

Helpfully, he directed MPs into the lobbies with “Pope and Paisley here: women and choice there”. Decisions on Iraq and Afghanistan were too much for her. A last straw was Kim Howells, more Blairite than Blair himself, who called for the humane phasing out of the word ‘socialism’. She resigned from the frontbench and was redeployed to clean up British participation on the Council of Europe, which had been seen as a jolly and was rarely taken seriously. She recalls: “This was work I loved. We newcomers in the delegation got to know our counterparts in all the other European socialist groups, and we worked together on human rights, equality issues and children’s welfare.”

This is an admirably authentic account of an MP without an ego from an age that’s gone forever. No longer could an MP rejoice that the House was composed entirely of “English men”. No MP will repeat Maria’s luck of renting a flat for 14 years at the fixed price of £114.65 a month. The shameless chauvinism and rampant English nationalism of 1987 is extinct.

This is a serious account of the restless work of a fine, idealistic MP. There are victories and disappointments by the dozen, linked with delicious anecdotes of the oddities of parliamentary life.

Eschewing the five-star excess of parliamentary overseas trips, she led a Spartan character-forming expedition to Nicaragua. Maria, Dawn Primarolo, Alice Mahon and Audrey Wise penetrated the alien culture as guests of the Sandinistas in the bush. On a journey in a small open boat, they were advised to act like Americans and speak English to avoid sniping gunfire from the Contras who occupied the river banks. The parliamentary quarter lustily sang ‘On Ilkla Moor Baht ‘at’ and ‘I Belong to Glasgow’.

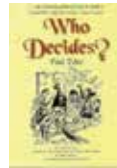
Understandably, the Contras fled. 🇺🇸

Paul Flynn is Labour MP for Newport West

Who Decides?

By Paul Tyler

Arthur H. Stockwell Ltd, £5.95



The voice of Paul Tyler is heard frequently from the Liberal Democrat benches in the Lords. It is always clear, determined and insistent about the need for radical change in British politics. No one who cares about the well-being and accountability of our institutions at both national and local government level could fail to be interested in the views of this immensely likeable man and his passionately held convictions.

An old Tory like me does not expect to agree with him, and yet harmony can sometimes prevail. We are at one about the injustice of continuing to exclude most British citizens living overseas from participation in Westminster elections, a practice which puts us at odds with other major democracies. On this point Tory policy needs to come into line with that of the Liberal Democrats who are committed to change.

This book, however, is not a tract designed to advance the reforms to the political system in which Tyler believes so strongly. He even leaves on one side the case for creating an elected second chamber, the cause closest to his heart. Instead of putting his ardent Liberal convictions into print, he has drawn on his experiences in and out of Parliament over fifty years to produce a short, engaging book, brimming with humour and charm.

In 1964 he became the youngest county councillor in Britain, and – as tends to be the way with Liberals – quickly developed a taste for committee work with which, half a century later, he still loves to be involved.

Along the way he got to know a remarkable man, Dr Edgar Anstey, principal psychologist at the Ministry of Defence, and came to admire a sharp, witty commentary on committees (“how they work and how to work them”) written by this inspiring mentor.

Tyler weaves extracts from Anstey’s work into his book. “I have dared to match”, he explains, “examples of his professional wisdom with more extensive and recent practical examples drawn from my much more dilettantish career”. He has also been able to include satirical drawings from the much admired pen of Norman Thelwell who was Anstey’s illustrator. The result is a marvellously decorated collection of shrewd insights and entertaining reminiscences

to aid all those who yearn to manoeuvre successfully in committees, from golf clubs to Parliament.

Intense application to the details of discussion is not always necessary to achieve success. Tyler records how one very adroit Chairman of the

“ The book is a marvellously decorated collection of shrewd insights and entertaining reminiscences to aid all those who yearn to manoeuvre successfully in committees ”

Royal Institute of British Architects, Sir Peter Shepherd, got his way by displaying complete indifference to excited colleagues. “I have on our study wall a striking back view of a female nude, sympathetically created by Peter – so my note on the back reminds me – during a lively discussion at the Policy and Finance Committee meeting on 20 June 1971”. Thoughtfully, he shares the drawing, which is indeed striking in its attention to detail, with his readers.

Tyler provides impressive evidence of his own skills as a committee operator by printing in the concluding section of the book the detailed diary notes which he kept as a member of the joint committee on the government’s Lords Reform Bill during the twelve months from May 2011 onwards. He built a successful alliance with a group



Lord Tyler in discussion with *The House*, 2013

of progressive Tory MPs on the committee. He worked closely with Mark Harper, the Tory minister responsible for the Bill. “He is such a very articulate and committed advocate of the reform package”, Tyler noted during the 2012 Easter recess, “and I didn’t want either to miss out on his advice or to fail to share our plans with him”. At one point press reports suggested that the government might dilute the proposals. Tyler was reassured

for the time being by a Tory associate who tells him that David Cameron was feeling “contrite, admitting that he might have slipped up, hinting to journalists that a retreat strategy might be needed” – the first indication of what was to come later in 2012. Tyler provides fascinating glimpses of what was happening behind the scenes.

His tireless efforts contributed significantly to the endorsement of a second chamber with an electoral mandate by a majority on the joint committee in April 2012. He continues to hope that reform will come. “The bill”, he concludes, “will probably be resurrected after the 2015 election, whatever the party composition of the new government”. If so, Paul Tyler will undoubtedly deploy all his considerable committee skills once again to assist it. 🏰

Alistair Lexden is a Conservative peer and historian of his party. All his reviews and articles published in *The House* can be found on his website, www.alistairlexden.org.uk

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