

'THE LAST OF THE FRANCIS WRIGLEY HIRST'



'Liberty above all things' – Francis Hirst (1940)¹

Jaime Reynolds describes the career of the leading ideologue of 'old Liberalism' in the interwar Liberal Party, Francis Wrigley Hirst.

For H. J. Laski, Francis Hirst was the 'last of the Liberals'.² And Hirst was indeed a rare and unbending exponent and publicist of classical Liberalism in the first half of the twentieth century, at a time when such ideas were being overwhelmed by war and collectivism. He can be seen as the last in the line upholding the pure doctrine of what he called the 'great watchwords of Liberalism – Peace, Liberty, Free Trade, Public Economy, and Good Will among Nations'³ in the tradition of Adam Smith, Cobden, Gladstone and John Morley. Today he is a largely forgotten figure, remembered only as an outmoded 'primitive Liberal' on the fringes of the party, whose laissez-faire creed had been toppled by the new social Liberalism in the years before 1914 and buried by Keynes and Beveridge in the 1930s and 1940s.⁴

Nevertheless Hirst's career is of continuing interest. More than anyone else he continued robustly to articulate and propagate traditional Radicalism from within the Liberal Party until the end of the 1940s. While his brand of Liberalism was in decline, it was still a significant element in the thinking of many Liberals at the

time. Moreover those ideas have, to some degree, come back into fashion in recent decades among neo-liberals and libertarians.

Francis Wrigley Hirst was born on 10 June 1873 at Dalton Lodge near Huddersfield. Both his parents came from wealthy mill-owning families with deep nonconformist and Liberal roots. His maternal aunt, Mary Wrigley, married William Willans (1800–63), the leading figure in Huddersfield Liberalism and nonconformity and grandfather of Herbert Asquith. Another Wrigley started the US chewing gum firm. Hirst's father Alfred was forced to retire from the woollen textile business in 1886 because of failing eyesight and the family moved to Harrogate, where he worked in the cause of the blind. This does not seem to have involved much hardship. Hirst later recalled that shortly before retiring his father had cleared a profit of £10,000 (the equivalent of £500,000 today) from just one import deal.⁵

Hirst attended Clifton College in Bristol from 1888–91 and then won a scholarship to Wadham College, Oxford, securing a double first in Classical Moderations and Greats in 1896. He was President of the Oxford Union

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the same year, succeeding John Simon, who was to become a life-long friend.⁶ Other friends at Oxford included Hilaire Belloc, F. E. Smith and Leo Amery.

Hirst was one of the first at Oxford to study political economy, naturally of the classical variety. He was strongly influenced by Alfred Marshall and Professor F. Y. Edgeworth (1845–1926), a vigorous opponent of tariff reform.⁷ Hirst was already an ardent Liberal, joining the radical Russell Club.

Having narrowly failed to secure a research scholarship at Oxford, Hirst earned his living coaching students, lecturing on local government at the newly founded London School of Economics, and writing. In 1899 he was called to the Bar and practised as a barrister for the next few years, without much financial reward, giving up in about 1906 to concentrate on journalism and writing. He had cut his teeth as a journalist as one of the talented young writers that C. P. Scott brought into the *Manchester Guardian*. In 1907, largely on the recommendation of John Morley, Hirst was appointed editor of *The Economist*, a post he was to hold until 1916.⁸

Hirst had forged his close friendship and political partnership with Morley in the summer of 1899, and again in 1901, when he worked as Morley's researcher on his celebrated biography of Gladstone, spending many happy weeks exploring Gladstone's voluminous papers at Hawarden Castle.⁹ Hirst soon became Morley's intellectual and political amanuensis.¹⁰ Together with several other young Liberals, including Hilaire Belloc, John Simon and J. L. Hammond, Hirst published *Essays in Liberalism* in 1900, contributing an essay on Liberalism and Wealth. The book – which aimed to reassert the doctrines of classical liberalism then under increasing attack from Fabians and New Liberals – was dedicated to Morley as the 'embodiment of philosophic liberalism ... the wellspring of a liberal tradition which united the doctrines of Mill and Cobden and represented the still-living personality of Gladstone'.¹¹ Hirst was suspicious of the New Liberals – what he called 'the new type of Liberal politician who offers the public a mixed pottage of socialism and jingoism ...'.¹²

At this time Hirst was closely involved in the protest movement against the Boer War in which

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Morley was a leading figure. Hirst was a founder of the League of Liberals Against Aggression and Militarism, serving on its committee.¹³ He contributed to a collection of essays on *Liberalism and the Empire* (1900), accusing Cecil Rhodes's Chartered Company of inciting the conflict with the Boers.¹⁴ He also worked with Simon, Belloc, G. K. Chesterton and J. L. Hammond in the pro-Boer *Speaker*, the forerunner of *The Nation*, which under the editorship of H. W. Massingham became a standard-bearer of advanced Liberal opinion.¹⁵

In 1903 Hirst married Helena Cobden, great-niece of Richard Cobden, and eventually they were to live in Cobden's old home, Dunford House near Midhurst in Sussex, which they turned into a shrine to the great free trader and his ideas. The marriage was long-lasting and happy, although they were at odds over Helena's suffragette activity, which led to her arrest in 1913.¹⁶ They had no children.

Already, in his twenties, through his friendship with Morley and his prominence in Liberal circles and at the Union at Oxford, he had built up a wide acquaintanceship with many of the leading politicians of the day,

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helped by the fact that he was excellent company, 'hospitable and inclusive', and 'a fascinating conversationalist' with a 'genius for friendship'. He had many interests outside politics: he was a spirited but not particularly good chess player, a keen fly-fisherman and sports enthusiast (cricket, golf, athletics), and a lover of the Classics, especially Latin poetry.¹⁷

His first two solo books appeared at the height of Joseph Chamberlain's Tariff Reform campaign. *Free Trade and other Fundamental Doctrines of the Manchester School*, a collection of extracts from the leading classical liberal pioneers which was published in 1903, and *Adam Smith*, which appeared in Morley's 'English Men of Letters' series in 1904, set the pattern of clear and orthodox exposition of classical liberal thought. Hirst was in the thick of the Liberal defence of free trade, contributing to *Fact versus Fiction* (1904), which the Cobden Club published to refute Chamberlain's arguments.¹⁸ He also wrote a number of academic and technical studies on local government and legal and commercial issues in these years.

As editor, Hirst expanded and modernised *The Economist*, previously a rather dull journal, turning it into a lively and partisan leader of Radical opinion. Working hand-in-hand with the anti-militarist wing of the Liberal Party, he sought to counteract 'the Armour-plate press' which loudly demanded a naval arms race with Germany. A good illustration of how Hirst operated behind the scenes came in March 1912 when Churchill proposed an increase in the naval estimates to build new Dreadnoughts, in defiance of the 'Radicals and Economists' and a strongly worded resolution recently adopted by the National Liberal Federation (NLF). Morley leaked to Hirst information about the division of opinion in the Cabinet on this issue, including the opposition of Lloyd George, the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Hirst helped Sir John Brunner, chairman of the

Top: The six writers of *Oxford Essays in Liberalism* (1897) – standing: H. Belloc, J. L. Hammond, F. W. Hirst; seated: P. J. Macdonnell, J. A. Simon, J. S. Phillimore.

Left: Hirst's farewell party given by the staff following his sacking as editor of *The Economist* in 1916 – he is seated with Mary Agnes Hamilton, later a Labour MP.



NLF, to draft circular letters of protest to constituency associations and editors, and in July he suggested that Brunner write to Asquith to say that he would call a special meeting of the NLF to discuss 'this fatal and provocative policy'. In the autumn Hirst ghosted a manifesto from Brunner to every Liberal Association chairman before the NLF meeting held on 21 November. By the time the meeting was held, the Cabinet had found a compromise formula and the crisis had subsided, although the eventual outcome was a defeat for Hirst and the Economists.¹⁹

Hirst is sometimes described as an isolationist, but it would be more accurate to say that he stood for active efforts to maintain international peace in Gladstonian style through the 'Concert of Europe'. He attempted to lower international tensions by sending the journalist Dudley Ward to Berlin as a correspondent with a wide brief to promote friendly relations with Germany.²⁰ He also upheld the Gladstonian tradition of concern for oppression in Europe. In 1913–14 Hirst was a member of the International Commission established by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, which investigated Serbian atrocities against the Macedonian (Bulgarian) population during the Balkan Wars of 1912–13. The report was published in 1914.²¹

Hirst blamed the Liberal government for the slide to war in 1914. He later wrote that 'the death of Campbell-Bannerman made way for Mr Asquith and so gave the Liberal Imperialists a free hand in foreign policy and at the same time opened the door to a great expansion of armaments ... The real reason behind these tremendous additions to the Navy lay concealed in the secret diplomacy of the Liberal Imperialist Ministers ...'²² When war broke out in August 1914 Hirst, alongside his friends Morley and John Burns, who resigned from the Cabinet, was in the small group of Radicals

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who opposed the war even after the German invasion of neutral Belgium. He immediately began efforts to build a broad alliance of the various anti-war currents.²³

The formation of the Coalition government under Asquith in May 1915 greatly increased the pressure to introduce conscription, which Hirst loudly opposed. He wrote to Sir John Brunner that 'the Liberal Imperialists and Tory imperialists together are quite capable of working up a panic and rushing the country into military slavery'.²⁴ *The Economist* immediately stepped up the campaign against compulsory military service, which it continued stubbornly in 1916 when Asquith brought in conscription.²⁵

Hirst's opposition to the war was, to a significant degree, budgetary. He later wrote of 'the Great War, the most tremendous economic catastrophe recorded in history',²⁶ setting out his case in several of his books.²⁷ He never wavered in his orthodox Cobdenite critique of war, writing in 1947 that two world wars had left Britain 'shorn of its liberties, in a state of bankruptcy and serfdom, oppressed by ruinous taxation, overwhelming debt, and conscription, manacled by more and more inflation, entangled in new alliances ... and with military commitments in all parts of the world'.²⁸ He was secretary of a committee of economists critical of Lloyd George's finance policy formed under the Economic Section of the British Association.²⁹

Unlike the many anti-war Liberals who gravitated towards the Labour Party, Hirst, on account of his economic liberalism, utterly rejected socialism. He told his good friend, Molly Hamilton, later a Labour MP, that 'anyone who has any truck with Socialism must be intellectually flabby'.³⁰ Nor was the Conservative Party an option, not least because of its protectionism which, in Hirst's book, was equally if not more detestable. It was said that if a Tory entered the room, Hirst 'was able to detect it, "to smell out" the

charlatan, so to speak'.³¹ None of this prevented Hirst from enjoying a wide circle of friends from both the Conservative and Labour Parties.

In November 1914 Hirst successfully stirred up opposition in the House of Lords to a provision of the Defence of the Realm Act, then being rushed through Parliament, which would have allowed a secret court martial to sentence non-military personnel to death.³² In 1915 Hirst took on the government in the outstanding civil liberties case of the war, the Zadig case. Arthur Zadig, though born of German parents, had been a naturalised British subject for ten years. In October 1915 he was detained by the Home Secretary under the Defence of the Realm regulations on the grounds of his 'hostile origin and associations'. A defence fund was established and the case taken through the courts up to the House of Lords where Hirst appeared for the appellant arguing that the rights of British subjects under the Magna Carta and the Habeas Corpus Act could not be overthrown without express legislation. Although the Law Lords found against Zadig (with a powerful dissenting opinion from the Radical Lord Shaw), Hirst was widely judged to have won the moral argument and Zadig was released shortly afterwards.³³

Hirst's outspoken opposition to the war cost him the editorship of *The Economist* in 1916 when Walter Wilson Greg, the most important trustee, lost patience with having to defend the paper's pacifist stance. Hirst's removal was handled in 'a highly civilised fashion'.³⁴ For some time before his resignation he had been discussing with Sir Hugh Bell, the great ironmaster and fervent libertarian, and with anti-war Radical MPs such as Gordon Harvey, Percy Molteno, Richard Holt, D. M. Mason and Godfrey Collins, the establishment of a new weekly, *Common Sense*, with Hirst as editor. This 'fanatically free trade'

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paper appeared in October 1916 and survived until early 1921.

Consistent with his belief in exploring every avenue that might end the war, Hirst rushed to the support of the former Conservative Foreign Secretary, Lord Lansdowne, when he called for a negotiated peace with Germany in November 1917. Hirst was seen as the leader of 'a party of sorts' that tried to exploit Lansdowne's initiative', forming a 'Lansdowne League' to arouse public support. The *Common Sense* office became a pacifist headquarters.³⁵

Hirst fought a rearguard action against creeping wartime protectionism. With his usual allies – Bell, Harvey, Molteno, Holt and Collins, joined by Sir John Simon, John Burns, Leif Jones and Lords Beauchamp, Bryce, Courtney and Eversley – he protested in July 1916 against the protectionist resolutions put forward by the government for the Economic Conference of the Allies held in Paris.³⁶ *Common Sense* carried on the fight in 1919–21 against protectionist measures put forward by the Lloyd George Coalition. Hirst and his collaborators formed an 'Anti-Embargo League' which forced the government to abandon sweeping restrictions placed on imports, but had less success against 'anti-dumping' measures later.³⁷

Hirst unsuccessfully stood for parliament in Sudbury in January 1910, defending a seat captured by the Liberals in 1906. He claimed that he was 'destroyed [by] ... Beer & Feudalism & sheer brutality', although in fact the swing to the Conservatives there (6.7%) was closely in line with the average swing in Suffolk (7%). He also stood for Shipley, Yorkshire in the 1929 general election. Shipley was a three-way marginal with the Liberals in third place with about 30%. Hirst's vote was disappointing, despite – or perhaps because of – his treating the voters to a 'masterly interpretation of the philosophy of Cobden and Gladstone'. Against the national trend, his vote dipped by 3% compared

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with both the 1924 general election and a by-election in 1930 that was contested by a new candidate.³⁸

In the 1920s and '30s he was increasingly out of tune with the party leadership. He had very little enthusiasm for Asquith and even less for Lloyd George³⁹; Campbell Bannerman was the last Liberal leader who Hirst counted as a sound Cobdenite.⁴⁰ Hirst was prominent in a number of organisations on the fringes of the party that sought to keep the flag of classical liberalism flying. He was an executive member of the Free Trade Union and remained very active in the Cobden Club, writing pamphlets and serving as its secretary from 1935. He also chaired the Liberal Free Trade Committee from 1931.⁴¹ In addition, Hirst was the moving force behind the 'Public Economy League', a group formed in 1919–20 to press for reductions in public expenditure. The League was still active during the Second World War when Hirst lobbied the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Kingsley Wood, to curb the growth of expenditure and tackle rising inflation.⁴²

Hirst remained an orthodox Cobdenite in international affairs during the 1930s, favouring the solving of problems through international law and arbitration rather than through collective security and the League of Nations. Such was his opposition to war that he joined Herbert Samuel and a handful of other Liberals in supporting the Munich agreement in 1938. He was not, however, a pacifist and accepted that the defence of freedom justified the use of force both at home and abroad against its enemies (threatening Communist and Fascist parties in particular).⁴³

Hirst's influence behind the scenes is difficult to assess. He seems to have had easy access to leading politicians in all three parties throughout his career. In December 1905 we find him writing to Campbell-Bannerman as he formed his Liberal

government, urging the case for retrenchment to reverse 'the vast sums destroyed and wasted during the last ten years, and the results; borrowed credit, less enterprise in business and manufactures, reduced home demand and therefore output to meet it, reductions in wages, increase in pauperism and unemployment.'⁴⁴ Eighteen years later, as Ramsay MacDonald formed the first Labour government, according to gossip Hirst again had the ear of an incoming Prime Minister. The journalist R. T. Sang wrote to Josiah Wedgwood, a Liberal MP who had defected to Labour:

You have all been wondering who [m] JRM [acDonald] has been relying on – if anyone – for advice on the formation of his Government. No one has hit upon the fact which has been carefully concealed. But he had gone to the worst possible source for advice and inspiration – F.W. Hirst. Last week JRM, Hirst and Lloyd George breakfasted together and went through the Cabinet proposals. JRM offered Hirst the Chancellorship and pressed him to take it. Hirst refused in JRM's own interest, as he believed the Party would not stand the exclusion of [Philip] Snowden, and it was Hirst who advised Snowden for it. Hirst has got [Lord] Parmoor to come in and influenced some other strange selections.⁴⁵

It is unclear what truth if any there is in this report. The choice of Hirst and Lloyd George, ideological opposites within the Liberal Party, for such soundings seems odd, especially as Hirst held no office in the party. MacDonald's supposed offer of the Exchequer to Hirst seems even more improbable, as Philip Snowden, as the Labour Party's acknowledged financial expert, had an indisputable claim to this position and

Hirst was not even a Member of Parliament. Hirst and MacDonald were old comrades from the anti-war movement and had known each other since Hirst's university days (Hirst was also a close friend of Mollie Hamilton, who was living with MacDonald at the time). It is also true that MacDonald made some unexpected ministerial appointments of Liberal and Conservative personalities and there is a good deal of mystery about how he made his choice, but it was Lord Haldane, the most prominent of these, who seems to have been the key influence. The appointment of Lord Parmoor, an in-law of the Webbs and one of Labour's few supporters in the Lords, did not require prompting by Hirst. In all probability Hirst expressed his ideas for appointments to MacDonald, but the influence Sang ascribed to him seems greatly exaggerated.⁴⁶

Hirst's influence as a journalist and writer was more definite. He continued to write prolifically in the inter-war period. He liked to dictate straight on to the typewriter and was usually able to send articles to press almost without correction.⁴⁷ In the 1920s his annual analysis of the budget in *Contemporary Review* was widely respected. In 1925, *A History of Free Trade from Adam Smith to Philip Snowden*, which ran into several editions, appeared. This was followed by biographical studies of great Liberals on both sides of the Atlantic: a *Life of Thomas Jefferson* (1926) and *The Early Life and Letters of John Morley* (1927), followed in 1931 by *Gladstone as Financier and Economist*. Several of his works, including those on Smith, Morley and Gladstone, have still not been entirely superseded in the literature. His *The Consequences of the War to Great Britain* (1934) interpreted recent British history and politics from a Cobdenite Liberal point of view.⁴⁸

In 1935 Hirst published two books that summarised his political and economic outlook. The weighty and ambitious *Liberty and Tyranny* traces the history of

individual freedom from Classical Antiquity through the British and American liberal thinkers of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and defends its superiority over the then ascendant ideologies of Nazism, Fascism and Communism, which Hirst inclines to lump together in many of their collectivist characteristics. Its shorter companion volume, *Economic Freedom and Private Property*, sets out the case for economic liberty and is fluent and pithy and much more accessible to the modern reader.

Hirst has been characterised by some contemporaries and later commentators as a 'laissez-faire Liberal', although he hotly rejected the term, at least if it was understood as meaning that 'government should abstain inertly from constructive work'.⁴⁹ He certainly favoured a limited role for the public sector and strict economy in public expenditure, furiously attacking the growth of the state especially during wartime when, he claimed 'the British nation found out the meaning of bureaucracy, and learnt the difference between being served and being ruled by a Civil Service'.⁵⁰ Hirst considered that the State should be responsible for defence and police, provision of public goods, and education. He also accepted the need for municipal services: public health, lighting, roads etc. In general, however, the state should only take responsibility for services 'plainly beneficial to society which cannot be left to private enterprise'. As G. P. Gooch wrote of him, Hirst 'remained a "Manchester" man to the end, much less convinced than myself of the capacity of legislation to increase our happiness and welfare by State action and social reforms to create the Welfare State ... he was a Cobdenite ...'⁵¹ Nevertheless, following Adam Smith, Hirst claimed that he 'had no pedantic objection to the state managing a business if it can manage it well'. He also wrote positively of the progress in education, public health, old age pensions, and other public serv-

ices in the years before 1914. He sought to distance his ideas from ideological laissez-faire of the sort advocated by Herbert Spencer, or for that matter by some modern libertarians. He rejected the idea that civilisation could be built on the basis of narrow individualism, and called for active participation of the citizen in the management of local and national affairs and public spiritedness.⁵² He wanted to return to what he called 'the long reign of economic liberty' between 1846 and 1914 when, as he pointed out, both Liberal and Conservative governments promoted social reforms involving large expenditure.

Sound money occupied a central place in Hirst's economic thinking; indeed it was something of an obsession. He was a fervent advocate of the Gold Standard and preferred a metallic gold and silver currency of the sort that existed in Britain from the early nineteenth century until 1914 to the fully convertible paper currency linked to gold that was established by Churchill in 1925 and survived until 1931. As he never tired of repeating, 'experience has proved that sooner or later an inconvertible paper currency with no intrinsic value comes to grief ... a moment always comes when the temptation to inflate is irresistible ... it [is] madness for any nation which has the choice to allow its currency to become the plaything of politics ... A currency must be knave-proof and fool-proof.'⁵³

Hirst gave his memoirs (which closed before the First World War) the title 'In the Golden Days' and he was in no doubt that the rot in British politics, society and the economy set in with the abandonment of the Gold Standard in 1914. He wrote that the old metallic currency 'was as nearly automatic and perfect as any country need desire. The Great War dissolved it. Had we remained neutral ... there is no reason for supposing that the system would have broken down.'⁵⁴ However he accepted that the decision to abandon the Gold

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Standard again in 1931 was justified at the time, while hoping for its restoration and putting forward ideas for international management of the price of gold.

The contrast between libertarian Conservatism and Hirst's 'old Liberalism' was demonstrated by his involvement with Ernest Benn's Individualist Movement. Benn had founded the movement in 1926 while still a Liberal, but had broken finally with the party in 1929. Hirst seems to have been closely involved from the start, as was his old friend Sir Hugh Bell, who was a co-founder. Hirst helped to write *The Philosophy of Individualism: A Bibliography*, published by Benn's Individualist Bookshop in 1927. The movement took on a new lease of life with the national mobilisation and planning of the Second World War. Hirst published a pamphlet on *Free Markets or Monopoly?* in 1941 and helped to draft the *Manifesto of British Liberty* issued in mid-1942, of which he was a signatory. He was a leading figure in the Society of Individualists established by Benn in November 1942, and his protégé, Deryck Abel, became secretary of the Society. Hirst seems to have favoured a broad national membership (80–100 members in each constituency), while others wanted to keep it as an elite Establishment lobby. In 1944 a rift between Hirst and Benn opened up. Hirst wanted the Society to lead a civil liberties campaign against the internment of political opponents of the war under Regulation 18b of the Defence of the Realm Act, but Benn, an instinctive 'patriot' on such matters, refused to get involved. In September 1944, Benn agreed to amalgamate the Society with the National League for Freedom, which claimed some forty Conservative MPs and a number of industrialists amongst its membership. Hirst, with a few Liberal followers, resigned, protesting that this 'signified reaction, protection, mercantilism and monopoly'.⁵⁵

Accounts of the post-war renaissance of economic liberal-

Hirst, though an indifferent politician, was undoubtedly the leading ideologue of individualist Liberalism in the first four decades of the twentieth century, a viewpoint that saw economic liberalism, civil liberties, peace and internationalism as an indivisible whole.

ism, mostly written by Thatcherite Conservatives, tend either to ignore or dismiss the influence of the old Radical Liberal current.⁵⁶ In fact there were important continuities, which included Hirst's activity. The origins of the revival can be traced to 'Le Colloque Walter Lippmann', a gathering of economic liberal academics held in Paris in August 1938 to analyse and find ways to reverse the decline of liberal thinking in Europe. The meeting was inspired by *The Good Society* by the American publicist, Walter Lippmann, published in 1937.⁵⁷ Hirst did not attend the meeting, but Lippmann prominently acknowledged his debt to Hirst's *Liberty and Tyranny* in his book.⁵⁸ Hirst propagated classical liberalism among the younger generation of economists through his writing and lectures, for example at the London School of Economics (of which he was a governor) in the late 1930s, where Lionel Robbins and Friedrich von Hayek gathered a group of anti-Keynesian academics and students who formed the vanguard of the neo-liberal revival after the war.⁵⁹ Hirst and some of the post-war neo-liberals certainly must have known each other through involvement in such bodies such as the Free Trade Union⁶⁰. In the late 1930s and '40s he organised conferences for undergraduates at Dunford House to introduce them to a traditional Liberal perspective on current events. He sought to popularise such ideas through his short book *Principles of Prosperity* (1944), but with its somewhat antiquated flavour it received nothing like the attention of Hayek's *Road to Serfdom*, published the same year.

Hirst was, naturally, strongly opposed to the interventionist economics of Maynard Keynes, which were increasingly influential in the Liberal Party in the inter-war period and after 1945, and this contributed to his disillusionment with the party.⁶¹ He frequently attacked Keynes's ideas in his books and in private his denunciations of Keynes were

even more outspoken.⁶² He was also increasingly doubtful about the welfare state in his later years and critical of what he called 'the Beveridge Hoax'.⁶³ For their part, some Keynesians were suspicious of Hirst's continued influence on Liberal economic thinking.⁶⁴ He dated the opening of the rift between 'the old and the new Liberals' to 1935, but he remained an active and popular member of the party until the final years of the war, and was regularly elected by the Assembly to the Party Council.⁶⁵ The break seems to have come at the end of 1944 when the Liberal Free Trade Committee was forced out of Liberal Headquarters, and carried on its campaign against Beveridge's influence over the party independently from Dunford House.⁶⁶

For many years Hirst had also spread the word on the other side of the Atlantic. He was very well known in US economic liberal circles. His first visit there had been in 1907 to advise Senator Aldrich's Monetary Commission, which preceded the establishment of the Federal Reserve Bank.⁶⁷ In 1921 he lectured on economics at Stanford University in California.⁶⁸ In 1935, on his last visit to the US, he lectured at Wesleyan University and delivered the prestigious Princeton Public Lecture on *The Value of Liberty*. President Herbert Hoover was a close friend.⁶⁹

Despite increasing ill health from about 1949, Hirst continued to take a lively interest in politics until shortly before his death, on 22 February 1953.

Hirst, though an indifferent politician, was undoubtedly the leading ideologue of individualist Liberalism in the first four decades of the twentieth century, a viewpoint that saw economic liberalism, civil liberties, peace and internationalism as an indivisible whole. He was unashamedly backward looking and nostalgic: for him, Victorian Liberal England truly represented the golden days. He insistently restated Cobdenite and Gladstonian principles and

sought to show how their abandonment lay behind the troubles of his day. However he failed to develop a modern and persuasive expression of these ideas to match Keynes, Beveridge and other social liberal thinkers on the left, or to pre-empt the neo-liberalism of Hayek and the New Right. By the time of his death his brand of Liberalism was almost extinct. In that sense he can indeed be seen as 'the last of the Liberals'.

Dr Jaime Reynolds is guest-editor of this special issue. He studied at LSE and has written extensively on British and East European political history.

- 1 Inscription by Hirst to the Bishop of London in author's copy of F.W. Hirst, *Liberty and Tyranny* (London, 1935).
- 2 G. P. Gooch et al., *F.W. Hirst By His Friends* (London, 1958), p. 90.
- 3 F.W. Hirst (ed.), *Alexander Gordon Cummins Harvey: a Memoir* (London, 1925),

- p. 122.
- 4 There is an entry for Hirst in the *Dictionary of National Biography* written by Roger Fulford (1971), but he is not included in *The Dictionary of Liberal Biography* (1998). Some friends of Hirst's including Gilbert Murray, G. P. Gooch, Roger Fulford, Maurice Bowra, Arthur Ransome, and Herbert Hoover produced a short volume of recollections in his memory entitled *F.W. Hirst By His Friends* in 1958. A few of his books were reissued in the 1960s and '70s, but *Liberty and Tyranny* and *Economic Freedom and Private Property* have long been out of print and are now difficult to obtain. W. H. Greenleaf devoted considerable attention to Hirst in his book *The British Ideological Heritage* (London, 1983) pp. 97–100. Anthony Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England 1846–1946* (Oxford, 1997) also gives Hirst some prominence (p. 282). Howe cites Hirst's diary, but this refers only to limited extracts included in Hirst's privately published pamphlet *The Formation, History and Aims of the Liberal Free Trade Committee 1931–1946*; the diary itself appears to

- have been lost. Most histories of the Liberal Party and Liberal ideas ignore or dismiss Hirst, although there is greater interest among libertarians; see, for instance Mark Brady, *Against the Tide: The Life of Francis W. Hirst* (www.libertyhaven.com, 1999). Hirst's papers (together with those of John Morley) were acquired by the Bodleian Library, Oxford, in 2000. Hirst's memoirs, *In the Golden Days* (London 1947) only go up to 1906.
- 5 Hirst, *Golden Days*, pp. 54–55, 58.
- 6 J. Simon, *Retrospect* (London, 1952), p. 34.
- 7 Hirst, *Golden Days*, p. 134–5.
- 8 Gooch, *Friends*, p. 62. For Hirst's editorship of *The Economist*, see R. Dudley Edwards, *The Pursuit of Reason – The Economist 1843–1993* (London, 1993).
- 9 Hirst, *Golden Days*, p. 162; Hirst, *Early Life and Letters of John Morley* (London, 1927) introduction.
- 10 However there is only one brief mention of Hirst in Morley's *Recollections* (London, 1917).
- 11 *Ibid.*, pp. 160–61.
- 12 Hirst, *Gordon Harvey*, p. vii.
- 13 Hirst, *Golden Days*, pp. 193, 199.
- 14 Hirst, *Golden Days*, pp. 183–5. This view is not shared by modern historians, see I. R. Smith, *The Origins of the South African War 1899–1902* (London, 1995).
- 15 Hirst, *Golden Days*, p. 192; Simon, *Retrospect*, p. 45.
- 16 M. A. Hamilton, *Remembering My Good Friends* (London, 1944), p. 82.
- 17 Gooch, *Friends*, chapters by J. E. Allen (Hirst's brother-in-law) and Arthur Ransome (an angling partner), pp. 13, 48–57.
- 18 Hirst, *Golden Days*, p. 248.
- 19 S. Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain*, vol. 2 (London, 1984), pp. 211–12. S. Koss, *Asquith* (London, 1976), pp. 149–50.
- 20 S. Koss, *Rise and Fall*, p. 211.
- 21 *Unfinished Peace, Report of the International Commission on the Balkans*, 1996. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington. See also www.macedoniainfo.com/macedonia/foreword.htm.
- 22 Hirst, *Harvey*, pp. 71, 75.
- 23 C. Hazlehurst, *Politicians at War* (London, 1971), p. 125 citing letter from Hirst to C. P. Trevelyan, 12 August 1914, Trevelyan MSS.
- 24 C. Hazlehurst *Politicians at War*, p. 270.
- 25 Hirst, *Harvey*, pp. 109, 114–15. See also Dudley Edwards, *Pursuit of Reason*, pp. 561–67.
- 26 F.W. Hirst, *Money: Gold, Silver and Paper* (London, 1933), p. 167.
- 27 Notably *The Political Economy of War* (London, 1915).
- 28 Hirst, *Golden Days*, p. 202.
- 29 Gooch, *Friends*, p. 17.
- 30 Hamilton, *Remembering*, p. 80.

Francis Wrigley Hirst 1873–1953: Selected writings

- Hirst et al., *Essays in Liberalism by Six Oxford Men* (London, Cassell, 1897)
- Hirst et al., *Liberalism and the Empire, Three Essays* (London, Brimley Johnson, 1900)
- Joseph Redlich and F. W. Hirst, *The History of Local Government in England* (London, Macmillan, 1903, reprinted until 1970s)
- Free Trade and other Fundamental Doctrines of the Manchester School* (London and New York, Harper & Brothers, 1903, reprinted 1968)
- Adam Smith (English Men of Letters series, London, Macmillan, 1904)
- Arbiter in Council* (London, Macmillan, 1906 anonymous)
- The Stock Exchange: A short study of investment and speculation* (London, H. Holt, 1911; 2nd ed. London, Thornton Butterworth, 1932)
- The Political Economy of War* (London, J. M. Dent, 1915)
- From Adam Smith to Philip Snowden: A History of Free Trade in Great Britain* (London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1925)
- Hirst (ed.), *Alexander Gordon Cummins Harvey: a memoir* (London, Richard Cobden-Sanderson, 1925)
- Life and Letters of Thomas Jefferson* (London, Macmillan, 1925)
- Hirst and J. E. Allen, *British War Budgets* (Oxford University Press, 1926)
- Early Life and Letters of John Morley* (London, Macmillan, 1927; reprinted 1975)
- Gladstone as Financier & Economist* (London, Ernest Benn, 1931)
- Money: Gold, Silver and Paper* (London, Scribner's, 1933)
- The Consequences of the War to Great Britain* (Oxford University Press, 1934)
- Liberty and Tyranny* (London, Duckworth & Co, 1935)
- Economic Freedom and Private Property* (London, Duckworth, 1935)
- Armaments: the Race and the Crisis* (London, Cobden-Sanderson, 1937)
- Principles of Prosperity* (London, Hollis and Carter, 1944)
- In the Golden Days* (London, Frederick Muller, 1947)

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ERRATA

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Unfortunately some of the endnotes to this article were omitted in error. Our apologies to our readers and to the article's author. We reprint below the full set of endnotes for ease of reference

- 1 Inscription by Hirst to the Bishop of London in author's copy of F.W. Hirst, *Liberty and Tyranny* (London, 1935).
- 2 G. P. Gooch et al., *F.W. Hirst By His Friends* (London, 1958), p. 90.
- 3 F.W. Hirst (ed.), *Alexander Gordon Cummins Harvey: a Memoir* (London, 1925), p. 122.
- 4 There is an entry for Hirst in the *Dictionary of National Biography* written by Roger Fulford (1971), but he is not included in *The Dictionary of Liberal Biography* (1998). Some friends of Hirst's including Gilbert Murray, G. P. Gooch, Roger Fulford, Maurice Bowra, Arthur Ransome, and Herbert Hoover produced a short volume of recollections in his memory entitled *F.W. Hirst By His Friends* in 1958. A few of his books were reissued in the 1960s and '70s, but *Liberty and Tyranny* and *Economic Freedom and Private Property* have long been out of print and are now difficult to obtain. W. H. Greenleaf devoted considerable attention to Hirst in his book *The British Ideological Heritage* (London, 1983) pp. 97–100. Anthony Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England 1846–1946* (Oxford, 1997) also gives Hirst some prominence (p. 282). Howe cites Hirst's diary, but this refers only to limited extracts included in Hirst's privately published pamphlet *The Formation, History and Aims of the Liberal Free Trade Committee 1931–1946*; the diary itself appears to have been lost. Most histories of the Liberal Party and Liberal ideas ignore or dismiss Hirst, although there is greater interest among libertarians; see, for instance Mark Brady, *Against the Tide: The Life of Francis W. Hirst* (www.libertyhaven.com, 1999). Hirst's papers (together with those of John Morley) were acquired by the Bodleian Library, Oxford, in 2000. Hirst's memoirs, *In the Golden Days* (London 1947) only go up to 1906.
- 5 Hirst, *Golden Days*, pp. 54–55, 58.
- 6 J. Simon, *Retrospect* (London, 1952), p. 34.
- 7 Hirst, *Golden Days*, p. 134–5.
- 8 Gooch, *Friends*, p. 62. For Hirst's editorship of *The Economist*, see R. Dudley Edwards, *The Pursuit of Reason – The Economist 1843–1993* (London, 1993).
- 9 Hirst, *Golden Days*, p. 162; Hirst, *Early Life and Letters of John Morley* (London, 1927) introduction.
- 10 However there is only one brief mention of Hirst in Morley's *Recollections* (London, 1917).
- 11 *Ibid.*, pp. 160–61.
- 12 Hirst, *Gordon Harvey*, p. vii.
- 13 Hirst, *Golden Days*, pp. 193, 199.
- 14 Hirst, *Golden Days*, pp. 183–5. This view is not shared by modern historians, see I. R. Smith, *The Origins of the South African War 1899–1902* (London, 1995).
- 15 Hirst, *Golden Days*, p. 192; Simon, *Retrospect*, p. 45.
- 16 M.A. Hamilton, *Remembering My Good Friends* (London, 1944), p. 82.
- 17 Gooch, *Friends*, chapters by J. E. Allen (Hirst's brother-in-law) and Arthur Ransome (an angling partner), pp. 13, 48–57.
- 18 Hirst, *Golden Days*, p. 248.
- 19 S. Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain*, vol. 2 (London, 1984), pp. 211–12. S. Koss, *Asquith* (London, 1976), pp. 149–50.
- 20 S. Koss, *Rise and Fall*, p. 211.
- 21 *Unfinished Peace, Report of the International Commission on the Balkans*, 1996. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington. See also www.macedoniainfo.com/macedonia/foreword.htm.
- 22 Hirst, *Harvey*, pp. 71, 75.
- 23 C. Hazlehurst, *Politicians at War* (London, 1971), p. 125 citing letter from Hirst to C. P. Trevelyan, 12 August 1914, Trevelyan MSS.
- 24 C. Hazlehurst *Politicians at War*, p. 270.
- 25 Hirst, *Harvey*, pp. 109, 114–15. See also Dudley Edwards, *Pursuit of Reason*, pp. 561–67.
- 26 F.W. Hirst, *Money: Gold, Silver and Paper* (London, 1933), p. 167.
- 27 Notably *The Political Economy of War* (London, 1915).
- 28 Hirst, *Golden Days*, p. 202.
- 29 Gooch, *Friends*, p. 17.
- 30 Hamilton, *Remembering*, p. 80.
- 31 Gooch, *Friends*, p. 49.
- 32 Hirst, *The Consequences of the War to Great Britain* (London, 1934), p. 108–9.
- 33 Gooch, *Friends*, pp. 91–94; and Hirst, *Liberty and Tyranny*, pp. 70ff.
- 34 Dudley Edwards, *Pursuit of Reason*, p. 541–42.
- 35 Hirst, *Harvey*, p. 129; Hamilton, *Remembering*, p. 85.
- 36 Hirst, *Harvey*, pp. 119–20, referring to letter to *The Times* of 5 July 1916.
- 37 Hirst, *Harvey*, pp. 139–41, 146.
- 38 N. Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People: the General Elections of 1910* (London, 1972), pp. 373–4, quoting Hirst's letter to Gilbert Murray 21 January 1910, and p. 501; Gooch, *Friends*, p. 74–75.
- 39 He considered the record of the Labour Party (especially Philip Snowden) on free trade to be more creditable than Lloyd George's, see Hirst, *Safeguarding and Protection* (London, 1926), p. 27.
- 40 There is a paean to Campbell-Bannerman in Hirst's *Golden Days*.
- 41 Hirst, *The Formation, History and Aims of the Liberal Free Trade Committee 1931–1946 (A Brief Autobiographical History)* (published privately, Dunford House, 1947). I am grateful to Professor Philip Williamson for providing me with a copy of this document.
- 42 F.W. Hirst, *Principles of Prosperity* (London 1944), pp. 108–9. It had produced pamphlets in the late 1930s against high taxation and armaments. Leslie Hore-Belisha and Oswald Mosley were successively secretaries of the League after 1918, see Hamilton, *Remembering*, p. 85.
- 43 Hirst, *Liberty*, p. 295.
- 44 Letter to Campbell-Bannerman, 19 December 1905, Campbell-Bannerman Papers, Add Mss 41238, quoted in H. V. Emy, *Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics 1892–1914* (Cambridge, 1973), p. 199.
- 45 Letter to J. C. Wedgwood, 23 January 1924, Wedgwood Papers, quoted in R. Douglas, *Land, People and Politics: A History of the Land Question in the UK 1878–1952* (London, 1976), p. 185.
- 46 D. Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald* (London, 1977), pp. 299–301. There is no mention of Hirst in Parmoor's account of his appointment, see *A Retrospect, The Autobiography of Lord Parmoor* (London, 1936).
- 47 Gooch, *Friends*, chapter by Hirst's secretary 1929–31, p. 46.
- 48 Beveridge and Keynes were among his fellow editors of this series of histories.
- 49 Hamilton, *Remembering*, p. 80; See W. H. Greenleaf, *The British Political Tradition volume 2: The Ideological Heritage* (1983), pp. 97–100 for detailed assessment.
- 50 Hirst, *Principles*, p. 147 and Hirst, *Money*, p. 159.
- 51 Hirst, *Principles*, p. 87.
- 52 Gooch, *Friends*, p. 22–23.
- 53 Hirst, *Liberty*, p. 292.
- 54 Hirst, *Money*, p. 220.
- 55 Hirst, *Money*, p. 242.
- 56 D. Abel, *Ernest Benn: Counsel for Liberty* (London, 1960)
- 57 For the classic Thatcherite interpretation see D. Willetts, *Modern Conservatism* (Penguin, 1992).
- 58 R. Cockett, *Thinking the Unthinkable* (London, 1994), p. 9–10.
- 59 W. Lippmann, *The Good Society* (Boston, 1937), p. viii. Lippmann's book also influenced the *Ownership for All* programme adopted by the Liberal Party in 1938.
- 60 For example W. H. Hutt, who Hirst had helped to write *The Philosophy of Individualism* in 1927.
- 61 Hirst was on the executive of the FTU until the late 1940s, overlapping with Arthur Seldon, for example.
- 62 Letter from Hirst to R. F. Harrod, 6 November 1946, refers to the 'so-called Liberal Party' and adds 'Tories are all for conscription and preferential protection. They are no more conservative than the Liberal Parties are Liberal'. See: <http://e-server.e.u-tokyo.ac.jp/Exhibition/keynes/gif/167-02.gif>
- 63 Hirst, *Money*, pp. 238, 247n; Hirst, *Principles*, p. 80–82. Gooch, *Friends*, p. 37.
- 64 Gooch, *Friends*, p. 17.
- 65 R. F. Harrod, *The Prof: A Personal Memoir of Lord Cherwell* (London, 1959), p. 243.
- 66 For example, he was elected 21st of 30 members at the 1943 Assembly. It appears that he did not seek re-election in 1945. *LPO reports 1937–47*.
- 67 Hirst, *Liberal Free Trade Committee*, pp. 31–32.
- 68 Hirst, *Money*, p. x.
- 69 *Ibid.*
- 70 Hoover and Hirst became friends before 1914 when Hoover worked as an international engineer and visited London where he was briefly a neighbour in Campden Hill. He looked after Hirst when he was taken seriously ill during a visit to the US in 1929. Hoover contributed to Gooch, *Friends* (see p. 45).