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vice-president from 1956. But his uncompromising espousal of unilateral free trade, bitterly opposing the proposal that Britain should join the European Economic Community, provoked confrontation at the 1958 Assembly, and he moved away to found the Keep Britain Out campaign. The last party conference he attended was the first I went to, at Edinburgh in the spring of 1962; but he was by then a fringe figure. Meanwhile, the IEA (substantially funded from the fortune that Antony Fisher had made from introducing battery hens into the UK) had published a series of pamphlets attacking state monopoly in broadcasting. Ideological and business interests combined to draw Smedley into pirate radio as the advent of transistor radios freed listeners from dependence on BBC transmissions; he was involved at

different times with Radio City, Radio Caroline, and other shorter-lived stations.

Liberal Democrats today defend the BBC against the dominance of commercial interests in broadcasting. Fifty years ago, however, the BBC represented the 'nanny state' in all its glory, excluding popular culture from its airwaves – in spite of the explosion of popular music in the early 1960s. As the Labour government moved to ban pirate radio, a new generation of Young Liberals launched the 'Save Pop Radio Campaign', in autumn 1966. They announced their campaign a week after Smedley's acquittal.

Lord Wallace of Saltaire is a Liberal Democrat peer and government whip in the House of Lords. He is emeritus professor at the London School of Economics.

before World War I. Rather, McKibbin sees Edwardian politics as in a state of delicate equipoise, with an air of impermanence. This was capable of being disturbed by a what he terms 'structure' and 'contingency', the interplay of events and deeper social forces that is perhaps the key theme of this book.

In 1914, therefore, the Liberal Party may not have been already doomed, but its position in British politics was fragile: it risked offending middle-class voters through its welfare and social reforms without doing quite enough to win the adherence of working-class voters. The Liberals were dependent for continued electoral success on the informal Progressive Alliance with Labour. But Labour resented their junior role in the partnership, and were keen to escape from the Liberals' shadow. World War I provided the opportunity. It split both parties, but the Liberals more so, while Labour's fundamental sense of purpose as the party of the trade union movement held it together. As McKibbin points out, however, much of the discussion about Labour's rise and the Liberals' fall is guesswork.

What is clear, however, is that once Labour had overtaken the Liberals they were unlikely to offer them a hand up. McKibbin is far from complimentary about the Labour Party during the 1920s, arguing that it failed to adopt a clear political strategy that would give it a broad-enough basis of support to beat the Conservatives. As a result, in the 1929 general election, the Liberals appealed for votes on the basis of Lloyd George's semi-Keynesian 'We can conquer unemployment' policy. But the unemployed voted Labour, while Liberals gained votes from disgruntled Conservatives who didn't believe in Lloyd George's policy, but who defected in sufficient numbers to leave Labour as the largest party. Thus, as McKibbin writes:

The 1929 election brought into office a party which owed its victory largely to the intervention of another party which fought the election on a programme neither the majority of its voters nor its MPs believed in.

The author sees the crisis of 1931 as bringing the party system back into

Strange death?

Ross McKibbin, *Parties and People 1914–1951* (Oxford University Press, 2010)

Reviewed by Iain Sharpe

PROFESSOR MCKIBBIN'S work will be best known to *Journal of Liberal History* readers for his contributions to the 'Strange Death of Liberal England' debate, particularly through his 1974 book *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910–24*. McKibbin argued that the growth of class politics, rather than World War I, was the main explanation for the rise of Labour and the decline of the Liberal Party. Those

who have not followed his work since then may be surprised to find that his views have evolved, as he states on the first page of *Parties and People*: 'I no longer see the Edwardian system as already disintegrating.' This does not mean that he has been converted to the optimistic assessment of the Liberal Party, associated with historians such as P. F. Clarke and Trevor Wilson, that the party was in robust health

ROSS MCKIBBIN

PARTIES
and PEOPLE
ENGLAND 1914–1951

alignment with political reality. This was done by fusing a significant section of the Liberal Party (along with Ramsay MacDonald and the few who followed him out of the Labour Party) with the Conservatives in an anti-socialist alliance. Although an independent Liberal Party remained, it was no longer a significant political force. But for those Liberals, led by Sir John Simon, who served through the 1930s in the National Government, it was not a simple case of capitulation to the Conservatives. The Tory party of Baldwin was very different from the strident, aggressive opposition of 1914. As McKibbin puts it, Baldwin's party was 'primmer, calmer, more even-tempered ... less imperial'. As a result it was an anti-socialist alliance not a progressive one that dominated 1930s politics.

As its title indicates, this book is not just about the decline of the Liberal Party, and its later chapters address the causes of the 1945 Labour landslide and the record of Attlee's government through to its election defeat in 1951. If McKibbin sees 1931 as a defining date in bringing anti-socialist forces into alignment, he argues that 1940 is the key date for the collapse of their

hegemony. The failure of appeasement discredited its Conservative proponents completely, making them seem, as McKibbin puts it: 'not just incompetent, but in some way traitors'. It guaranteed that the Conservatives would have lost any election after 1940. The increased role of the state during the war, and its further expansion envisaged by the Beveridge report, helped to legitimise Labour's view of the world, but was not the cause of their 1945 victory.

McKibbin is highly critical of the Attlee government, in particular its identification of socialism with nationalisation at the expense of any interest in institutional and constitutional reform: of the House of Lords, the public schools, the ancient universities and the professions. The result, he concludes, was that for the second half of the twentieth century England became 'a society with powerful democratic impulses but political structures and habits of mind which could not adequately contain them'.

All of which might leave readers of this journal wondering how different British political history might have been had Labour in the 1920s tried to retain the progressive alliance in some form – could it have been possible to create a

political force for which social and welfare reform went hand-in-hand with constitutional change and tackling privilege? But it is something that Labour simply would not have countenanced, and this book does not deal in such counterfactual speculation. What it does do is offer a fascinating discussion of the key developments in British party politics from just before World War I to a few years after the second. It is based on the author's 2008 Ford Lectures at Oxford University, and as a result has a more informal, conversational tone than one usually finds in academic writing. McKibbin writes with a ready wit: for example, rebutting the suggestion that people's greater interest in football than politics was a sign of apathy, he comments: 'Hardly anyone leads a purely "political" existence, and those who do are usually dangerous.' This book can be read and enjoyed by the general reader as well as the academic specialist, and it is pleasing to see that it has been priced accordingly.

Iain Sharpe recently completed a University of London PhD thesis on 'Herbert Gladstone and Liberal Party revival, 1899–1905'. He is leader of the Liberal Democrat group on Watford Borough Council.

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trenches of World War I as well the cabinet room of World War II – reminds me of something I was told in 1959.

Jeremy Thorpe was about to take the Cambridge team helping him in August to tea with Isaac Foot ('no canvassing on a Sunday – unless you pretend to be Tories'). Jeremy told us how, Viscount Thurso being ennobled, when Clem Davies was asked for a Liberal peer for the coronation honours, he nominated Isaac. According to Jeremy, Churchill replied: 'no, he has sons, I want a token Liberal peer, not a Liberal dynasty', so the future Lord Grantchester was agreed upon.

Dr Peter Hatton

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lit by the SDP? 'It is a question to which there is no conclusive answer', warns Lord Adonis – but his choice is the modern Labour Party. At 'Class of '81', he recalled a lunchtime meeting with Tony Blair in about 1993 at which the future prime minister asked Adonis, who was then a journalist and card-carrying Liberal Democrat, why it was so difficult for Labour to reach out to Middle England. Adonis suggested: 'It's the name Labour, it puts people off.' To which Blair replied: 'So what should we call ourselves?' Adonis smiled and said: 'How about Liberal Democrats?' Two years later, the name change came – Blair opted for 'New Labour' – and so, too, did ideological