and regarded them as insufferable - in the case of Harcourt he was probably right. He conducted the Foreign Office as a fiefdom and resented the intervention of any other minister. In any politician these are fatal weaknesses. Whatever rivalry exists within a party it can only be effective when its leaders can work together, can argue out their case without rancour and can reach the compromise that is good for the country and the party. It may be unfair to say that Rosebery sought the glory without the work - the palm without the sand - but he did want a ministerial career without the politics, a government that did not require teamwork.

Because Rosebery was a failure he has not been blessed by many good biographies. Because he was one of the protagonists of imperialism he seems a dated, forgotten man. But as Enoch Powell has said, every political career must end in failure, and often the reasons for failure are of much greater value than the recitation of long outdated successes. So we must be especially grateful for the paperback reissue of Robert Rhodes James' elegant work. As always he covers the life in a straightforward way, not bogged down in forgotten trivia but emphasising the key elements of the events and the personality. He outlines the development of Rosebery's Liberal imperialism - Rosebery may well have been the first to envisage the British Empire as a Commonwealth in the way that it subsequently developed. He does not forget the influence that Rosebery exerted over Grey, Haldane and Asquith who, as more practical men, were able to develop Rosebery's approach in the final flowering of Liberal government before the First World War. If Rhodes James cannot finally bring himself quite to agree with Churchill's judgement of Rosebery he cannot in all honesty differ much from it.

# Old Heroes for a New Party

*Conference Fringe Meeting Report*
*Scarborough, March 1995*
*by Patrick Mitchell*

Scarborough welcomed the return of the Liberal Democrats with a fine display of east coast weather conditions. A large audience took shelter from the cold and the wind for the second showing of 'Old Heroes for a New Party' in the comfortable, if somewhat gloomy, surroundings of the billiard room of the Royal Hotel, otherwise known as the Prince Regent Room.. The speakers managed to share the one reading lamp available.

The 'heroes' for our 1994 meeting had been Voltaire, Acton and Burke, not all of whom might occur to most of us as a first choice (which is one of the interesting things about the occasion). Our speakers this time had each chosen someone with special appeal to them.. Alan Beith, who spoke first, outlined the career of W.T. Stead (1849-1912), the Liberal journalist and activist, who had been a great innovator as editor of the *Northern Echo* in Darlington, and then of the *Pall Mall Gazette* after John Morley. He was an unorthodox man who articulated the religious radicalism which had supported Gladstone, and campaigned on the basis of a radical view of Christianity. His great causes had been peace, temperance, and the rights of women. His determination to expose the vice of child prostitution led to his imprisonment for a short time. He died on the *Titanic*.

Sir William Goodhart, as a lawyer of American descent, introduced us to Judge Learned Hand (1872-1961), son and grandson of lawyers, who practised fairly unsuccessfully as a lawyer until 1909 when he became a Federal District Judge, later becoming an Appeals judge (though he never rose to the Supreme Court). His reputation was made both as a judge and as a political philosopher. In politics he was initially a Republican, but always a liberal, who became known from the 1920s onwards for his speeches on liberty.

It is less easy to see the particular appeal of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman to Tony Greaves. Unfortunately we were unable to learn more, because Tony was unable to get to the meeting, so we will have to wait for a future occasion to discover what he would have had to say. In his absence Gordon Lishman, who chaired the meeting, treated us to an impromptu seminar in which members of the audience were asked to propose their own heroes. The discussion ranged widely, covering politicians from Oliver Cromwell to Helen Suzman, economists from Adam Smith to J.K. Galbraith, philosophers and novelists. No doubt some of them will feature in the next instalment of what seems sure to become a regular feature of our conference activities.

# What is Liberal Democracy? The Importance of History

*by James Lund*

This series of articles has been overtaken by the recent course of politics. When it began, John Smith led a Labour Party still committed to public ownership of the means of production. Given the emergence of Tony Blair and the prospect of New Labour, what occasioned these articles, the possibility of winning increased, sustained electoral support for Liberal Democracy at the national level, looks much more difficult to fulfil.

Continuing success in local elections, in which only a minority of the electorate vote; a growing part in local government, the powers of which have been substantially diminished; the repeated stimulus of often spectacular by-election victories: none of these, we know from hard experience, will bring the sort of support at General Elections that the party wants. Nor will single issues, important as education is; as if the party were a populist pressure group.

The foregoing articles have apparently indicated little to improve this prospect. Yet in truth there is everything to play for in the longer term.. Thatcherism has largely destroyed traditional conservatism. What New Labour is to be or could be, no one yet knows.

What the Liberal Democrats need is what has been called 'a hegemonic project', such as the Liberals had in 1906, Labour

in 1945 and the Conservatives in 1979. This is a vision of what a majority of the electorate can accept and support as a practicable and desirable future for society, issuing from a reasonably adequate and coherent grasp of the present and how it came to be what it is. Such a majority represents a coalition of interests, not necessarily compatible with one another in the longer term.

Such a project is not to be confused with a battery of policies, characterised by David Marquand in a recent *Guardian* article as 'the professional deformation' of the British Left. And not only of the Left. What a party after reflection thinks ought to be done, ideally, in the different sides of national life and in unforeseeable future circumstances, is politically important, but it should not be confused with the actual political stance of the party.

The electorate at large is, I think, confused by the Liberal Democrat stance. This is hardly surprising. The merger which gave rise to such a party was very recent. When two parties join, there must necessarily arise some degree of uncertainty about how united the newly merged party is or can be and what it really stands for. The confusion is partly inherent in the constitution of the party, partly in the electorate's conception of the political in relation to the economic in our affairs.

*The Liberal Democrats need a vision of what a majority of the electorate can accept and support as a practicable and desirable future for society*

In the light of Will Hutton's *The State We're In (to be reviewed next issue)*, it can well be said that what we need is a more democratic society, liberally administered. Whether the Liberal Democrats are wholeheartedly intent on bringing about such a society is what is in question in the party and among the electorate. According to Hutton, the very considerable economic weaknesses and injustices of our society are the integrally related counterpart of its system of government, insofar as this determines, not who votes when, but how we are actually governed by those we vote into power. What he calls 'gentlemanly capitalism' in the economic sphere, greatly preoccupied with the short-term liquidity and high yield of all investment at the expense of efficient productivity and levels of employment, pay and security, is the counterpart of the way we are governed. This is oligarchically in the name of the Crown over subjects, not citizens, and to some extent independently of whatever party is in power.

Writing in a recent issue (12 May) of the *Liberal Democrat News*, *à propos* of a *Sunday Times* headline 'Ashdown and Blair forge anti-Tory pact', Sheila Ritchie was moved to say *"that there is a huge amount of evidence that about half of those who vote for us prefer the Labour Party and about half prefer the Conservatives"*. Setting aside what that evidence is and how true her conclusion, this seems a remarkable state of affairs in the aftermath of some sixteen years of what R.W. Johnson (*London Review of Books* 9 March) calls 'social vandalism'. Yet it is one that is generally agreed to have a considerable measure of truth.

Insofar as it is true, it confirms the view already advanced here, that part of the actual stance of the Liberal Party, formed in the half century before the First World War, when the party struggled for and gained political power, continues today to be oligarchical rather than democratic. It was after all the Social Democratic Party that contributed the democratic element to the name of the merged party. So long as the party does not have to face the prospect of power, it can continue apparently united. But when that prospect is in sight, however distant, as the conclusion of Sheila Ritchie's article indicates, the old and new Liberalism starts to come apart. The fact that the formalised philosophy of the party continues to be grounded in the beliefs of such philosophers as Kant, J.S. Mill, and J.R. Green is an indication of its undemocratic foundations, insofar as these derive from the old Liberalism with its mind-body dualism in philosophy.

Perhaps the greatest current weakness of the party in the perception of the wider electorate is its inescapably political identity. One of the consequences of some three hundred years of oligarchical government, which intended to keep the power it had and to keep secret the conditions of successfully doing so, has been the general belief of the electorate that society is an economic and not a political institution. Understanding to the contrary was generally confined to those who actually led, and was kept from those who were content to be or could not think of themselves as other than subjects.

The democratisation of the electoral system through the extension of the franchise to the majority who had learned to think of themselves as subjects and not as citizens, and who had not actively exercised political power, meant that they reconceived the society they had in fact joined in terms of the sort of relations and the sort of aspirations they did understand, namely, the economic.

But a party like the Liberal Democrats who do stand for a political idea of what is in fact a political society - it is not our economic relations that ultimately hold us together as a society but our political proceedings - is potentially a party that can lead in a 30-30-40 society, which has been made such, partly by deliberate political action to that end. The generous, the fair-minded, and those others among the contented who sense their potential insecurity, could be brought together with the politically aware among the insecure and the impoverished by a party that really intended to be what it said it was: democratically concerned with the whole society; respectful of socially concerned freedom of action; active on behalf of the interests of those unable to act effectively for themselves.

# 1945-1964: The Gory, Gory Years

*by Mark Egan*

The history fellow in my college once asked me what I was researching for my D.Phil in politics. When I told him, the Liberal Party between 1945 and 1964, he replied, *"What a depressing subject!"* Well, I happen to disagree, but that reply at least highlights the two major problems in approaching the Liberal Party during that period - the party was staggeringly