The Transformation of Urban Liberalism: Party Politics and Urban Governance in Late Nineteenth-Century England. By James R. Moore. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006. 336 pages. £55.00 (Hardback*)*

Urban history, particularly the history of urban Britain, has been undergoing something of a revival in recent years. This trend has obvious links to developments in the study of urban environments, the lived practices of their inhabitants and the very concept of 'the city' which has occurred across the humanities and social sciences. Many of these new urban histories are characterised by an engagement with, and application of, theories and ideas drawn from such heterodox sources as Georg Simmel, Michel Foucault and Richard Sennett. These theoretically informed approaches to the study of cities of the past have greatly informed the work of social and cultural historians of the city by scholars like Patrick Joyce and Mary Poovey. In such studies the ideas of liberalism, with its emphasis on free trade, opposition to government intervention and promotion of *lassiez-faire* are portrayed as pivotal in the governance of 19th British cities. The growth and development of cities, the process of urbanisation itself was intimately linked to the changing intellectual currents of the nineteenth century.

However, these approaches with their emphasis on the emergence of the public sphere, the rise of the social subject and the tactics and strategies of governmentality have meant a deflection of attention away from concerns such as party politics, particularly at that most durable level, that of the local. James R. Moore's book, *The Transformation of Urban Liberalism,* is part of the Historical Urban Studies series and in it Moore examines the successes, defeats, debates and developments of the British Liberal party in its heyday of the late nineteenth century to the beginning of its slow, painful decline in the early twentieth century. To do this Moore uses two different cities as case studies in charting the fortunes of Liberalism and the Liberal Party itself, namely Manchester and Leicester. Moore's reasoning is that it is only through a close study of urban boroughs that the varying bases and levels of support for the Liberal Party can be fully understood. The urban boroughs of cites such as Manchester and Leicester, in Moore's analysis, formed the core of Liberal Party support and these two differing 'sites' of political organisation are compared throughout the text, particularly in terms of the dialectic between national issues such as Home Rule and more local policy developments such as the emergence of Manchester Radicalism within the Liberal Party. The period Moore focuses on is one which has not received a deal of attention from political historians and in this book he deals with the concerns and attitudes of the grassroots party members and demonstrates how, although the Liberal Party was highly uncomfortable with the more obvious class based politics of some of its more radical members, the issues of class and urban governance were inextricably linked.

In his narrative on the development of 19th century local party politics in both Manchester and Leicester Moore continually highlights how the creation of local party machines to solve local problems was both beneficial and problematic. It

was beneficial in that the party was able to respond to local issues and problems in a more organised and coherent manner but it created problems as the party's electoral base and size grew so both national and local issues threatened party unity. In Manchester in particular the emergence of the Radical wing of the party led to a discernable rise in tension within the Liberal party structure both in the wards of Manchester but also in the more lofty corridors of power in Westminster as the Radical wing sought control of the local party organisations and demanded greater democracy within the party and, indeed, Britain itself. The issues of Home Rule and women's suffrage dominated national political discourse but, as Moore points out, localised issues frequently took precedence in determining the allegiance and support of local party members and the electorate. This prioritisation of the local by Moore is at odds with the received model of the Liberal Party's trajectory of development in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Traditionally, the passing of the 1886 Home Rule bill was held to be the death knell for the Liberal Party in Britain as it signified the beginning of the party's inexorable decline. Moore rejects this view as being far too Westminster-centric holding that from a localised perspective, particularly in his two case study cities of Manchester and Leicester, the Liberal party and liberalism remained an energetic and effective political force.

Moore argues that the divisions which occurred within the Liberal Party within the final decades of the 19th century were to some extent evolutionary. He argues that the 'old guard', so to speak, of councillors and aldermen who had held power for several decades in what were essentially one party urban boroughs were criticised, attacked and frequently replaced by younger, more radical reformers and party members who placed the good of the Liberal Party as a whole above the merits and attractions of local personalities. However, what these younger, more radical party members did was to prioritise commitment to party ideology over commitment to the urban wards. This attempted repositioning of the focus of local party organisations created a great deal of tension within the party and may have been the reason the Liberal Party began to lose its grip over large swathes of the British electorate.

Throughout the book, Moore goes into great detail on the local personalities and figures who dominated both Liberal and, indeed, city politics in both Leicester and Manchester. He details how municipal governance was transformed throughout Britain by the attentions and ideological commitment of Liberal Party members. He is particularly interesting when discussing the development of suburban politics and that of civic utility infrastructure. He also argues that the issue of class politics and the rise of the Labour movement were not in themselves directly responsible for the demise of the Liberal Party, his contention being that the Liberal Party retained a great deal of its support among not only the 'shopocracy' or the new middle classes but also in working class communities in many areas well into the 20th century. Moore's book is an interesting, thoroughly researched and well written text. His eye for detail and portrayal of local power struggles and debates are forensic in their application. However, perhaps as a result of its overall argument (that the history of the Liberal Party is far more than the story of successes and failures at Westminster), the book is very much focussed on the structures of power which operated at the level of the local. Moore's story does not venture out into the streets to deal with the lives of the inhabitants of

Manchester and Leicester, those directly affected by the decisions of those party councillors and aldermen he discusses. Perhaps this is an unfair criticism as the book does what it set out to do which is to discuss the transformation in the shape and makeup of the grassroots of the Liberal Party and the nature of urban governance in 19th century Britain. However, one cannot help but feel that altering the focus of political history from the national to the level of the local merely resets the horizons of the story without discussing the implications these changes had for the inhabitants of the cities in question.

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