

# 'AN OUT-OF- GRIMOND A

Jo Grimond is the Liberal leader most often associated with attempts to realign British politics on the left, to create what he foresaw as 'a new progressive movement' taking in 'the Liberals and most of the Labour Party'.<sup>1</sup> On three occasions during his leadership he stirred up controversy in the Liberal Party by predicting or suggesting such a development, and yet never achieved any change. **Matt Cole** examines the relationship between the Liberals and those of what Grimond called 'an out of date word'<sup>2</sup> – the left.



**W**HEN HE stepped down as leader, the party had not established any closer relationship with Labour, and, although its image and recruitment had in some ways moved leftwards, this had not significantly altered its electoral base or its parliamentary representation. Grimond himself fought shy of such links when opportunities to establish them seemed to arise, and even when cooperation with Labour politicians came about in the Lib-Lab

Pact ten years later, Grimond was amongst the more apprehensive members of the parliamentary party. In his *Memoirs* Grimond makes little mention of it.

Why did a leader of Grimond's dynamism repeatedly embark on this strategy, and then each time abandon it? Alan Watkins expressed the bemusement of many commentators looking back on Grimond's career and his failed bids for realignment:

At two recent periods – in 1959–61 and in 1964–66 – there

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was a chance that, given resolute action by Mr. Grimond, a start might have been made on the radical alliance. Admittedly the circumstances were not ideal; they never are; but they were the best that Mr. Grimond could reasonably have expected. However, Mr. Grimond waited on events. He gave reasons for not acting. The Labour Party had made no approaches: the party was still committed to public ownership: the time was not yet: there must be a real meeting of minds, and not a hastily concocted arrangement. But politicians cannot afford to await the miraculous arrival of a perfect world. They cannot afford to wait until Parliament is reformed and the machinery of government overhauled and the Labour Party altered in character. They must take things as they find them. And this Mr. Grimond, perhaps to his credit, has always refused to do.<sup>3</sup>

Watkins points to a number of factors, but emphasises the judgment of Grimond himself in this mystery. An examination of opinion in the parties around him, however, shows that realignment was inherently implausible, and that – to the extent that it is significant – Grimond's personality and personal political philosophy account for the attempt as much as for the failure of realignment.

## Before realignment

There is a good deal of evidence that Grimond's personal politics were, as he claimed, strongly progressive. In an unpublished passage of his *Memoirs*, he remembered that as a young man in the early 1930s 'with my upbringing and temperament, it would have been difficult not to be a Liberal. But I might I suppose have joined the Labour Party.<sup>4</sup> In the euphoric atmosphere following the Second World War and the arrival in office of a Labour government, he recalled later that 'we were all to some extent socialists' and that 'I had rosier visions of what might be achieved by governments on behalf of communities.<sup>5</sup> He was, unlike any of his parliamentary colleagues in the 1950s, always opposed at the polls by the Conservatives, and he voted against the Conservative government in parliamentary divisions more often than any other Liberal MP between 1951 and becoming leader, and when he became leader the votes of Liberal MPs were cast much more evenly between government and opposition (see Figure 1). Grimond was supportive of the Radical Reform Group formed in 1954 to resist the growing influence of libertarian free-market economists in the Liberal Party, becoming its President in 1958.

However, this implied leftward disposition does not seem to have affected Grimond's overall approach to parliamentary

politics. Figure 1 shows that in the Commons, though he was slightly less reliable as a supporter of Conservative measures than his colleagues, Grimond joined in the Liberal MPs' general pattern of voting predominantly with the Conservatives. For at least one division he acted as a teller on the Conservative side of the lobby, and he was described in correspondence between Liberal National and Conservative leaders as 'very sensible and well-balanced.'<sup>6</sup>

This apparent 'drift to the right', as Megan Lloyd George called it, was a feature of the Liberal Party generally at the time, reflected in the electoral pacts at Bolton and Huddersfield, and in Churchill's courtship of Clement Davies, and it was a trend from the consequences of which Grimond could not isolate himself. At a time of potentially fatal vulnerability for Liberals, they could hardly decline to at least humour Conservative approaches, and attempts by Basil Wigoder, A. P. Marshall and a group of MPs led by Megan Lloyd George to forge a link with Labour had met with contemptuous rejection before 1951.<sup>8</sup> After that Lord Thurso and Sir Andrew MacFadyen were similarly rebuffed.<sup>9</sup> Even upon taking up the leadership in 1956, Grimond did not change his tone or that of the party substantially. Official policy had been set very clearly against any national pacts in 1955, and an early series of

Left: 'He needs me': Harold Wilson and Jo Grimond (*The Guardian*, 1965)

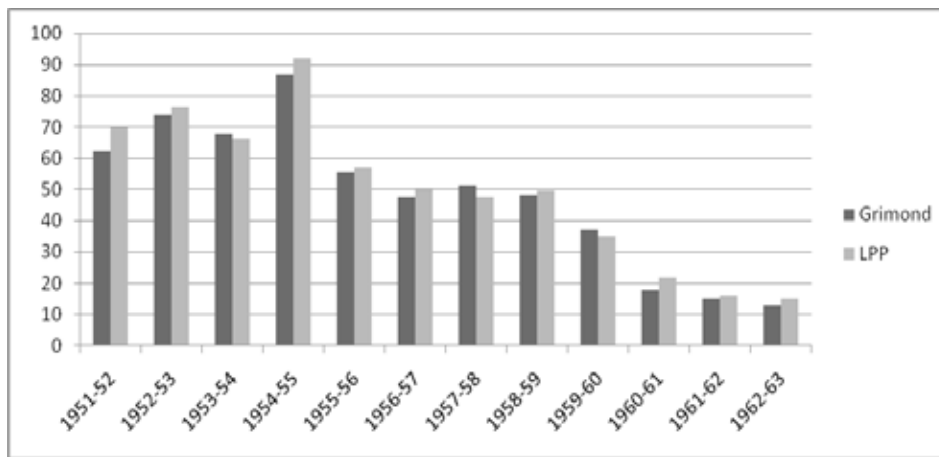


Figure 1: Percentage of votes cast with the Conservatives by Liberal MPs in Commons divisions, 1951-63<sup>7</sup>

articles setting out 'New Liberal' strategy and policy under Grimond in *Liberal News* made no mention of realignment.<sup>10</sup> Two years later Grimond published *The Liberal Future*, in which he gave no hint of any arrangement with Labour, but rather asserted that 'Socialists ... were prepared to use the State even if it meant overriding personal liberty', a principle which had led to the rise of National Socialism, that nationalisation had been 'a fiasco' and 'the promise of endless welfare benefits to be handed out by the grandmother state ... is incompatible with freedom', and most wittingly that 'a Liberal must submit his beliefs in the private enterprise system to a more radical criticism than is now provided by the Labour Party.'<sup>11</sup> Roger Fulford's authoritative (though not authorised) book for the general election of the same year, *The Liberal Case*, was studiously equidistant in its assessment of the relative appeals of the Labour and Conservative Parties in a balanced parliament: he set out three principles governing Liberal cooperation which might affect either party in the same way, starting with a demand for electoral reform to which the Labour Party showed no signs of responding.<sup>12</sup> The priority of Grimond's early period in the leadership, when he sought to 'get on', was to distinguish the Liberals from both of the main parties.

**1959**

It was only following the 1959 general election, with a larger share of the vote but still only six MPs, that Grimond openly proposed realignment. Over the weekend following the

Conservative victory, he gave interviews to *The Guardian* and *The Observer* calling for the formation of a joint movement of Labour and Liberal supporters:

I would like to see the radical side of politics – the Liberals and most of the Labour Party – make a new appeal to people to take an active part in all sorts of real political issues. There must be a bridge between Socialism and the Liberal policy of co-ownership in industry through a type of syndicalism coupled with a nonconformist outlook such as was propounded on many issues by George Orwell.<sup>13</sup>

'I have always thought there should be a really strong progressive movement as an alternative to Conservatism,' Grimond was reported saying on the front page of *The People*. 'The election result might well create the atmosphere for this to happen. At the moment I cannot say that I shall offer any kind of deal to the Labour Party. But I shall be meeting certain people next week and it is likely that the possibility of a deal will at least come under discussion.' The 'certain people', the paper assumed, were his colleagues in the leadership of the Liberal Party. It was also reported that private talks were being held between Labour MPs to persuade Gaitskell that 'the only future for Labour lies in sinking Socialism without a trace and embracing a policy of radical reform.'<sup>14</sup> Paul Johnson wrote in the *Evening Standard* that such a deal was the talk of the Labour Party 'all over London (but chiefly in Hampstead).'<sup>15</sup> Douglas Jay advocated a

new Liberal-Labour relationship, 'even up to a merger', at a party on the same weekend that Grimond gave his interviews,<sup>16</sup> and Bill Rodgers found in a discussion with Mark Bonham Carter set up by the *Sunday Times* to explore the idea of realignment that they 'reached a surprising measure of agreement'.<sup>17</sup>

Such an unexpected and controversial departure requires explanation. Grimond had evidently been amongst those less keen on the role of the Liberals as a prop to Tory governments in the first half of the decade, and Churchill's retirement and the Suez episode had convinced even those who had been advocates of a deal with the Tories that their liberal credentials had expired. The weakness of Labour now made an appeal to the left apparently more promising, and the Labour leader since 1955, Hugh Gaitskell, was already seeking to reform the party's approach to trade unions and nationalisation. Lastly, Grimond now had alongside him in parliament an ally in the campaign for realignment in the new MP for North Devon, Jeremy Thorpe. It was Thorpe who made speeches and wrote a piece in the *Evening Standard* at this time reassuring Liberals that their independence was not under threat, and that it was business as usual for Liberal campaigning regardless of realignment.

Nonetheless, Grimond's suggestions met with anxiety and rejection in both Liberal and Labour Parties and he was forced into a quick rearguard action in further newspaper interviews and a radio broadcast on *Any Questions*. Opinion at the top of the Labour Party was already hostile to any relationship with the Liberals: in a speech the previous year, Party General Secretary Morgan Phillips had dismissed talk of a deal with the Liberals saying that a Labour victory short of overall majority would be 'disastrous', that the Liberals appealed to 'escapism' and that aspects of new Liberal campaigning such as torchlight parades were 'unhealthy'.<sup>18</sup> A *Sunday Times* columnist teased Labour supporters on 'The Liberal Menace'.<sup>19</sup> Gaitskell immediately rejected the advice of Jay and others to consider a deal.

In the Liberal Party there was also surprise and concern. Some of Grimond's small band of MPs were already fearful of his strategy and critical of his management style. Roderic Bowen, who had been a Liberal MP since 1945, recalled that he had taken a critical view of Grimond from the outset:

Grimond to my mind was really riding two horses. In the country and in the Party, he was saying: 'The Liberal Party is a great party, it's an independent party, it's fighting Labour and it's fighting Tories tooth and nail, and it's totally independent'. That was the image he was presenting to the country. In private, within the Liberal Party, he was really saying that the Liberal Party should be reduced to a sort of sphere of influence within the Labour Party.

Bowen reassured himself at the time that 'I don't think the Labour Party really had any use for Grimond. They would have welcomed taking the Liberals, which had become much stronger by then of course, under their wing, absorbing them; and of course, that involved ingratiating Grimond, but personally I don't think they had any use for Grimond.'<sup>20</sup>

Former Young Liberal leader and parliamentary candidate Roy Douglas noted that Grimond's remarks caused 'a considerable degree of apprehension and concern among the rank and file of the Liberal Party'; and Grimond's biographer agrees that 'many party members, after all the splits and secessions of the past fifty years, cherished above all else the party's independence' and that 'Grimond may be faulted for giving such an ambiguous interview on such a sensitive topic.' Grimond told his staff that he expected the Party Council to be critical of his actions.<sup>21</sup> Immediately he sought to downplay the significance of his remarks and the changes he was proposing, telling *The Times* on the day the *Observer* interview was published that 'I was really saying nothing more than I have been saying on the subject for some time' and that 'I am not talking about immediate

coalition and I am merely speaking for myself.' A week later he had scaled down his ambitions to no more than a 'growing together of radical opinion on some issues that may come up in the next few years.'<sup>22</sup> Douglas considers this attempt to distinguish entirely between perception of Liberal policy and his own statements to be implausible, but acknowledges that 'for the time being, the matter blew over. Perhaps everyone who in other circumstances might have made a fuss was too exhausted after the general election. Perhaps they were satisfied that reciprocity from the Labour side was out of the question.'<sup>23</sup> A mixture of Labour obstruction, Liberal resistance and his own poor presentation had put paid to Grimond's first attempt at realignment within seven days.

### **1962**

Despite his disappointment, Grimond, according to Barberis, 'continued to hanker after some sort of alliance or realignment' and 'kept the realignment pot simmering'.<sup>24</sup> His next opportunity to test reaction to Labour–Liberal cooperation was initiated from the other side, as those on the Labour Right, such as Mark Abrams, reflected upon their third electoral defeat.<sup>25</sup> In November 1961, maverick Labour MP Woodrow Wyatt published a letter in *The Guardian* arguing for an electoral deal between the parties.<sup>26</sup> He set out his proposal again in the *New Statesman* the following January:

There are many radical necessities on which Labour and Liberal supporters are agreed – the urgent need to raise housing and education standards, to restore the social services to first place in Europe, to increase the impetus towards fair shares of wealth, to step up help to the aged, to improve the health service, to stimulate British industry with the aid of more than the half-hearted planning proposed by the Conservatives.

'If a Labour–Liberal electoral alliance is to succeed' urged Wyatt, 'the ground must be prepared for it well in advance. I suggest that

it should start by a combined appeal from Gaitskell and Grimond through all media of communication, including television.' He identified ninety-seven seats where one party should stand down: in thirty-six the Labour Party; in sixty-one the Liberals.<sup>27</sup> Other individual voices on the left were also urging cooperation: Wyatt's fellow Labour MP Desmond Donnelly publicly supported a deal, and Michael Shanks had just published his renowned study *The Stagnant Society*, in which he argued that 'it is not surprising that there has been growing support for the idea of some sort of alliance between the Right-wing of the Labour Party and the Liberals. Until this happens the opposition vote in the country will remain divided and the Conservatives will enjoy a monopoly of power (unless they too split). Mr Gaitskell has more in common in policy and in outlook with Mr Grimond than with Mr Cousins.'<sup>28</sup>

Shanks's reference to Transport and General Workers' Union General Secretary Frank Cousins highlighted one of the issues – the role of trade unions – which had given rise to bitter dispute in the Labour Party under Gaitskell, the others including public ownership and nuclear defence. A reviewer of *The Stagnant Society* in *Liberal News* wrote reassuringly that 'Mr Shanks sees one big difficulty. He fears that the Liberals are even more anti-trade union than the Tories. This may have been true 10 years ago, but it is certainly not so now.'<sup>29</sup>

Grimond's response to this renewed speculation was positive, but tempered by his awareness, from the bruising experience of two-and-a-half years earlier, of the dissent which any encouragement to Wyatt would provoke within the Liberal Party. He re-emphasised that 'it would be intolerable for the country and suicide for the parties concerned if Liberal and Labour cut each other's throats because of vested interests when they could work out together a progressive policy broadly acceptable to both.' At the same time, however, he maintained a diplomatic distance by arguing that Wyatt's preoccupation with seats before policy 'may

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appear both naïve and cynical'.<sup>30</sup> In some ways conditions were more promising for realignment than in 1959: Labour revisionists had been frustrated by the failure of Gaitskell's move against Clause IV in 1959, and unnerved by his need to go to the barricades over defence at the 1960 Labour conference.

The Conservatives, on the other hand, were now alienated from Liberal politics: only Central Office intervention had maintained the electoral pact in Bolton in 1959, and the Liberals had broken it at the East Bolton by-election of 1960. The last senior voice in the party to propose a national deal with the Liberals had been Randolph Churchill in 1958 and the Conservative Steering Committee had rejected such a proposal.<sup>31</sup> Despite deteriorating economic conditions, a ragged and remote Tory government was holding its own in the polls and even making by-election gains.<sup>32</sup> In March, Grimond tried to capitalise on these circumstances saying that 'the divisions in politics fall in the wrong place. The natural breakdown should be into a Conservative Party – a small group of convinced Socialists in the full sense – and a broadly based progressive Party. It is the foundations of the last named that the Liberal Party seeks to provide.'<sup>33</sup>

Much of the Liberal Party, however, remained reluctant to provide such a foundation, and Grimond knew it. Even before Wyatt's *New Statesman* article had hit the news stands, John Buchanan, the Liberal candidate at the Oswestry by-election, had attacked the idea of any Lib-Lab deal as 'wrong politically and wrong morally'. He pointed to the experience of the Liberals supporting the 1929 Labour administration, and warned that the Liberals 'would be deluged by Labour pressure.' The right approach, he stressed, was 'to be strong enough to push the Socialists into second place. We did it at Oswestry; we can do it elsewhere.'<sup>34</sup> This self-confidence was restated by Bolton MP Arthur Holt a week after Grimond's comments. Though writing to the Editor of the *Daily Herald*, he might equally have been responding to his party leader:

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You say there is a gulf between the Liberal and Labour Parties. Correct. You say there is a gulf between the Labour Party and the new Radicals. Correct. You say the Labour Party is stuck in the mud. You want a new Party with new sensible attitudes to politics. ... You have got it all in the Liberal Party.<sup>35</sup>

It was the immeasurable strengthening of such confidence that came with the Orpington by-election victory which curtailed this second bout of realignment speculation. Although this brought, in Eric Lubbock, a supportive colleague into Grimond's parliamentary group, it also emboldened those who wanted to see the Liberals go it alone. Two months later, they were further encouraged by the retention of Clement Davies's seat Montgomeryshire by Emlyn Hooson, a relative right-winger who would speak out against later attempts at working with Labour.

#### **1965**

Grimond's last attempt at establishing a working relationship between the Liberals and Labour was not principally on policy as in 1959, or an electoral alliance as in 1962, but at the parliamentary level. The outcome of the 1964 general election had been a Labour government led by Harold Wilson with an overall Commons majority of only four seats. Although this was tantalisingly close to the balance-of-power situation that Grimond had anticipated might precipitate cooperation between their two parties, it was clear that Wilson would press on without seeking support from outside Labour ranks.

Less than a year into the 1964 parliament, however, Grimond – buoyed up by the victory of David Steel, another advocate of inter-party cooperation, at the Roxburghshire by-election in March 1965 – gave another press interview which raised the prospect of the Liberals working with Labour. This time his suggestion was that Liberal MPs might bolster the parliamentary support for the Labour government's programme in exchange for 'a serious agreement on long-term

policies.'<sup>36</sup> As in 1959 and 1962, there was some evidence for Grimond to believe that such an offer would be well received. Orpington MP Eric Lubbock remembers 'a lot of Lib-Labbery' in the 1964 parliament, some support for which came from 'the most surprising' quarters, such as Scottish Liberal MP George Mackie. Lubbock found John Silkin a close and sympathetic contact in the Labour Party. The possibility of cooperation boosted morale amongst Liberal MPs and in some ways compensated for the frustrations of the election. The Wilson government was engaged in projects which had Liberal sympathies, not to say origins, such as the introduction of an Ombudsman, and 'we were fully behind rent controls and race relations legislation.'<sup>37</sup> Wilson's Chief Whip Ted Short acknowledged 'the small but useful fund of goodwill I had built up with the Liberals' in the early stages of the parliament, and took the view of Steel's victory at Roxburghshire that 'as the Liberals voted with us occasionally, this was something of a gain for us.'<sup>38</sup>

As on the previous two occasions, Grimond almost immediately met a slammed door of Labour indifference, and had the rug pulled from under him by Liberal objectors, this time more vocal than ever. The National League of Young Liberals had pre-empted the debate by passing a resolution at their annual conference two months earlier rejecting any form of pact or alliance with either of the main parties.<sup>39</sup> When *The Guardian* interview was published – with the sensational headline 'Coalition Offer to Labour from Mr Grimond' – opinion in the Liberal Party was at best divided, and critics did not keep their counsel. Only two MPs fully supported the statement, and some of Grimond's closest allies were amongst the critics: Arthur Holt, who had lost Bolton to Labour in 1964 pleaded that 'it raises great local difficulties in some areas where Labour's image is still moronic and prejudiced. Local Liberals find national level speeches an embarrassment and it is vital that the Parliamentary Party keep in closest touch with the PPCs in these areas.' In neighbouring Colne Valley, another

keen admirer of Grimond, Richard Wainwright, had come within 200 votes of winning the seat from Labour in 1964, and warned that he was 'driven to be pessimistic about the proposals'.<sup>40</sup> A Liberal Independence Committee was established by four former parliamentary candidates who wrote an open letter to Grimond warning that his approach risked leaving the Liberals 'submerged in Socialism'.<sup>41</sup> Some leading figures such as Lord Byers were especially suspicious of Wilson because of the prime minister's abandonment of Liberalism after Oxford University, where they had been contemporaries.<sup>42</sup>

Press coverage from across the political spectrum was humiliating: *The Sunday Mirror* said that Grimond's gesture would be 'publicly scorned', and its daily stablemate that it was 'a non-starter'; the *Sunday Telegraph* believed 'Ministers see no need for taking up Mr Grimond's offer' and *The Sun* declared that 'Mr Grimond hasn't a cat in Hell's chance of dictating terms to the Government for Liberal support. Whose side are they on? Even the question doesn't matter. Neither side at present cares much.' Even the more restrained tone of *The Economist* dismissed the intervention as 'yet another buzz that is destined to die away'.<sup>43</sup> Unsurprisingly, by the time the Liberal Assembly came around in September, even though Grimond intervened unexpectedly early to make a speech setting out his terms to Labour again, incoming Party President Nancy Seear looked back on the episode to deliver a stinging rebuke to the idea of a Lib-Lab arrangement:

For forty years we have prophesied that the country would come to recognise the need for a non-socialist progressive party. We have not spent these years isolated but undefiled in the wilderness to choose this moment of all moments to go, in the biblical phrase, 'a whoring after foreign women'.<sup>44</sup>

To make the humiliation more complete, the foreign women were noticeably unbiddable. Silkin had warned Lubbock that Labour's National Executive

Committee offered no mechanism for closer cooperation between the parties;<sup>45</sup> and though Wilson had Transport House conduct some initial research into the likely impact of using the Alternative Vote electoral system, he discovered that it would have weakened Labour in 1964, and dropped any possibility of negotiations. The tone of Wilson's boast afterwards that 'I never considered accepting his [Grimond's] proposal for one moment'<sup>46</sup> may reflect partisan bravado, but its substance is confirmed by Wilson's refusal to work with the Liberals in February 1974, when he had no majority at all. In his speech to Labour's 1965 conference, Wilson dismissed the record and significance of the Liberals with characteristic brutal wit.

Again Grimond had mishandled the press, his own MPs and supporters, and his intended partners in the Labour Party, and it is difficult not to return to Watkins's harsh assessment of his role. Douglas certainly took that view with six years' hindsight and a thorough inside knowledge of the Party:

It is difficult to see what effect Grimond sought to produce, or how he imagined that this statement would assist. There was much alarm amongst Liberals, and the sharpness of their reaction seems both to have pained and surprised Grimond. If he sought to bring Party advantage to the Liberals by inclining to Labour in a balance-of-power situation, it is difficult to see why he thought he would succeed with ten MPs when Lloyd George had failed with fifty-eight, and Asquith had failed with a quarter of the House of Commons. If he sought some fundamental realignment of British politics, then he palpably misjudged completely the temper of active workers in both the Liberal and Labour Parties. A few brief conversations with constituency officers of the Liberal Party, or others in frequent contact with ordinary voters, would have sufficed to assure him that his plans, whatever they were, were simply 'not on'.<sup>47</sup>

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### Assessment

Three questions arise from this series of episodes: why did Grimond attempt realignment?; why did it fail?; and what was its long-term significance? All three questions can be answered by examining not only Grimond's personality, but also opinion in the Liberal Party and in the Labour and Conservative Parties.

Grimond's personality not only drove the process of realignment but also accounts for the abject nature – though not the simple fact – of its failure. We have good evidence that, although he participated in it because the survival of the party was at stake, Grimond was unenthusiastic about the Liberals' closeness to the Conservatives in the first half of the 1950s, and, once he became leader, Liberal MPs' voting patterns turned against the government. The shift of the Conservatives away from the Liberals consolidated this change. However, it was Grimond's unpredictable and remote manner which made his bids for realignment particularly ineffective: they came as a surprise even to his closest allies, and were expressed in such vague and inconsistent terms as to provoke a mixture of bewilderment, fear and anger rather than approval. Moreover, though Grimond was a leftist by instinct, his vision of the left – as he indicated at length in the passage from which the title of this article is taken – was inherently at odds with that which formed the core beliefs of even the most receptive elements of the Labour Party in the 1960s: Grimond was wholly opposed to further nationalisation, and committed to co-ownership; as a member of the Unservile State Group in the 1950s, he had put his name to publications proposing the ending of housing subsidies and tax relief for private school fees;<sup>48</sup> in the 1970s Grimond himself acknowledges that his views towards the left became more critical after the realignment project, and that 'the Socialist movement in the 70s steered by no star'.<sup>49</sup>

Even at the height of his own leadership, Grimond gave spontaneous signals of his distaste for the most sacred of Labour icons. Richard Wainwright, whose battle against Labour in the Colne

Valley by-election of 1963 was fully supported by Grimond, made a personal note of one such instance. Grimond addressed a large meeting at Holmfirth and the audience waited eagerly for questions from the floor:

After a couple of friendly questions there came a rasping voice: 'What will Mr Grimond do for the working class?' Jo uncoiled himself and summoned up his matchless gift of commanding emphasis; and then just one sentence: 'The working class – I would abolish the working class'. Several seconds for his nine-word answer to sink in, and then huge applause, not from Liberals only. And no comeback from the well known Labour questioner.<sup>50</sup>

It is perhaps unsurprising that Grimond was associated by the young Vince Cable in the middle 1960s principally with economic liberalism.<sup>51</sup> And it is therefore no surprise that his attempts to reach out to Labour sometimes lacked conviction.

However, whatever Grimond had done the realignment project would have failed. Each time, Liberals who had fought to protect the party's existence expressed opposition with increasing vehemence, and Grimond himself came to recognise that 'the idea that the Liberal Party should be the mainstream of realignment was regarded as a Grimond eccentricity'.<sup>52</sup> The fact that Liberal opposition was not even fiercer is accounted for partly by Labour contempt for realignment. The only Socialists who responded warmly to Grimond's overtures were mavericks like Wyatt and Donnelly who did not remain in Labour themselves. The vast majority of the Labour movement was too tribal and often too complacent even to acknowledge the Liberals.

The significance of the realignment idea may lie in its longer-term effects. It ensured a public profile for the Liberals, and re-established an impression of the Liberals as a party of change, and possibly a party of government. Grimond's assertion of a leftist stance recruited many new activists in the late 1950s and early

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1960s who had not been attracted by the party previously – though many of these were keen opponents of cooperation with Labour, which they had also rejected.<sup>53</sup> The general idea of working with elements and former members of the Labour Party might not have borne fruit in the 1970s and 1980s had its seeds not been sown in the 1960s. This may, indeed, have been Grimond's hope: to lay the ground for a long-term healing of the progressive rift of the Edwardian era, on the right terms. Yet all of this is speculative and highly contentious. Whatever Grimond's realignment strategy sought, its fate was not dictated by Grimond; its achievements were largely accidental and belated; and its immediate failure was inevitable.

*Matt Cole lectures for the Hansard Society at the London School of Economics. Later this year he is to publish Richard Wainwright, the Liberals and Liberal Democrats: Unfinished Business with Manchester University Press.*

- 1 *The Guardian*, 10 October 1959; *The Observer*, 11 October 1959. This idea was reiterated in the *News Chronicle*, 14 October 1959.
- 2 This is Grimond's description of the term 'left' in J. Grimond, *The Liberal Challenge* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1963), p. 315.
- 3 A. Watkins, 'The Tragedy of Jo Grimond', *The Spectator*, 20 January 1967, p. 60.
- 4 M. McManus, *Jo Grimond: Towards the Sound of Gunfire* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2001), p. 374.
- 5 J. Grimond, *Memoirs* (London: Heinemann, 1979), pp. 132 and 260.
- 6 Jack Maclay MP to Lord Woolton, 10 December 1951, Woolton MS 25 Folios 197–98. Maclay suggested continuing negotiations about cooperation between the National and Independent Liberals (and thereby the Conservatives) after Grimond's return from New Zealand in early 1952.
- 7 These figures are calculated from detailed tables in the *Conservative Campaign Guides* of 1955, 1959 and 1964.
- 8 See M. Egan, 'Basil Wigoder', *Dictionary of Liberal Biography* (London: Politicos, 1998); Marshall's proposals of February 1948 are in the Labour General Secretary's files GS/LIB/4ii, Museum of People's

- History; B. Donoghue and G. W. Jones, *Herbert Morrison: Portrait of a Politician* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), p. 509.
- 9 Thurso (formerly Sir Archibald Sinclair) was reported by Philip Noel-Baker to have approached Gaitskell about a pact in February 1952: cited in M. Jones, *A Radical Life: the Biography of Megan Lloyd George* (London: Hutchinson, 1991), p. 237. MacFadyean's appeal was made publicly at the Corn Exchange in Plymouth on 21 February 1953 (*The Times*, 23 February 1953).
- 10 This series was called 'Where Liberals Stand', and ran in various issues of *Liberal News* in the first half of 1957.
- 11 J. Grimond, *The Liberal Future* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), pp. 21–22, 55.
- 12 R. Fulford, *The Liberal Case* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959), pp. 39–50, esp. p. 49.
- 13 *The Observer*, 11 October 1959.
- 14 'Is it a Lib–Lab Deal?', *The People*, 11 October 1959.
- 15 M. Foot, *Aneurin Bevan: a Biography*, Vol. 2 (London: Davis-Poyntner, 1973), p. 631.
- 16 McManus, op. cit., pp. 146–47.
- 17 B. Rodgers, *Fourth Amongst Equals* (London: Politicos, 2000), p. 40.
- 18 *Sunday Times*, 1 June 1958.
- 19 'A Student of Politics', *Sunday Times*, 8 June 1958.
- 20 R. Bowen, interview, 8 August 2000.
- 21 McManus, op. cit., p. 146.
- 22 *Daily Telegraph*, 17 October 1959.
- 23 R. Douglas, *A History of the Liberal Party 1895–1970* (Sidgwick & Jackson, 1971), p. 272.
- 24 P. Barberis, *Liberal Lion: Jo Grimond – a political life* (I.B.Tauris, 2005), pp. 100–101.
- 25 M. Abrams, *Must Labour Lose?* (Penguin, 1960).
- 26 *The Guardian*, 23 November 1961.
- 27 W. Wyatt, 'My Plan for a Lib–Lab Pact', *New Statesman*, 26 January 1962, pp. 110–12.
- 28 M. Shanks, *The Stagnant Society* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), pp. 175–76. The postscript is dated June 1961.
- 29 John Landell Mills, *Liberal News*, 5 October 1961.
- 30 'Radicals Must Unite', *Liberal News*, 3 February 1962.
- 31 R. Churchill, *London Evening Standard*, 2 April 1958. The proceedings of the Steering Committee are

concluded on page 72

# THOMAS PAINE AND THE RADICAL LIBERAL TRADITION

In the two centuries since Thomas 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. This meeting will discuss the continued resonance of Paine's thought and 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 this 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

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## 'An out-of-date word': Grimond and the left (continued from page 56)

- described in J. Ramsden, *The Winds of Change: Macmillan to Heath, 1957–75* (Longman, 1996), pp. 36–37.
- 32 On a small swing, the Conservatives had won Brighouse and Spenborough from Labour in a by-election on 17 March 1960.
- 33 *The Times*, 17 March 1962.
- 34 'Pact "Not on your Life"', *Liberal News*, 25 January 1962. Buchanan presumably meant 'second of the opposition parties', for at the by-election on 8 November 1961 he had narrowly won second place for the Liberals, pushing Labour into third position.
- 35 'Herald's Blind Eye', *Liberal News*, 10 February 1962. Holt wrote to the *Herald* in response to an article, 'Nation in Search of a Party' which called upon Labour to transform itself urgently but rejected any reference to the Liberals. The letter was not published.
- 36 *The Guardian*, 24 June 1965.
- 37 Lord Avebury (formerly Eric Lubbock), interview, 12 August 1999.
- 38 Edward Short, *Whip to Wilson* (Macdonald, 1989), pp. 117 and 172.
- 39 'Stormy Young Liberals say – "No Pacts"', *Liberal News*, 23 April 1965.
- 40 All quotation in this paragraph not otherwise attributed is cited in *Liberal News*, 2 July 1965.
- 41 *The Guardian*, 26 June 1965.
- 42 This was confirmed by Luise Nandy, Byers's daughter, in an interview, 18 January 2009.
- 43 All quotation in this paragraph not otherwise attributed is cited in *Liberal News*, 2 July 1965.
- 44 *The Guardian*, 23 September 1965.
- 45 Lord Avebury (Eric Lubbock), interview, 12 August 1999.
- 46 H. Wilson, *The Labour Government 1964–70: a Personal Record* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson and Michael Joseph, 1970), p. 139.
- 47 R. Douglas, *History of the Liberal Party 1895–1970* (Sidgwick & Jackson, 1971), p. 281.
- 48 G. Watson (ed.), *The Unservile State: Essays in Liberty and Welfare* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1957), pp. 129–30.
- 49 Grimond, *Memoirs*, p. 260.
- 50 Wainwright's note of this exchange is in the Wainwright papers at the LSE.
- 51 V. Cable, *Free Radical: a Memoir* (Atlantic Books, 2009), p. 42.
- 52 Cited in McManus, op. cit., p. 146.
- 53 A case in point is John Pardoe, whose journey to Grimond's Liberal Party from Labour's left is documented in A. Slade, 'What might have been', *Journal of Liberal Democrat History*, Issue 36 (November 2002).