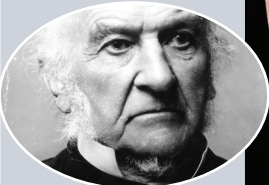


Britain's Lib Dems in political spotlight

■ **1859:** Liberal Party formed as successor to **Whig Party**, combining breakaway **Conservatives** of Robert Peel and free trade **Radicals**

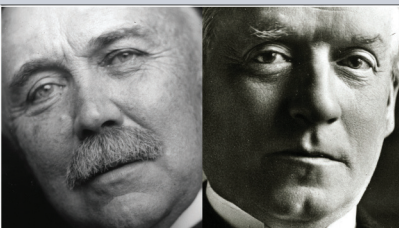


■ **1924:** **Ramsay MacDonald** becomes Labour Party's first prime minister – centre-left Liberals are reduced to mere 40 seats in Parliament

■ **1956-67:** Under **Jo Grimond's** leadership Liberals boost share of vote from 2.5% to 20%, winning by-elections in Torrington, Orpington and Roxburgh

■ **1868:** Under leadership of **William Ewart Gladstone** (*inset*), Liberals oust minority Conservative government. Gladstone's achievements include education reform and Third Reform Act, which extends vote to millions. **Liberals govern for almost 30 years**

■ **1895:** After split over **Irish Home Rule**, Liberals languish in opposition



■ **1906-15:** Liberal landslides under prime ministers **Henry Campbell-Bannerman** (*left*) and **Herbert Asquith** (*right*). Liberals reduce power of upper, unelected House of Lords and establish foundations of modern welfare state

■ **1915:** British failures during First World War force Asquith to invite Tories to join coalition. **David Lloyd George** becomes Prime Minister

■ **1967:** **Jeremy Thorpe** elected leader

■ **1974:** Liberals hold balance of power in hung parliament



■ **1976:** Thorpe (*left*) forced to resign following personal scandal. Party's new leader, **David Steel** (*right*), negotiates Lib-Lab pact with minority Labour government of **James Callaghan**. Pact founders in 1978

■ **1988:** Merger with short-lived **Social Democratic Party** creates **Liberal Democrats**. Leaders include **Paddy Ashdown** (1988-99), **Charles Kennedy** (1999-2006), **Menzies Campbell** (2006-07), and **Nick Clegg**

■ **May 11, 2010:** Lib Dems hold balance of power in hung parliament. In midnight deal Clegg (*main picture*) is named Deputy Prime Minister, cementing Lib Dems in formal coalition with **David Cameron's** Conservatives