator – witty, rhetorical, hyperbolic, capable when roused of whipping up a magnificent storm of indignation' (p. 18).

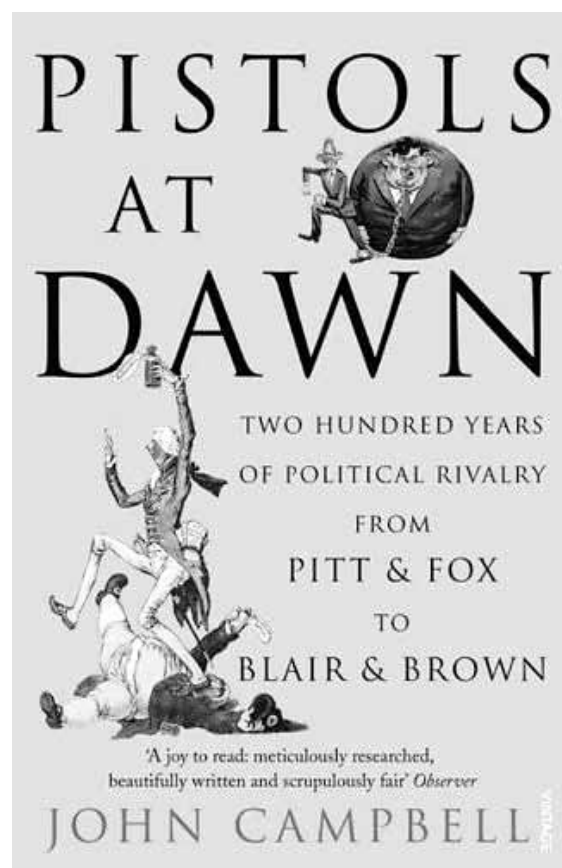
By far the most striking scene in the book is the account of the actual physical duel fought on 21 September 1809 by two senior cabinet ministers on Putney Heath at 6 a.m. – Lord Castlereagh and George Canning, the Secretary of State for War and Foreign Secretary, both rising stars of the Tory party and key figures in running the war against Napoleon. Four shots were fired and one of the protagonists was hit in the thigh. Here the pair actually tried to kill each other, the high point of a physical rivalry which lasted the whole of their political lives. Years later, their political careers resumed and they sat together around the same cabinet table.

There is much else of interest here too. Perhaps most original is the account of Harold Macmillan's positively ruthless treatment of his arch-rival, the eminently civilised, urbane R. A. Butler whom Macmillan defeated for the premiership in succession to Anthony Eden in 1957. Six years

later, 'Supermac' took pains to ensure that Douglas-Home, although not really suited for the position, should succeed him as Premier, rather than Butler, when his health failed and his government had conspicuously run out of steam. Campbell makes especially good use of Macmillan's detailed political diaries between 1959 and 1966, due to be published by Peter Catterall this autumn.

The material on Ted Heath's long-running rivalry with Margaret Thatcher is rather more familiar. Here the author is generally sympathetic to the often luckless Heath, portraying Thatcher's 'successes' as often a continuation of his policies by different means, and pointing up his seminal role in taking Britain into the EEC in 1973, an achievement that may in the long run prove to be more enduring than hers (p. 345).

On the relationship between Blair and Brown, the author is genuinely insightful, even prophetic. Much of what Campbell predicts in his closing paragraphs has come true since he completed his manuscript (pp. 404–05). Evidence has indeed multiplied



A Liberal Democrat History Group evening meeting

THOMAS PAINE AND THE RADICAL LIBERAL TRADITION

To coincide with the publication of the special issue of the *Journal of Liberal History* on 'Liberalism and the Left' (summer 2010), we are delighted to welcome Prof Edward Royle and Dr Edward Vallance to the History Group for an evening focusing on the life, works and influence of Thomas Paine.

In the two centuries since Paine's death, his works and reputation have been both vilified and appropriated by individuals and movements from across the political spectrum. His name has become a touchstone of left-wing and liberal thought, celebrated for the courage of his political vision, even as the specific context of his writings has too often been disregarded. We invite our speakers to consider the continued resonance of Paine's thought and to assess his relevance for radical and liberal activists today.

Speakers: **Edward Royle**, Emeritus Professor, University of York and author of many works on 18th and 19th century history including *Revolutionary Britannia? Reflections on the Threats of Revolution in Britain, 1789–1848* and *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium: A Study of the Harmony Community*; **Dr Edward Vallance**, University of Roehampton and author of *A Radical History of Britain: Visionaries, Rebels and Revolutionaries – the Men and Women who fought for our Freedom* and *The Glorious Revolution: 1688 – Britain's Fight for Liberty*. Chair: **Dr Richard Grayson**, Head of Politics, Goldsmiths College, guest editor of the 'Liberalism and the Left' special issue of the *Journal* and co-editor of *After the Crash: Reinventing the Left in Britain* and *Reinventing the State: Social Liberalism for the 21st Century*.

6.30pm, Monday 12 July 2010

David Lloyd George Room, National Liberal Club, 1 Whitehall Place, London, SW1A 2HE

of Brown's 'well-intentioned clumsiness, the same leaden inability to communicate' as Ted Heath famously displayed in the 1970s, his fate, too, to be 'an unlucky Prime Minister', possibly 'a 'tail-end' Prime Minister' (ibid.). What Campbell has provided here rather resembles a précis of two authorised biographies. The deal which Blair and Brown made in advance to share the spoils was really a

pact with the devil. With less personal ambition they could have made a great team, but for ten years they obstructed each other and wasted the opportunity that a huge majority offered them.

At the end of each chapter, the author summarises his views on the winner of each political contest. He thinks, for example, that Aneurin Bevan lost out to Hugh Gaitskell in the short run,

but has won posthumously because he has a monument in the NHS. Especially helpful are the parallel pieces of information often provided in asterisked footnotes which are genuinely helpful as an addendum to the main text. The book is a joy to read: meticulously researched, and scrupulously fair. These eight studies are lively, penetrating, intelligent and, like all Campbell's work, exceptionally

well written. At the moment, John Campbell is penning the authorised biography of Roy Jenkins. Like all his books, it is certain to prove an exceptionally rewarding read. One eagerly awaits publication.

Dr J. Graham Jones is Senior Archivist and Head of the Welsh Political Archive at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth