“Liberal Spring”

Lukáš Nevrkla

INTRODUCTION

The 1960s are commonly considered to be a revolutionary, permissive, affluent and liberal decade. Despite the fact that it still remains a matter of dispute to what extent is this historical imagery of 1960s substantiated and to what extent it presents only a surviving stereotype, there is a “liberal” and “progressive” ethos surrounding this decade in Western Europe as well as in the United States.1 Especially after Kennedy’s victory in the American presidential elections of 1960 was there a widely-shared awareness of a shift away from the conservativism of 1950s.

This was very much true also of Great Britain. In 1960s the first uncensored version of D. H. Lawrence’s novel Lady Chatterley’s Lover was published. In 1963, the Beatles published their first album Please Please Me. However, the “liberal spring” in the United Kingdom was not limited to social and cultural life. The early 1960s witnessed also a significant transformation and revival of British political liberalism, which up to that time had been struggling for survival in the two-party dominated British political system. In contrast to 1950, 1951 and 1955, the general election of 1959 signalled that the Independent Liberal Party besieged by the two dominant political parties could avert the negative trend of development and regain its position as a major political force.

The following text attempts to analyse the phenomenon of the revival of the structures, ideology and public appeal of the Liberal Party between 1959 and 1964. The first section provides a basic introduction into the history of the Liberal Party after 1945 and outlines the major framework of its revival at the onset of 1960s. The second section analyses the nature and dynamic of the Liberal revival and seeks to position it within the context of the changes which were transforming contemporaneous British society and politics. Lastly, the third section seeks to project the phenomenon of the Liberal revival from the perspective of a single political issue of European integration, which the British 1961 EEC application transformed into a new major cleavage of British politics.

I) THE LIBERAL PARTY AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR

A) THE LIBERAL PARTY 1945–1956

When, after the end of the Second World War, the election campaign for the 1945 general election resumed standard political competition in the United Kingdom, it was the Liberals who faced probably the toughest challenge of all three major political parties. When the results were published, they only proved that Liberalism in Britain faced a serious crisis going far beyond organisation or funding.

Not being able to overcome the split from the time of MacDonald’s National Government, Liberals entered the election split into the Liberal Party under Archibald Sinclair and the National Liberal Party led by David Renton. In 1945, the Independent Liberals won 9 % of popular vote which left them only with 12 seats in the House of Commons. Sinclair himself had to face a defeat in his constituency. National Liberals reached mere 2.9 % of the popular vote but managed to ensure almost equal seats in the new parliament. Many of their 11 M.P.s, however, owed their seat to the alliance with the Conservatives rather than to the appeal of National Liberal policies among the voters. Whereas Conservative leaders wished to appeal to former Liberal voters National Liberals needed an ally in the fight with the Liberal Party which claimed the continuity with the liberal political heritage of previous decades. The alliance between National Liberals and Tories was further deepened in 1947 when the Conservative and National Liberal representatives signed the Woolton-Teviot agreement which provided for the unification of the associations of the parties on constituency level.

The Conservative Party retained the policy of cooperation with National Liberals until 1968. By that time, the party’s structure as well as its members had already merged its ally. During the two post-war decades, hardly any of the National Liberals could find some ideological grounds to refuse the gradual merge with the Conservatives as illogical or unacceptable. All the partial differences were easily marginalised by a common appeal for an anti-socialist alliance aimed against the Labour Party which benefited both Conservatives and National Liberals.

In contrast to the National Liberals, the Sinclair’s Liberals refused the offer of an anti-socialist alliance and attempted to establish themselves in national politics as an independent alternative force. With much of the previously liberal politics shared by the other parties the Liberals struggled hard to retain their own independent identity. However, at the turn of 1950s, the Liberal programme consisted rather of an incoherent set of values and principles torn between the traditional Liberal belief in an individual and the collectivist Keynesian principles of planned economy and welfare. The historical core of the Liberal policy lost much of its appeal as it was firmly incorporated into the doctrines of both of the two dominant parties. The principles which remained were either too vague or did not correspond to the demands of the majority of the post-war voters. Not even Beveridge’s plan of welfare reform could be claimed uniquely Liberal and Beveridge himself, despite the success of his report.

---

on social insurance lost when contesting the constituency of Berwick on Tweed in the 1945 parliamentary election. In the first half of 1950s, the major representatives of the Liberal Party such as Clemet Davies, Archibald Sinclair, Jeremy Thorpe, Joseph Grimond, Megan Lloyd George, Frank Beyrs or the Bonham-Carter family presented rather a group of individuals devoted to vague idea of liberalism than a party bound by a coherent political ideology.

The results of the 1950 general election proved that the Liberal Party fought for survival both in terms of politics and ideology. Despite the fact that the party contested almost twice as many constituencies as in 1945 it won only 9 seats in the House of Commons. Liberal positions became gradually limited to the “Celtic fringe” with Cardiganshire and Montgomery being its main bastions. When in 1957 Liberals lost Carmarthen to Labour it seemed that not even the areas traditionally devoted to Liberals can hold against the bipartisan trend in British politics.

The deteriorating political situation of the party further enhanced its problems with funding and lack of members suitable to stand as M.P. candidates in parliamentary election. In the parliamentary election of 1951 the Liberals nominated 174 candidates which meant that the party would not be able to reach majority in the House of Commons even if every one of them was elected. The following damage to the party’s credibility resulted in further electoral losses and faced the party with a number of small party disadvantages such as the phenomenon of “lost vote” which, in British politics in particular, had a considerable impact on the behaviour of the voters.

B) THE LIBERAL PARTY UNDER JO GRIMOND
In November 1956, Joseph Grimond was elected leader of the Liberal Party. He presided over a body which was fragmented and lacked coherent and distinctive political programme. Being aware of this, many of the prominent Liberal politicians such as Megan Lloyd George decided to join their future political fate with one of the two dominant parties. However, in spite of this, Grimond also took over a party which the previous leadership of Clement Davies successfully managed to save from complete disintegration and whose potential appeal to the voters presented a substantial factor in electoral mathematics of both Labour and Conservative politicians. “Just now the hypothetical Liberal vote (and the actual vote in by-elections) is swollen by discontented refugees from the Conservative Party. But this is a windfall. The party in the country depends for its existence on the possession of a distinct philosophy of government and society. Their leader must be able to express it,” summarised the Times the situation of the Liberal Party.

At the age of 43 Grimond was the youngest leader the Liberal Party ever had. He was born in St Andrews and his parliamentary career has always remained connected with Scotland. Grimond entered parliament after the general election of 1950 as a MP

---

4 COOK, C. — STEVENSON, J., op. cit., p. 44.
5 DUTTON, D., op. cit., p. 139.
6 The Times, 1. 10. 1956, p. 9.
7 The Times, 1. 10. 1956, p. 9.
for Orkney and Shetland, a constituency which he continued to represent until his retirement from politics in 1983. Being married to Laura Bonham Carter, a daughter of Liberal peer Violet Bonham Carter, Grimond had close ties with one of the most prominent Liberal families in Britain. In Grimond, former Chief Whip of the party, the Liberals gained a gifted speaker and ideologist.

His works *The Liberal Future* (1959) and *The Liberal Challenge* (1963) present two of the crucial sources of the Liberal Party ideology in 1950s and 1960s.

Grimond’s election captured a psychological moment which by the end of 1956 felt many Liberals. With the public support for the conservative government shattered by the Suez Crisis and the resignation of Prime Minister at hand, not only the Liberal leaders became persuaded that this could be the moment to turn over the trend of negative development from the previous years.

Despite the fact that in February 1957 Lady Megan George reduced the number of Liberal M.P.s by winning the by-election in former Liberal constituency of Carmarthen for the Conservatives, the results of other 1957 by-elections seemed to confirm the Liberals’ hopes of revival. In May 1957, William Douglas Home, a playwright and younger brother of Alec Douglas Home, contested by-election in Edinburgh South. “Everything turns on how well the Liberals fare in a division where they pulled in a mere 3600 and lost the deposit last time out. That was seven years ago; now they are in better heart and organisation and are urging strongly that a Liberal vote is far from a vote wasted but the only way in which to wreck the dictatorship of right and left,” commented on the prospects of the Liberals the *Times*.9 Despite the fact that even in Edinburgh a Liberal victory seemed unlikely, the appeal of Liberal Party was considered sufficient to help Labour win one of the Tory Scottish footholds. This, however, did not happen and the seat was retained for the government. Still, the Liberals won 23% of the votes in a constituency which had not been contested by a Liberal candidate for seven years. On the other hand, the share of Conservative voters fell from 67% to 45.6%.10

However, Edinburgh was not the only example of the rising electoral appeal of the Liberal Party.11 In March 1958, Mark Bonham Carter, the grandson of Henry Asquith, stood for the Liberals in by-election in the countryside constituency Torrington in Devon. With the majority of approximately two hundred votes, his victory was a narrow one. Still, it was an immense success as it was the first Liberal by-election victory since 1945. “If Torrington goes Liberal, the likelihood of several other seats in the West Country going the same way will be great; the leagues of primroses at present gaily studding the road banks around here will presage a Liberal spring. If it does not, the psychological repercussions on the Liberal zealots, no matter how narrow the margin, will be interesting.”12

Growing success in the by-elections raised hopes also for the coming general election scheduled to be held 1959. Liberals fought the general election with mani-

---

9 *The Times*, 20. 5. 1957, p. 4.
10 *The Times*, 30. 5. 1957, p. 10.
12 *The Times*, 27. 3. 1958, p. 10.
festo called *People Count*. The manifesto retained much of the previous criticism of bipartisan politics and attempted to present the Liberal Party as an alternative to both class and party division in British politics. “A Liberal vote is a protest against the British political system being divided up between two powerful Party machines, one largely financed by the employers and the other by the Trade Unions.”\(^{13}\) For the Liberals this was a split cutting through politics, society and economy. “The Conservative Party is clearly identified in the minds of the electors with employers and big business, and they cannot deal objectively or fairly with the problems continually arising between employer and employee. The Labour Party is in the hands of the Trade Union Leaders.”\(^{14}\)

There were, however, few specific measures which would specify how this goal could be reached. Liberals still found difficult to distinguish themselves from the two major parties on the principal issues which divided British society. *People Count* was a mixture of old, traditional liberal ideas among which new influences started to appear. In foreign policy, they refused the development of independent British nuclear force. However, they desired to contribute to the development of nuclear weapons within the framework of Western alliance. Their domestic policies aimed on reduction of tariffs and lowering of the consumer prices. At the same time they advocated higher degree of state investment particularly into high education and infrastructure. In addition, the party also called for electoral reform, self‑government of Wales and Scotland as well as for the revival of British countryside.\(^{15}\)

For the Liberals, the results of the 1959 election were indecisive. The party won the same numbers of mandates as in 1955 but its share of popular vote rose from 2.7 % in 1955 to 5.9 % in 1959.\(^{16}\) However, the election manifested that the attempts of the Liberal leadership to reform and reinvigorate the party was attracting an increasing interest of the voters. Grimond sought to re‑build the Liberal Party as a new progressive force positioned on the centre‑left of the political spectrum. The new political strategy was reflected also on the party ideology which was increasingly turning away from the free trade liberalism to Keynesian social and economic policies bringing the British political liberalism closer to “socially progressive” liberalism of the American Democratic Party of J.F. Kennedy and L. B. Johnson. “There is a vital task to be done in building up a Progressive alternative Party. The Labour Party have failed to appeal to youth; they have lost their enthusiasm: and so long as they remain tied to nationalisation (which is part of their constitution) and financed by the vested interests of the Trade Union establishment, they will never broaden their appeal sufficiently to embrace all the people who want a progressive party in this country.”\(^{17}\)


\(^{14}\) Ibid.

\(^{15}\) *The Times*, 21. 9. 1959, p. 15.

\(^{16}\) DUTTON, D., op. cit., p. 194.

C) LIBERAL REVIVAL (1958–1964)

After the general election of 1959, the Liberal Party demonstrated a number of features which indicated its gradual revival. The party membership was growing steadily. In March 1964, the Liberal headquarters announced that the number of party members reached 351,300. This was more than twice than in 1959. Similarly, also the number of candidates suitable for standing in parliamentary elections increased. During the November 1962 by-election campaign the liberals announced that they had already over 300 candidates in the field for next general election. “This means that the Liberals are well on the way to challenging the other two parties on the scale of 1950,” commented the Times.

It was on the level of local politics where the Liberal revival was most obvious. After the 1959 borough council elections the Liberals held 120 seats out of nearly four thousand. Since then, the number of Liberal councillors steadily grew until 1963. In 1961, the number of liberal councillors increased by more than eighty and in 1962 by further by more than three hundred.

There trend of a Liberal revival, however, was not limited only to the borough councils. It affected the whole sphere of British local government. Between 1958 and 1962 the number of liberals in the boroughs, counties and urban district councils of England and Wales increased by more than eight hundred. In its general election manifesto *Think for Yourself* the Liberal Party could claim that from 1959 to 1964 the number of Liberal councillors in local political council rose from 500 to 1,822.

Similarly to the local government, the Liberal Party achieved significant success also in parliamentary by-elections. During the session of the 42nd parliament (1959–1964) over 60 by-elections took place. With Labour and Conservatives splitting most of the seats roughly half by half, there were only three seats won by other parties. One of them was the constituency Belfast South which in August 1963 the Ulster Unionist Party successfully managed to keep under control. The two remaining seats were won by the Liberals. In March 1962 Liberal candidate Eric Lubbock managed to win the former conservative constituency of Orpington. Orpington was the first Liberal by-election victory since Torrington in 1958 and also the first loss of government seat after 1959. A month after Orpington, Emlyn Hooson successfully defended Liberal bastion in Montgomeryshire, which became vacant after the death of former Liberal leader Clement Davies.

Despite the fact that the overall number of the parliamentary seats won by the Liberals in the by-elections remained low, the growing share of the popular vote

---

18 *The Times*, 18.3.1964, p. 5.
19 *The Times*, 15.11.1962, p. 7.
20 *The Times*, 9.5.1959, p. 6.
22 *The Times*, 13.5.1961, p. 8; *The Times*, 11.5.1962, p. 5.
25 *The Times*, 15.3.1962, p. 12.
26 *The Times*, 30.4.1962, p. 6.
the Liberal Party attracted demonstrated that the party successfully constituted its position. Out of the first 18 by-elections after 1959 the Liberals contested 16 reaching and average popular vote of roughly 24%.\textsuperscript{27} The rise of Liberal popular vote became apparent in autumn 1962 when a crucial round of 5 by-elections took place. On 22nd November 1962, elections were held in South Dorset, Chippenham, Central Norfolk, South Northamptonshire a Glasgow Woodside. Despite the fact that the Liberals did not win any of these constituencies the number of their voters rose considerably. In Woodside, the number of Liberal voters increased almost three times in comparison to the results of the 1959 general election. In Chippenham, the Liberal Candidate Christopher Layton defeated his Labour Party competitor and only a narrow margin of votes decided that he remained second after the candidate of the Conservative Party.\textsuperscript{28}

When assembling at their 1962 party conference in Llandudno there was an atmosphere of optimism among the party delegates. “The party has been on the up-and-up throughout the year, and will assemble with by-election triumph still ringing in their ears, in the knowledge that the party membership has increased by a third and income been doubled, and with the satisfaction of knowing that the doings of their party attract more public attention that at any time since the war.”\textsuperscript{29}

The optimism was underlined by exceptional results in local elections. The gains of the Liberal Party in the 1962 borough councils surpassed even those of the Labour Party.\textsuperscript{30} Out of the eight hundred of borough, county and urban district councillors in England and Wales won by the party between 1958 and 1962 over 500 got their seats in 1962.\textsuperscript{31} According to the National Opinion Polls published in February 1963 the Liberals were expected to win 36.8% of the votes in the following general election. Had this prediction come true, the Liberals would have had more members in the House of Commons than the Conservatives. With the Labour Party winning the election with the share of 44.2% of the vote, the Liberal Party would become the main opposition party.\textsuperscript{32}

Although there was no doubt about the recent Liberal success, there were widely shared doubts whether the Liberal Party can maintain the pace of advance until the general election. By the end of 1962, it seemed that the main task of the Liberal leadership is to persuade the public that the credibility of Liberal alternative as well as the increase in the preferences of the party was not merely a matter of moment but a part of a long term trend resulting from a development in British society. “The Liberals remain the only party that has consistently improved their position, although some of their steam has gone out of their recovery. They hang uncertainly between a relapse and another broad advance.”\textsuperscript{33}

First indications that the tide of Liberal revival reached its climax came as early as in late 1962. The by-elections results proved wide interest of the public in the Liberal

\textsuperscript{27} \textit{The Times}, 30. 10. 1961, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{28} \textit{The Times}, 23. 11. 1962, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{29} \textit{The Times}, 19. 9. 1962, p. 13.
\textsuperscript{30} \textit{The Times}, 11. 5. 1962, p.5.
\textsuperscript{31} \textit{The Times}, 10. 5. 1963, p. 14.
\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Liberal News}, 9. 2. 1963, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{33} \textit{The Times}, 24. 11. 1962, p. 9.
Party. At the same time, they demonstrated that the advance of the Liberal might not be strong enough to overcome the barriers of British majority voting system. This trend continued also in 1963 and 1964 when the nearing general election and mounting election campaign exposed the Liberal revival to the ultimate test of its credibility. Even in summer 1963, during the peak of the Profumo affair, the share of those who claimed to vote Liberal in the following general election decreased from 14.8 % in May to 13.8 % in June.34 In March 1964 the preferences given to the Liberal Party fell to 8.8 %, which was nearly the same as in 1959 and about 4 % less than in July 1963.35

The same indicated the 1963 elections into borough councils. According to the editorial of the Times, “the Liberal rebuff” was possibly the most important result of the elections. The net gain of 80 seats remained far below the expectations of both the party and the public and contrasted to the 320 the party gained in 1962. “After the 1962 elections the metropolitan suburbs, the home counties and the seaside resorts looked ripe for a Liberal harvest. Now it looks once more as if sporadic Liberal triumphs ... are to be explained more by special local circumstances than by a new political mood sweeping the country.”36 In the course of 1964, the enthusiasm for the Liberal alternative on the level of local government seemed to expire even further. In the borough council elections of 1964 the Liberal Party could not hold the trend from the previous years and, with parliamentary election at hand, lost over 60 seats.37

The general election of 1964 brought an end to the more than a decade of Conservative rule started by rather surprising electoral victory of Winston Churchill in 1951. With 317 seats won, Labour Party gained a narrow majority in the House of Commons. In terms of the popular vote, Wilson’s victory was even closer. The number of votes received by Labour exceeded those of the Conservatives only by roughly 200 000. The Liberal Party set 365 candidates to fight the election and won over 11 % of the popular vote and nine parliamentary seats. In the contested constituencies the average gain of Liberal candidates reached 18.5 %.38 In comparison to the previous general election this was a significant improvement. The number of Liberal voters almost doubled and the party won three more seats than in 1959.

In statistical terms, the election seemed to result in a considerable Liberal success. From the political point of view, however, the position of the party became rather precarious. “The result of the 1964 General Election was blow to me,” noted Joseph Grimond in his memoirs.39 With Wilson being the new Prime Ministers the Liberal Party could hardly hope to negotiate with Labour a realignment of the centre and radical left as Grimond originally envisaged. “The Liberal Party had very little, if any, bargaining strength. A government in the position of Labour held in 1964 is wise to make as much splash as it can before going to the country again as soon as possible.”40

---

35 The Times, 12.3.1964, p. 12.
36 The Times, 11.5.1963, p. 9.
37 The Times, 8.5.1964, p. 14.
40 Ibid.
II) ANATOMY OF THE LIBERAL REVIVAL (1958–1964)

A) “TAKE BRITAIN AHEAD”

“In the coming years, the struggle between the Liberal and Labour Parties for second place will, I believe, become the focal point of interest in the British political scene. But a liberal revival will not come by juggling with figures. It will come about only if there is a powerful body of opinion backed by a powerful political organisation dedicated specifically to putting liberal principles into practice.”

By the beginning of the 1960s there were several reasons to think that there might be a better days in front of the Liberal Party. Despite the fact that there was no direct causal relationship between the “liberal ethos” of the Sixties and the revival of British Liberal Party, both of the phenomena were to some extent conditioned by the same processes which had been at that time transforming British politics and society. It was the gradual decline of the British world-power status which contributed to the growth of public interest in new political alternatives. The public awareness of Britain’s relative decline was, however, not restricted to the sphere of foreign policy but embraced also the class-dominated society as well as its sluggish economic growth trapped in the series of stop-and-go cycles. Whereas the loss of world power status opened more space for new conceptions of British foreign-policy the changes in the society started to erode the class division which in 1950s contributed to the extreme degree of two-party domination in British politics. In politics, these background processes manifested themselves in the rise of what the contemporary political press generally called the “floating vote”. In early 1960s the floating vote consisted of a new kind of a voter which emerged as a result of the transforming society. Moreover, it was closely connected also with the rising number of the Conservative voters discontented by the policies of Macmillan’s cabinet, who, rather than for Labour, were more likely to opt for the “non-socialist” Liberal alternative. Least but not last, it was the devotion and stamina of the party members as well as its leaders who improved party’s organisation, ensured additional funding and form a new distinctive and applicable political programme.

It was the international affairs where the changing status of Britain became obvious first. Bipolar division of the world, spread of national liberation movements, global economic expansion of the United States as well as the continuing weakness of British economy and financial system contributed to diminishing of the British influence in the world affairs. In 1956–1957, the Suez Crisis revealed the weakness of British position in the Middle East and unveiled the “darker” side of the Special Relationship with the United States. Inherently tied to nuclear deterrent, the special relationship became subject to increasing public criticism especially after the Cuban Missile Crisis had demonstrated the marginal role of Whitehall in the decision-making process of the American government on the use of nuclear weapons.

In late 1962, after the Cuban Missile Crisis, Dean Acheson, former American Secretary of State, put the situation more plainly. “Great Britain has lost an empire and

has not yet found a new role. The attempt to play a separate power role—that is a role apart from Europe—a role based on a special relationship with the United States, a role based on being a head of the Commonwealth, which has no political structure, or unity, or strength and enjoys a fragile and precarious economic relationship by means of the sterling area and preferences in the British market—this role is about to be played out.”42 The uproar which Acheson’s speech caused all over the British press only demonstrated the precision with which it hit the spot.

Apart of the United States, also Britain’s relations with her former empire were undergoing increasing public scrutiny which in many cases resulted in disillusion. In early 1960s the system of British ties with its former colonies was in the middle of complex transformation. In February 1960, Macmillan held a speech in South Africa which turned into a symbol of the new approach the British government adopted and maintained in the relations with the Commonwealth. “The wind of change is blowing through this continent and whether we like it or not, this growth of national consciousness is a political fact. We must all accept it as a fact, and our national policies must take account of it.”43

The decline of Britain’s world-power status induced Macmillan’s government to reassess not only British policy toward African and Asian countries but also its policy towards Europe. In July 1961, the government announced its intention to seek membership in the European Economic Community. In 1961, both Macmillan and the Conservative Party bound her political fate with the vision of Britain in the EEC. According to Macmillan, the EEC was not only going to contribute to economic progress of Great Britain but also strengthen British international position as the membership would increase the value of British support to the USA in NATO.44 However, the application for the EEC membership was a highly controversial step which broke away from the tradition of British foreign policy in the second half of 1940s and 1950s. To its critics, no matter whether from the left or from the right, the EEC membership was an official recognition of weakness of both Macmillan’s government and Great Britain in general.

The failure of the EEC application intensified also debates on future direction of British economy. Both Macmillan and Wilson touched the issue in their speeches responding to the collapse of the negotiations in Brussels. Their content was surprisingly similar.45 “First, we have proposed a conference of Commonwealth Trade Ministers. Secondly, we shall work for close co-operation with the Commonwealth, the United States, EFTA and we hope the Six, for the Kennedy Round. Next we shall maintain our EFTA association. We shall work for world commodity agreements. At home we shall work for an expanding economy, without inflation, based upon an incomes policy,” proclaimed Macmillan one of his speeches.46

Public discontent with the foreign policy of Macmillan’s cabinet was revealed during the protests of the British New Left which peaked in 1961 and 1962. Protesting

43 The Times, 4. 2. 1960, p. 15.
against the “brinkmanship” of the Berlin and Cuban Missile crises as well as against the nature of British and American foreign and defence policies in general, the CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) managed to engage a mass of over 150 000 people in protest marches in 1961 and 1962. The response to the calls for nuclear disarmament was particularly strong in the Labour Party which from 1960 to 1961, to a large surprise of a large part of the British political spectrum, turned in favour of unilateral nuclear disarmament. Despite the fact that by the end 1962 the CND protests were slowly dying off, the nuclear deterrent remained an extremely controversial public issue which continued to produce calls for the change of British defence policy based on close attachment to the United States and their nuclear arsenal.

The feeling of crisis of the British super-power status was underlined by the long-term weak performance of British economy. By the end of 1950s, it was apparent that the British economic growth was significantly lagging behind the dynamically growing economies of Germany, Japan and the United States. The fact was that with the average increase of GDP between 1950 and 1973 nearing to 3% per annum, British economy was growing faster than ever before in the 20th century.47 Still, the United Kingdom was gradually losing its position on global markets. It was the British manufacturing industry as well as the traditional heavy industries such as shipbuilding which experienced the most serious problems. The weakness of British exports projected itself into the negative results of British balance of payments which in return tended to destabilise the pound sterling. Weak position of British hindered the possibilities of British government for maintaining more dynamic expansion by government expenditure as this could, if taken to far, force government to devaluate the pound. With sterling keeping its position of reserve currency of several tens of countries of the sterling zone devaluations had been out of the question. Not until 1967 did the government proceed to this radical solution. The result was that the growth took a form of rather mild stop-and-go economic cycles which characterised the performance of British economy in much of 1950s and 1960s.48

With the devaluation ruled-out, there was hardly any possible solution efficient enough to overcome the public discontent arising from growing unemployment rate. Macmillan’s government directed its hopes to the work of two corporate bodies which for some time had been trying to outline plans for modernisation of British economy. Both of them, the NEDC (National Economic Council) and NIC (National Incomes Commission) were set up in mid-1962 after Macmillan had rather drastically reshaped his cabinets.49

The purpose of Neddy and Nic, as they were nicknamed by the press, was to outline the future growth of economy without the risk of high inflation. In the main seat of the NEDC on London Bridge Street No 1, a group of politicians, economists and business and trade unions representatives discussed new strategies for British economic development. Among these, there were trade union leaders Frank Cousins

and George Woodcock conservative politician Reginald Maudling or Tyneside shipbuilder John Hunter.\(^50\)

It was, however, the economic department of NEDC headed by economist Donald MacDougall which bore the heaviest burden. In early 1963 NEDC committed itself to offer plans which would boost British economic growth up to 4 % GDP per year, an ambitious rate which would enable Britain to keep up with the expansion of the continental countries, especially the Six.\(^51\) The NEDC report published in February 1963 was, however, far from being a comprehensive plan consisting of concrete measures for government to adopt. Rather than that, it was merely a set of statistics which revealed the major problems of British economy.\(^52\) It did not add much to the plausibility of government’s economic targets. Quite on the contrary, it rather worsened public support for the government already damaged by other governmental initiatives such as the Pay Pause.\(^53\)

The most severe problems of British economy were connected with a number of underdeveloped regions. These were to a large extent the same areas hit by the Great Depression of 1930s. The on-going decline of British heavy industry resulted in concentration of unemployment in these regions. Whereas in most of the southern England the unemployment did not exceed 2 %, in northern England it reached 5 %. However, the most severe the situation was in Northern Ireland and Scotland. Here many regions faced unemployment exceeding 10 %.\(^54\)

Regional policy was thus a crucial issue for all of the post-war British governments. Despite all the efforts, there remained substantial differences between the North and the South limited by no means only to the economic performance and standards of living. For many British, the North, and the North East especially, continued to be associated with traditional stereotypes which concerned both its inhabitants and the weather. Facing the rising unemployment at home and collapsing Brussels negotiations in Europe, in January 1963 Macmillan announced appointment of Lord Hailsham to a new post — a special Minister for the North East. A massive government contract to Tyne district shipyards followed shortly afterwards.\(^55\)

Appointment of Lord Hailsham received a positive response in most of the media. “Tory wizard will go for quick action,” commented the Newcastle Evening Chronicle on the news of Hailsham’s tour around the North East.\(^56\) The public, however, attitudes cooled down soon. With the ministry for the North East being Hailsham’s fifth official appointment, it seemed that the whole initiative is rather a manoeuvre intended to calm down the public discontent.\(^57\) When, after six months of work, presented Hail-
sham the North East Development Council with the basic points of new development strategy, they were received rather sceptically as they shared much of the vague and general nature of the NEDC report from the beginning of the year.  

Hidden on the back pages of newspapers, on the background of high politics, there were debates revealing the complex character of the public sense of need for change. To many, a merely economic modernisation wasn’t sufficient. One of the authors of letters to the editor in the Newcastle Evening Courier thus for example argued that economic development in the North East requires first and foremost breaking away from the stereotypical image of a depression struck locality of the Jarrow marches era. It earned the person in question bitter criticism of the overwhelming majority of other respondents but, surprisingly, there were also some who shared similar opinions. “It is not only at sea that we are steeped in tradition, it seems that the way dad did things has had too much influence on us, both ashore and afloat.”

Much of the contrast between the old and new was unveiled during the high-profile and closely followed trials connected with major public affairs such as the publishing of D. H. Lawrence’s novel Lady Chatterley’s Lover or investigating the spy scandals of John Vassal, John Profumo or Kim Philby. The impact of these trials was by no means limited only to the field of law. It was one of the side consequences of the precedential nature of English Common Law that the jury often had to determine the normal or decide on the content of words denoting social and cultural phenomena which had been affected by social and cultural changes. These often concerned controversial concepts such as “prostitution” or “procuring” as was the case of the trial with Stephen Ward, the mentor of Profumo femme fatale Christine Keeler.

However, Profumo affair was far from being an isolated case. The connection between espionage in British government and wider social issues was manifested also during the trial with John Vassal admiralty intelligence officer who was transferring secret information to KGB. Right from the beginning, the trial touched the issue of homosexuality, still considered a crime under English law, as it soon turned out that KGB used photographs of Vassal having sex with other men to blackmail him. A debate on boulvarisation of media soon followed as it was revealed that some the stories in the press concerning Vassal were clearly manufactured. After Vassal’s sentence, the government set up a special tribunal presided over by Lord Radcliffe whose main aim was to examine the role of the press during the trial and re-investigate the case especially with respect to the alleged involvement of Vassal’s superiors Thomas Galbraith and Lord Carrington. The tribunal summoned a number of high positioned members of the intelligence service as the journalists concerned. When asked to reveal the source of their information, the tribunal gained a new dimension in dealing with the freedom of speech and journalists right to protect their sources. As a result of protracted refusal several tabloid journalists such as Bernard Mulholland from the Daily Mail or Reginald

62 The Times, 10. 10. 1962, p. 8.
Foster from the *Daily Sketch* were sentenced to several months of imprisonment for the contempt of court. This left behind a lot of animosity between Whitehall and Fleet Street which was to come to the surface just a few months later during the Profumo affair.\(^{63}\)

At the time of the 1964 general election, the notion reform and vision became one of the most widely used terms in the public debate. “Tory need to appear credible as a reforming party,” claimed one of the *Times* headlines already in early 1964.\(^{64}\) The prominence of these concepts in the British public discourse between 1959 and 1964 was to some extent extraordinary; not least because of the traditionally pragmatic and evolutionary character of British politics. In contrast to the United States, where the governments presented their policies integrated under the head of a more general visions such as Eisenhower’s New Look or Kennedy’s New Frontiers, the British governments of the 1950s and the 1960s never developed comparable schemes. The titles of the electoral party manifestos rarely outlived the elections and the politics remained a matter of particular issues rather than of complex visions or reform schemes through which explained their policies American governments since the times of F. D. Roosevelt. In the public discourse of early 1960s this began to change. Suddenly there was social demand for visions of future Britain. Works such as Michael Shanks’ *Stagnant Society* or Anthony Sampson’s *Anatomy of Britain* attracted massive public attention reflected among others in the advertising campaign surrounding them.\(^{65}\)

**B) THE RISE OF A NEW VOTER AND THE CONSERVATIVE PROTEST VOTE**

In Britain of 1950s and 1960s, society remained to a large ruled by class. Despite the relatively high upward mobility, class still determined much of the aspirations and life expectations of the British.\(^{66}\) In politics, the social division into upper, middle and working class strongly influenced the electoral patterns benefiting predominantly two dominant political parties. The phenomenon of the class vote reached its peak in 1950s and early 1960s. With the turnout nearing 80 %, the share of the vote won by Tories and the Labour Party in the general elections of 1951 and 1955 surpassed 96 % of the total.\(^{67}\)

However, as early as in 1959, there were signs that the two-party hegemony is weakening. In 1959, the vote captured by the Conservatives and Labour party fell slightly to 93 %. In 1964, already 12.5 % of the voters voted neither Labour nor Conservatives.\(^{68}\) Underneath this change in statistics there was a deep social transformation. In late 1950s, the new post-war generation started entering active economic and political life. Many of its members rose from the working class background to the middle class through the educational system. The change was apparent especially in the middle classes that grew in number as well as diversity. It was especially the clerical, professional as well as white-collar and black-coated workers whose numbers


\(^{64}\) *The Times*, 14. 2. 1964, p. 6.

\(^{65}\) *The Times*, 11. 10. 1962, p. 10.


\(^{68}\) COOK, C. — STEVENSON, J., op. cit., p. 46.
were increasing. In 1959, the ratio of non-manual workers in electrical, gas or chemical industry reached 30%. This process was extremely fast and there were voices that contemplated that the spread of new middle class meritocracy could remove barriers determined by class status. Soon, it started to be assigned with increasing political significance. Many contemplated the idea that the new middle-class suburbia spreading around the major British cities could become what the counties were for the Conservatives and the industrial towns for Labour. It was the interests of this group of people which to a large extent determined the shape of Liberal housing and transport policies which called for a massive building schemes and development of integrated local and long distance transport system.

The Liberal Party targeted at the uncommitted voters already in the general election of 1959. Grimond hoped to tone down strong class distinction in British society and two-party domination in British politics. “There are millions of Liberals in this country. There are also millions of young people and uncommitted voters who simply do not see themselves mirrored in the image of Tory bigwigs or Labour bosses. There are all the consumers, small business owners, professional men and technicians, craftsmen and farmers, fishermen, shopkeepers and pensioners who have no interest in the Capital v Labour struggle and are greatly harmed by it.” When the Liberals won the 1962 by-election in Orpington, constituency which exactly matches this new middle class suburbanite pattern the press called it “a revolt of the white-collar voters”. “Orpington is a suburb filled with middle-class people whose wages have not kept up with inflation, who have been given no Schedule A relief, who are buying houses a little beyond their means and who are having to pay higher interest rates on their mortgages,” explained the Times Lubbock’s victory.

Whereas the Orpington by-election was interpreted as an evidence of the rising Liberal appeal among the new suburban voters, who formerly inclined to conservatism, the by-election in Montgomeryshire presented a test of old allegiances. The Welsh constituency of Montgomeryshire was solidly Liberal since the days in which William Gladstone led the liberals. In contrast to Orpington it was predominantly rural with most of the voters being farmers or small town inhabitants with a strong sense of patriotism. Despite the competition of Labour, Conservatives and Welsh nationalists the Liberals managed to win with overwhelming majority, which Hooson further confirmed in 1964 general election.

Grimond’s political strategy thus hoped to combine the political potential of the new centre with the old Liberal bastions concentrated predominantly in rural areas.

---

71 The Times, 22. 9. 1962, p. 8.
72 The Times, 21. 9. 1959, p. 15.
74 The Times, 15. 3. 1962, p. 10.
75 The Times, 15. 3. 1962, p. 10.
76 The Times, 30. 4. 1962, p. 6.
of Wales and Scotland. Grimond himself was for more than twenty years the M.P. for Orkney and Shetland. This was a broad but also fragile and inconsistent coalition enabled also by the relatively undeveloped state of Scottish and Welsh nationalist movement.

In addition to the previous groups, the Liberals also intended to get support of the young voters. The Liberals were systematically creating an image of party of young people. With the voting age of 18 years being in early 1960s only a matter of debate, the Liberals were close to become the first party to officially back this measure. This new electoral strategy enabled the Liberals to increase its appeal among the voters and reach new areas which had been up to that time dominated by other parties. However, the complex and rather fragmented structure of the liberal electoral appeal characterises the nature of the liberal revival as such.

Between 1959 and 1964, the Liberals did not profit only from the wider consequences of the transforming society. It was also the phenomenon of conservative protest vote which stood behind so dramatically looking Liberal revival. “Public feeling over Suez is a sign of frustration—a symptom of a pent-up desire of people to do something, to respond to a Government which has some courage and imagination. Why we do not cash in on this feeling?” This is what Jo Grimond asked liberal audience in his New Year message for 1957.

After the conservative fiasco in the Orpington by-elections the press voiced several theories which identified the conservative protest vote as the major factor behind the liberal victory. Their variability reflected the disparity, instability and variability of the phenomenon of the protest vote as such.

Many of the contemporaneous comments explained the conservative losses as a result of a deviation from truly conservative principles. These concerns were frequently voices especially by the Right Wing of the party represented by Lord Salisbury. Macmillan had to face party opposition from these circles since his very accession to power. It was the foreign and defence policies at which the Right Wing concentrated most. As a result, the opposition of the Right Wing conservative party backbenchers grew most severe especially after the Winds of Change speech and Common Market application. However, despite the public influence which the opinions of the group gained thanks to the strong support of the Beaverbrook’s press empire, the opposition of the right wing presented to Macmillan’s leadership only a limited thread as the group appealed to a rather limited group of electorate which was unlikely to vote other than the Conservative party in the general election.

Contradicting this, some of the contemporaneous analysts claimed the government’s fiscal policies to be behind the overwhelming Liberal victory in what was by then considered a safe conservative constituency. “A large and growing section of voters are sick of being ground between the striking class on the one hand and the expense account on the other. They are sick of inflationary tendencies of both.”

77 The Times, 12. 9. 1963, p. 10.
78 The Times, 29. 12. 1956, p. 3.
80 The Times, 17. 3. 1962, p. 9.
According to these voices the turn to liberalism in Orpington was a “revolt” of suburban, white-collar middle class, which in particular was hit by inflation and rising interest rates.\textsuperscript{81} The unpopular Bank rate policies made mortgages more expensive and less accessible. In the suburbia of 1960s Britain this was a major setback as it was here where the new trend of the development of a democracy of property-owners started setting its roots. Between 1950 and 1973, the number of households owning their property rose from roughly one third to more than a half.\textsuperscript{82} It was the Pay Pause which became a symbol of this type of fiscal policy. The Chancellor of the Exchequer Selwyn Lloyd announced the pause in the increase of wages in July 1961 as a part of the whole set of measures intended to reduce public expenditures. “In my view there must be a pause until productivity has caught up and there is room for further advance,” argued Lloyd.\textsuperscript{83} The government intended to stop increase in wages of government employees as well as employees in public sector whose wages were regulated by wage councils. Moreover, the cabinet hoped to persuade also the private sector to follow his new policy. The new policy received a stormy response with a number of the trade unions raising their voice in protest immediately after its announcement. However, the public controversy surrounding it peaked in early 1962 when it had already ended and the first comprehensive estimates of its results reached the media.\textsuperscript{84} For many of those who tried to understand the development of British policy the loss of conservative parliamentary seat Orpington was among them.\textsuperscript{85}

The processes outlined above continued to influence British politics during the whole period between the 1959 and 1964. During these years they contributed to the emergence of considerable electoral potential which for most of this period seemed to ripe for the Liberals. In 1964, the capacity of the floating vote capacity was estimated to amount to 25% of the total which was considered enough to enable the Liberals to determine the balance of power between the two major parties.\textsuperscript{86} “If it is floating it can be pushed. Push it,” encouraged Grimond the members of the party at the dawn of the 1964 election.\textsuperscript{87}

III) THE REVIVAL OF THE LIBERAL PARTY IN CONTEXT OF THE BRITISH 1961 EEC

A) EUROPEAN POLICY OF THE LIBERAL PARTY
Of all the factors that contributed to the recovery of the Liberal Party in early 1960s the European integration probably best reflects the character of the Liberal revival as well as the dynamic of its progress. When in summer 1961 Harold Macmillan sub-

\textsuperscript{81} The Times, 15. 3. 1962, p. 10; 29. 3. 1962, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{82} JOHNSON, P. (ed.), op. cit., p. 321.
\textsuperscript{83} The Times, 26. 7. 1961, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{84} The Times, 2. 4. 1962, p. 11; 28. 4. 1962, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{85} The Times, 12. 4. 1962, p. 14.
\textsuperscript{86} The Times, 7. 9. 1964, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{87} The Times, 7. 9. 1964, p. 6.
mitted the first British application to the EEC the topic of European integration had not yet been fully politicized. Rather than being one of the political cleavages of that time it was an above-party issue which cut through the lines of both Labour and Conservative parties. Only during the protracted negotiations Brussels when the question of the EEC membership turned into a top public issue did the two major parties adopt more distinctive attitudes. Despite the opposition of the right wing of the Conservative party represented by Lord Salisbury, Derek Walker Smith and many others, the main body of the Conservative party under Macmillan’s and Heath’s leadership continued to support the turn to Europe. On the other hand, Labour under Hugh Gaitskell and Harold Wilson adopted a policy of pragmatic and opportunistic opposition. Labour refused primarily the terms negotiated by Macmillan’s conservatives rather than idea of the membership in principle. In 1967 cabinet led by Wilson himself applied for the membership in the European Communities.

In contrast to the two major parties, a clearly defined European policy presented an important part of the Liberal Party’s political creed since the end of the Second World War. “The Council of Europe is a Liberal conception. It is the realisation of a dream of European Liberals for two centuries,” proclaimed the Liberal Party election Manifesto in the 1951 general election.\(^8\) The Liberals supported European integration in principle as well as in practice and continuously called for the British participation in the process. The party perceived unification of Europe as a necessary guarantee of economic recovery of post-war Europe as well as a bulwark against the Communist threat to the liberal democracy.

After the failure of Council of Europe to provide a platform for deeper economic and political integration of the Continent, the Liberal Party turned their support also to the European structures founded on the basis of the European Steel and Coal Community. The Liberals advocated: “… wholehearted support for the European Defence Community and for the Coal and Steel Community and it rejects the insincere plea that our Commonwealth responsibilities are any bar to that closer association with Western Europe which is so highly desirable in the interests of both France and Germany and the settlement of their agelong quarrel. .... Liberals will continue to goad the Government when they feel that it is reluctant to play its proper role in the evolution of organs such as the Council of Europe and the Coal and Steel Community.\(^9\)

At the onset of 1960s this policy became a major asset to the Grimond’s leadership. By applying for the EEC membership Macmillan only indirectly confirmed that the Liberal’s political claims from 1950s had been substantiated.\(^9\) Moreover, the Liberal Party was now in possession of a policy which enabled the Liberals to position themselves more clearly against both Labour and the Conservatives. Moreover, the public debate on Britain’s place in Europe which accompanied the whole course of the protracted accession negotiations in Brussels provided the liberal politicians with


many new opportunities to address British public on nationwide level. A considerable number of Liberal politicians possessed a strong influence in many pro-European lobby organisations which emerge in response to the new European policy of Macmillan’s cabinet. Among others, Gladwyn Jebb became the chairman of the Common Market Campaign the main of the pro-European British lobbyist organisations.91 The political news reporting in Observer by Nora Beloff held a considerable prestige and penetrated also into a number of other media.

The sudden social demand for reflection on British attitudes towards Europe was responded to by the Liberal Party also by organising conferences and publishing numerous political, economic and social tracts elaborating particular perspectives on British membership. The Liberals took an active part in this scholarly debate; not least because of the strong influence Liberalism still had among the British intellectual elites. Organisations such as Oxford University Liberal Club gathered influential public figures such as historian Max Beloff or journalist Paul Foot. Conferences organised by the Liberal Party were attended not only by prominent British politicians and scholars such as John Pinder and Shirley Williams, but also by representatives of the EEC member states such as who bore some connection to the process of European integration such as Etienne Hirsch or Pierre Gallois.92

B) LIBERAL EUROPEANISM
At the time of the submission of the first British EEC application the Liberal Party presented the most pro-European force in British politics. Still the European attitudes within the party were by no means unified. Neither were they identical with political stands advocated by the European federalists from the Continent such as Jean Monnet and his Action Committee for Europe. Monnet’s vision of federalised Europe, in fact, received among the British Liberals only limited support. Rather than promotion of federalism the Liberal media demonstrate intentions to overcome the traditional distinction between federation and con-federation. A number of Liberal intellectuals called for a creation of a completely new hybrid type of international organisation. Such considerations were reflected for instance in an article in Liberal News from late 1962. It suggested creation of a community without federal powers led by a political committee which would held powers in foreign policy and defence whereas the internal affairs would remain controlled by national governments.93

There was little agreement on what the notion of federalism actually stands for. A Glossary of European terminology A Guide to Common Market published by the Observer defined federation as: „A union of states whose members surrender their sovereignty over the most important subjects such as foreign policy, defence, tariffs to a central government while keeping control over some part sof their internal affairs. “94 Still there was also a number of other interpretations which accented

different aspects of the concept. In his work *Liberal Challenge*, Grimond expressed reservations about the political usage of the term as such, calling it „a word which I think it wise to use as little as possible in this context just because it can mean so many different things.‟

In spite of these ambiguous attitudes toward the European federal structures in general, the liberals strongly supported the idea of European parliament. They envisaged creation of a single European parliamentary body which would exercise democratic control over all European institutions. Moreover, they also advocated the European parliament to be merged with assemblies of other European international organisations such as Western European Union. Similarly to the Committee, the European parliament was supposed to exercise its authority mainly on the field of foreign and defence policy. „A European Parliament ought to be a much more powerful instrument of control over the executive than the British Commons, just because the executive machine is newer and more remote,‟ outlined his thoughts in the *Observer* Max Beloff.

The Liberal media presented the future structure of united Europe as not yet decided and open to British influence. Not even the symbolic commitment of unconditional acceptance of the Treaties of Rome, which the British government had to include into the official text of the application, was considered to be the definite determinant of the future direction of European political integration. More importantly, the chance to take part in and influence the construction of European economic and political structures was endorsed as one of the main reason for joining the Six. The prevailing opinion was that it could help Britain to compensate for her loss of influence in global international affairs. This had a particular appeal on British public as there were concerns in the British left that the EEC could evolve into a self-centred, regional power bloc with protectionist economic policies. It was the membership of the United Kingdom which was alleged to prevent this development from happening. The Liberals could thus present the EEC also as an entity compatible with Liberal political and economic ideology and refute the criticism of the National Liberals, free traders and Eurosceptic media campaigns which frequently identified the EEC as an analogy to the federation of the United States of America which leads to the end of state sovereignty and loss of national identity.

The public discussion on the decaying international influence of the United Kingdom and the debate on British EEC membership were in the Liberal media closely connected. Integrated Europe with Great Britain as a member was perceived as a guarantee of broader unity of the West which was indispensible in the conflict with the Soviet Union and Communism. In terms of foreign policy thus, by arguing in favour of joining the Six, the Liberal Party opposed the strong tendencies to neutralist foreign policy and unilateral nuclear disarmament present at that time especially in the Labour Party.

---

96 *The Observer*, 29. 4. 1962, p. 11.
97 *The Observer*, 29. 4. 1962, p. 11.
It was symptomatic that the Liberal press often speculated that should the Brussels negotiations fail the future government, no matter if Labour or Tory, could attempt to solve the economic problems by intensification of the trade with the socialist countries. These speculations appeared in the press affiliated with the Liberal Party for instance during the Khrushchev’s visit of the United Kingdom in summer 1961. Accompanied by Soviet space celebrity Yuri Gagarin, Khrushchev as well as the Soviet industrial exhibition in London received by the British press quite a welcoming response.100

The EEC membership thus played an important role also in the Liberal Party’s conceptions of defence and foreign policies, which were in nature very close to those advocated by Kennedy’s administration. The Liberals often criticised Macmillan’s government for its foreign and defence policies based on nuclear deterrent claiming that Skybolt and Plaris deals jeopardised the prospects of British EEC membership. Pro-European sentiments of most of the Liberals had strong Atlantic connotations and the British Liberal press acknowledged the support with which the American government backed the British attempts to join the EEC.101

The pro-American attitudes of the Liberal Party were closely connected with the structure of Western alliance as a whole; including the crucial issue of nuclear weapons. „The West must be adequately defended by possession of the ultimate deterrent and with conventional weapons, but this must be done through the partnership of the Western Alliance. The fewer nations that manufacture the H-bomb, the more security there will be.”102 In 1962, in an article in the Liberal News Jo Grimond argued in favour of negotiations with France on common European defence policy. Grimond offered France lease of British V-Bombers. At the same time he called for the production of nuclear weapons to remain under the control of the United States. The shift away from nuclear deterrent concerned also the British military presence on the Continent as the war plans of the BOAR (British Army of the Rhine) were supposed to be based only on the use of conventional weapons.103

However, common European defense policy of this kind was hardly conceivable. It was unacceptable for France as well as for the Federal Republic of Germany. Rather than to the European powers, it was the British public, where gradually mounted the activities of pacifist organisations such as CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament), to which these foreing political strategies were addressed.104 The notion of the EEC as a firm guarantee of Britain in NATO enabled the Liberals to efficiently gather support among centre-right voters not only for the pro-European Liberal policy as a whole but also for the party as such.105

The European visions reflected in the media affiliated with the Liberal Party demonstrate the tendency to capture the contemporaneous trends in the develop-

ment of British public opinion. Moreover, they outline the way the Liberal Party used the European issue to create wider support for its political programme. Not only did the connection of the EEC membership with Cold War help the Liberals to broaden the electoral appeal of the European issue, it also provided them with an opportunity to modify British foreign policy in accordance with the party conception. The support of the public in the international affairs could also compensate for the lack of party’s distinctive identity and other elements of its manifesto which to the general public remained rather controversial.

C) LIBERAL PARTY AND BRITISH ACCESSION NEGOTIATIONS TO THE EEC 1961–1963

The news of the intention of Macmillan’s cabinet to apply for the EEC membership had been boiling on the pages of the press for several weeks before the decision was officially announced. In June most of the British press reported that the government seriously contemplated this option.106 The liberal press launched a new wave of criticism focused on the hesitation of the government. „Suddenly it all fell into place — we can join the United Arab Republic!” said one of the caricatures in the Liberal News. Moreover, the Liberal News targeted also at the ranks of British euro sceptics both on the right and left of the political spectrum and their “a hysterical last ditch campaign by curious alliance of forces of darkness (the Beaverbrook press, Tribune, Free Trade Union, Mr Harold Wilson and some of the more reactionary trade unions)”.107

However, the reaction of the liberal media was not based only on negative campaigning. Already at the beginning of August the Liberal News announced preparations of a new ambitious campaign called Take Britain Ahead. Similarly, the Observer announced publication of two series of articles called Can Britain Do It? and Britain Tomorrow, which were supposed to discuss the British relationship to Europe. 108

The response of the British Liberal press to the decision of the Macmillan’s cabinet demonstrates what a massive encouragement the 1961 British EEC application in fact was to the Liberal Party. The change in the course of British politics rose among the British liberals’ high hopes. Many of the liberal supporters considered the “Entry into Europe” to be the first vital step in a wider transformation of British economy, politics and society. Moreover, many also believed that the rise of Europe as an issue in British politics could contribute to the revival of the Liberal Party.

All these ideas strongly resonated at the 1961 Liberal Party conference which took place in Edinburgh on 20th and 21st September. Together with the renewed crisis over Berlin, the EEC presented application the main issue discussed by the delegates. Under the shadow of Berlin Wall built during August and September 1961 the delegates passed a party resolution, which refused the idea of unilateral disarmament as advocated by the Labour Party.109 However, the resolution also called for recognition of the

German democratic republic *de facto* in order to establish a basis for further accommodation on the Berlin question, which rather shocked two guests from the German Free Democratic Party who decided to take a protest leave.\(^{110}\)

With respect to the Common Market entry, the new East-West tension only confirmed opinion shared by many Liberals, *i.e.* that the British membership in the EEC was a desirable and perhaps even necessary contribution Britain should pay to the unity of the Western alliance. The party delegates passed a resolution approving of the Common Market membership by an overwhelming majority. The Liberals resolutely refused concerns that the EEC could seriously harm British agriculture or result in the fall in standards of living. When a group of euro-sceptic delegates presented a motion to supplement the resolution by an additional clause which would require the government to reach appropriate guarantees for the Commonwealth countries before acceding to the treaties of Rome, it received support by only 30 delegates out of roughly 1300.\(^{111}\)

In contrast to the annual conferences of the Labour and Conservative parties the conference of the 1961 Edinburgh Liberal Party conference turned into a manifestation of ideological unity and support to Grimond’s leadership, which by now hold a firm control over the party. In 1950s the party had to face an outflow of a number of its influential members. Figures such as Sir Walter Alexander or Roy Douglas left the party motivated partly also by their distaste to the liberal pro-European policies which they found incompatible with their free trade persuasion.\(^{112}\)

At the time of the 1961 Edinburgh party conference, the free traders had already lost much of their former influence. „Party ghosts, in this case free trade absolutists, may walk the floor, but they can scarcely be heard to squeak and gibber,” commented the situation at the conference one of the editorials of the *Times*.\(^{113}\) Instead of to the invisible hand of the market, the Liberals in Edinburgh entrusted the future of British economy to five-year economic development plan executed by a planning committee, a scheme not entirely unsimilar to the French model represented by *Commissariat Général du Plan*.\(^{114}\) The policy of support to the EEC entry continued to work as a catalyst in the Liberal shift away from the classical 19\(^{th}\) century *lassaize faire* liberalism even in the following years. At the time of party’s 1962 conference the Times spoke about the competition of Grimond’s “Pink Radicals” with more traditional “Blue Whigs”.\(^{115}\) Moreover, even in 1962 the party was left by a number of members in protest to the new political conception of Grimond’s leadership. In 1962, due to his opposition to the EEC, Oliver Smedley, the party also the president of the Cobden Club and leading member of the Free Trade League Oliver Smedley to found an anti-Common Market lobby group called *Keep Britain Out*.

\(^{110}\) *The Times*, 23. 11. 1961, p. 5.

\(^{111}\) *The Times*, 23. 11. 1961, p. 5.


\(^{114}\) CLARKE, S. — CURTICE, J., op. cit., pp. 95–98.

\(^{115}\) *The Times*, 21. 9. 1962, p. 12.
Similarly to the Edinburgh conference, the Common Market remained a key issue also at the Liberal Party conference in 1962. With the Labour Party moving into opposition to the EEC entry, Grimond used the opportunity to criticise the spreading euro-scepticism as well as to call for the pro-European supporters of the Labour Party to join the Liberals.\[116\] There was a widely shared enthusiasm for Europe among the party delegates who confirmed the party’s pro-European policy by passing Europeanism backing amendment to the conference resolution.\[117\]

In the atmosphere of optimism, rose a prospective candidate for future M.P. E. Dangerfield and asked: “Do we accept that we want this country to go into federation?” “Do you really accept that we be legislated for by a European parliament?” “Do you really think that it is possible for this country to be a part of a Federal state of Europe and still be the centre and core of Commonwealth?” According to a political correspondent of the *Times*, she did that with the intention of challenging the issue and subjecting it to more critical considerations. No matter if this was true, the assembly of Liberal delegates responded with three massive cheering yesses. This resonated not only in the press but also among the party leaders who felt that such a commitment could damage rather than benefit the party in the next general election. “To try to put the NATO countries into a straitjacket at this time will do a great deal of harm. I ask you to make it quite clear that we are not a federal party for Europe,” quoted the *Times* part of the speech of Mark Bonham-Carter.\[118\]

Despite the overwhelming support for European integration which the Liberal Party manifested at the party conferences in 1961 and 1962 the European enthusiasm of many Liberals was clearly limited. The ordinary voters of the party were much less passionate about the British membership in the Common Market; less than the optimistic tone of the Liberal press would suggest and possibly also less than the party leaders were willing to publicly admit. Not even two weeks before the start of the Edinburgh conference the *Daily Express* published a public opinion survey analysing the degree of membership support among the voters of the major British political parties. According to it, only 33% of the Liberal Party voters were in favour of the entry whereas 37% opposed it. This would make the Liberal Party electorate even more euro-sceptic than for instance that of the Labour Party.\[119\] While it might be questionable to what degree of accuracy this survey really captured the actual balance of opinion amongst the core Liberal voters, it is more than likely that amongst those who voted the liberals as an expression of a long-term disagreement with the conservative government there was little excitement about Britain being a member of the “United States of Europe”.

The press conference held by de Gaulle on 14th January 1963 hit the British Liberals very hard. Similarly to the rest of British media, the liberal press refused any exaggerated responses and called for a positive approach during the whole remaining


period of the negotiations. Many British liberals perceived it as a “French attempt to conquer Europe” and as such it was intended to be presented in the media.\textsuperscript{120}

British public perception of the crisis among the liberals was to a large extent determined by the character of the preceding European debate. The liberals emphasised predominantly the adverse impact of the Veto on the unity of Western alliance in the Cold War. The liberal press in Britain often stressed the fact that the failure of the accession negotiations resulted in the crisis of the Six rather than in the crisis of the United Kingdom. To repair the damage the Liberal Party called revitalisation of cooperation within OECD and GATT.

The news of de Gaulle’s press conference reached Grimond on an official visit of the United States. After his return, he held a speech in the EEC assembly in Strasbourg. He warned against the emergence of Europe dominated by France and Germany. Moreover, he called for the creation of strong European institution subject to the democratic control of powerful European parliament which could serve as a counterweight to the French-German axis and which could create conditions for the retirement of political dinosaurs.\textsuperscript{121}

The failure of the Brussels negotiations resulted also in a new wave of criticism of Macmillan’s government. The attitudes of British liberal press grew increasingly critical of Macmillan especially after the signature of the Nassau agreements in December 1962. In the liberal eyes Macmillan again turned into one of the “old and stubborn relicts” of the old world. During the Brussels crisis the Liberal News claimed de Gaulle to be merely an imitator of the Macmillan’s Tory policies based on a “superman” leader and the idea of powerful independent nation.\textsuperscript{122}

After the end of the Brussels negotiations the Common Market as a political issue lost in Britain, at least temporarily, much of the prominence it gained between July 1961 and February 1963. This fact was reflected also by the Liberal Party annual conference of 1963 in Brighton. It concentrated predominantly on domestic issues crucial for the next general election such as planning for economic expansion, housing and transport policies or electoral reform and education.\textsuperscript{123} Whereas the Liberals rather confirmed the European policy from previous years, they prepared a new foreign policy statement concerning Commonwealth called \textit{Towards World Order} demanding extension of the Colombo plan and deeper coordination of activities of Commonwealth countries governments. Resolutions critical of the regimes in south and central Africa were now supplemented by calls for progress in transformation of remaining British possessions into equal Commonwealth members.\textsuperscript{124} By the 1964 general election the attention of the public as well as of the Liberal party turned fully from the membership in the Common Market to other issues such as NATO multilateral nuclear force.\textsuperscript{125}

\textsuperscript{120} \textit{Liberal News}, 19. 1. 1963, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{121} \textit{Liberal News}, 16. 2. 1963, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{122} \textit{Liberal News}, 2. 2. 1963, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{123} \textit{The Times}, 11. 9. 1963, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{125} \textit{The Times}, 2. 9. 1964, p. 6.
D) BRITISH EEC APPLICATION AND THE DYNAMIC OF THE LIBERAL REVIVAL

The appeal of the Liberal European policy on the British public between 1961 and 1963 very aptly characterises the nature of the Liberal revival as such. Macmillan’s decision to seek membership in the Common Market transformed European integration from a general above-party topic discussed rather in abstract and theoretical terms into a political issue which attracted nation-wide attention and which served the significant points in the electoral competition of the major political parties.

At the time of the submission of the British EEC application the Liberals benefited from a long-term and clearly defined European policy. They also benefited from the positive public response to the new Macmillan’s policy. The option of EEC membership offered Grimond’s party leadership to gain public attention on much larger scale than before. Moreover, it enabled the Liberal party to distinguish itself more clearly from other political parties. Real possibility of joining the Six enabled the liberal policy planners to integrate the EEC into their conceptions for future development of Britain with respect to both foreign and domestic policy. The impact of the Common Market on British economy presented one of the crucial elements of the reform advocated by the Liberals.

In addition to this, the European enthusiasm for Europe among many current and potential liberal supporters contributed much to the reinvigoration of the party as such. Support for the EEC membership turned into one of the issues which split Grimond’s new liberals and the old “Gladstonians”. Wide support for the membership among the party members enabled Grimond’s leadership to keep the overwhelming majority of the party united behind his political conception. Moreover, European integration provided the Liberals with a platform which they could use to promote other points of their political programme and reach new voters, which became particularly obvious in the by-elections of 1962.

However, as the negotiations in Brussels were getting more and more complicated and as the support of British public opinion to the EEC entry was gradually dissolving also the Liberal alternative began to lose its appeal. The increasingly troublesome negotiations and, eventually, the De Gaulle’s veto resulted in strong patriotic response, which in its nature was sceptical of the EEC and which reduced the number of British voters willing to approve such openly pro-European policy as that of the Liberals. In addition to it, the de Gaulle’s veto also significantly changed the character of future general elections. With the removal of Europe as one of the dividing issues the party struggled to present the voters with an alternative which would be in the crucial points of social and economic policies clearly distinguishable from both the Labour and Conservatives.

CONCLUSION

The results of the Liberal Party in the general election of 1964 did not allow its leaders to exercise such political influence as they hoped during the previous years. Despite the rise in the popular vote, the outcome of the election was a political defeat as the low number of seats in the House of Commons deprived of the possibility to negotiate
an alliance government. The scenarios predicting new emergence of the Liberal Party as a major political party turned out to be over-optimistic. However, in spite of this, from 1956 to 1964 the Liberals successfully managed to reverse the negative development of the previous years. During the “Liberal Spring” the Liberal Party successfully stabilised its power and demonstrated that even in the two-party British political system there is a space for a third party. Two years later, in 1966 when the Liberals had to face another general election test, managed to keep most of their electorate and even increased the number of their members in the House of Commons from nine to twelve. In mid 1960s the Liberals presented a political force which was established on the parliamentary level and which possessed a new progressive-looking political identity which distinguished the party from both Labour and the Conservatives.

The sudden rise in the Liberal support in early 1960s may be contributed to the conservative protest vote which started increasing with respect to Macmillan’s foreign and domestic policies. Still, neither after the peak of the public enthusiasm for the Liberal alternative in late 1962 nor after the setback of 1964 general election did the Liberal Party return to such a marginal as it had in 1950s. This shows that behind the shifts of the floating vote or Conservative protest vote there was also a more profound social transformation which had been driving the forces of the Liberal revival.

The first signs of the transition to the post-industrial model of society resulted in the weakening of the class and bi-partisan nature of British politics. The growing unpopularity of Macmillan’s government increased the number of absenting voters as well as the number of those willing to turn their support to the non-socialist alternative to the Tories. It was the British middle-class white-collar suburb where these two processes intersected. Consequently, the swing to Liberalism in constituencies such as Orpington provided legitimacy for the public image of the revival as well as for the optimism advocated by Liberal media.

Whether relevant of not, much of the changes which had been affecting British politics, society and culture in early 1960s were considered liberal in nature, irrespective of what liberal actually meant and how much some social groups criticised it. “Effete and selfish prudence may argue for prostration before the ‘wind of change’ in Africa and an attempt to secure western interest by replace European service by American finance. But let no one claim virtue for an ignorant and cynical ‘liberalism’ which pretends there can be freedom without order and is indifferent to safety and welfare of primitive people.”

The revival of the British Liberal Party was one of the symptoms of a profound process which had been changing the face of Britain in 1960s. In politics, it resulted in emergence of new political cleavages which contributed to the weakening of the bi-partisan domination. “Winds of Change” in the Commonwealth, political impact of EEC application, economic shadows of the New Elizabethan Britain enabled the Liberals to position themselves more clearly with respect to the two dominant parties. More-

127 COOK, C. — STEVENSON, J., op. cit., p. 45.
128 The Times, 29. 6. 1960, p. 15.
over, they involved large number of new voters in issues advocated by the Liberals.

However, there were also other factors that contributed to the stabilisation of new political position of the Liberal party. One was the rise of Europe as a political cleavage in British politics encouraged the political revival of the Liberal Party. The nature of Liberal europeanism demonstrates the specific character of the British european attitudes in general. Despite the serious economic side it was the political and international aspect of the European integration which was probably most debated by the British public. Despite the fact that the European issue contributed to the Liberal revival 1958–9–1964 it also reflected its limits. After the switch in public opinion toward negative attitudes to EEC membership the it was also the liberal party who suffered and the ambitions of its politicians remained unfulfilled.

In addition to the Common Market, it was also the relatively undeveloped state of modern Welsh and Scottish nationalisms which conditioned the fact that the Liberals were able to gain the support of the new type of voter and, at the same time, keep its traditional followers in Wales and Scotland. Moreover, the gradual merge of the National Liberals with the Conservative Party which deprived the Liberal Party of a dangerous rival claiming its share in the liberal political identity. This enumeration is by no means complete. There were other forces in British society which bore some consequence to the Liberal revival for whose analysis there was not enough space. Probably the most noteworthy is the emergence of British New Left and the rise of the CND campaign whose peak roughly corresponded to that of the Liberal revival.

To a large extent, the Liberal Party became victim of its own success. By the end of 1962 the Liberal Party became a serious and widely recognised threat to the Conservative electoral supremacy over Labour. In the middle of the 1963, at the time of the Profumo scandal, the national opinion polls claimed that 69.2% of the participants believed that it would be Labour who would win the following general election.129 This, as well as many other factors, started to divert the sympathies of the resenting Conservatives back to their home party. The fading of support for the Liberal Party among the discontented Conservative support was more complex.

At the time of the 1962 party conference in Llandudno, speculations were rising that the conservative protest voters will return back to their home party should the Liberal Party success mean Labour government. This was also what the national opinion polls suggested.130 The fact that the conservative protest vote ceased to benefit the liberals is supported for instance by the national opinion polls published after the break out of the Profumo affair. In 1964 before the general election, results achieved by the Liberals in by-elections and local elections confirmed the ideas of Liberal slow down. Whereas in 1961 and 1962 the press and opinions polls contributed much to the image of the liberal alternative as a viable and realistic in from 1963 both the prophesies and analyses of political commentators started contributing to the wakening of party’s electoral performance when it needed the support most.131

130 The Times, 5. 9. 1962, p. 2.
131 The Times, 2. 3. 1964. p. 6.
Between 1959 and 1964, the public image of Liberal revival has never been completely clear of doubts. “The party, like Deterrent, must be credible if it is to be any good. And for a party to be credible it has to do more than denounce in a fashionable idiom the things it is fashionable to denounce, such things just now as stagnation, class distinction, lack of political leadership, shortcomings in economic and environmental planning.”¹³² In early 1964 the Times published an editorial called The High Tide and After which, similarly to the previous quote, summarised the main problems of the Liberal Party whose opinion polls results as well as by-elections results from last 6 months were rather discouraging. It criticised the Liberals that the Liberal Party still did not sufficiently resolve internal clashes and decided on its position in the political spectrum.¹³³ The split between Grimond’s supporters and traditional laissez faire liberals remained under the scope of the media as did the relatively unclear distinction of Liberalism to Labour and Conservative political conceptions. “The Liberal’s mid-term success was due to their reflecting and playing upon a mood and to their flattering particular groups which nursed particular grievances. At the same time they failed to become identified with any large interest in the nation.”¹³⁴ Moreover, it was easier for the Liberal Party to reassert its position on the level of local government. In contrast, irrespective of the House of Commons by-elections, on the parliamentary level the party had to cope with serious disadvantages to the two major parties. The large scale of the nation-wide political campaign required vast financial and human resources, in which the Liberals could compete with neither Tories nor Labour.

Despite the fact that the Liberal Party did not become between 1959 and 1964 a political force whose power would be comparable to Labour or Conservatives, during the Grimond’s era it was rebuilt on a new solid basis which comprised not only the unpredictable and unstable floating and protest voters but also a strata of new voters which started to emerge as a result of profound long-term changes in British society.

**ABSTRACT**

“LIBERAL SPRING”


The main topic of the article is the transformation of the British Liberal Party between 1959 and 1964. The initial part of the text concentrates on the historical development of the party after 1945 focusing especially on the crisis which the Liberals faced in 1950s. Consequently, the author analyses the phenomenon of the Liberal Spring which considerably influenced British politics at the turn of 1950s and 1960s. The text introduces not only the “objective” facts which for instance the contemporaneous British press used in order to reason in favour of the revival of British Liberal Party. It outlines also the way in which sometimes mere speculations about the reestablishment of the Liberals as a third major force in British politics contributed to the development of Labour and Conservative policies.

¹³³ The Times, 1. 2. 1964, p. 9.
¹³⁴ The Times, 5. 9. 1964, p. 9.
The main aim of the author is to present the Liberal revival in context of the transformation of British society in 1950s and 1960s and outline thus the specific nature of British Liberal Spring as well as its limits which contributed to the contradictory result of the Liberal Party in the general election of 1964.

**KEYWORDS**
Joseph Grimond, Liberal Party, European Economic Community, Orpington by-election, „Liberal Spring”

**ABSTRACT**
„LIBERÁLNÍ JARO“
PŘÍSPĚVEK K DĚJINÁM OBRODY BRITSKÉ LIBERÁLNÍ STRANY (1959–1964)

**KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**
Joseph Grimond, Liberální strana, Evropské hospodářské společenství, Orpington — doplňovací volby, „liberální jaro“