UK Data Archive Study Number 3162
Former Members of the Social Democratic Party, December 1991 - March 1992

SN 3162

LANCASTER
UNIVERSITY
Politics and
International Relations

SURVEY OF FORMER MEMBERS OF THE SDP

Dear Sir/Madam,

As you no doubt know, one of the major events in British politics during the 1980s was the foundation of a brand-new party - the Social Democratic Party (SDP) The subsequent career of the SDP introduced a new excitement and unpredictability into party politics

We are now attempting to find out something about the views, opinions and attitudes of people who were members of the SDP People in the media and academics have speculated about this but we would like to provide some solid evidence

With financial support from the Nuffield Foundation, we are writing to a number of former SDP party members to ask for their help We would be most grateful if you could assist our research by completing this questionnaire The success of the project depends upon our receiving as many responses as possible Your reply would make an important contribution to our research and your help would be greatly appreciated

We are sure that you will find the questions interesting Filling in the answers will take only a little time since most involve simply ticking a box or circling a number

All replies will, of course, be treated in strictest confidence

We would greatly appreciate it if you could place the completed questionnaire in the pre-paid envelope provided and post it to us as soon a possible If you would be interested in seeing the results of the survey please indicate this by ticking the box at the end of the questionnaire

Thank-you for your help

Yours sincerely,

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FORMER SDP MEMBERS' SURVEY

For each question please ring the appropriate number or write your answer in the space provided

SECTION A. YOUR POLITICAL BACKGROUND

1 When did you first join the SDP?

1 As soon as/shortly after it was formed (1981)
2 In 1982 or 1983
3 After 1983

2 In terms of attending meetings, helping at elections, joining in party activities and so on, would you say that during your time in the SDP you were a very active member, a fairly active member or not very active?

1 Very active
2 Fairly active
3 Not very active

3 Before you joined the SDP which party did you normally vote for or support?

2 Conservative
3 Labour
4 Liberal
5 Nationalist
6 Other (please specify) _____

4 During the five years before you joined the SDP were you a member of any other political party? Which one?

1 No previous party
2 Conservative
3 Labour
4 Liberal
5 SNP or Plaid Cymru
6 Other (please specify) _____

5 What were the main reasons that led you to join the SDP?

_____

_____

_____

6 At the time of the vote on the merger between the SDP and the Liberals in 1987 did you vote **for** or **against** the merger?

1 For the merger
2 Against the merger
3 Did not vote
4 Ineligible to vote

7 Immediately following the merger did you join the Liberal Democrats, stay with the continuing SDP, or what?

1 Joined the Liberal Democrats
2 Stayed in the SDP
3 Did not continue in either party

(IF 2 OR 3 PLEASE ANSWER 7a)

7a Why did you **not** join the Liberal Democrats?

_____

_____

_____

8 Are you **now** a member of any political party? Which one?

1 Not a party member
2 Conservative
3 Labour
4 Liberal Democrat
5 SNP or Plaid Cymru
6 Greens
7 Other (please specify) _____

(IF NOW A PARTY MEMBER PLEASE ANSWER 8a)

8a Would you describe yourself as a very active, fairly active or not very active member of your party?

1 Very active
2 Fairly active
3 Not very active

9 Which party do you intend to vote for in the next general election?

2 Conservative

3 Labour

4 Liberal Democrat

5 SNP or Plaid Cymru

6 Greens

7 Other (please specify) _____

10 Are you currently a member of any pressure or campaigning groups not directly connected to a political party?

1 No

2 Yes (please specify) _____

_____

_____

Section B. YOUR POLITICAL OPINIONS

11 In politics people often talk about the 'left' and the 'right' How would you place your views on this scale?

Left			Centre			Right	DK
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

12 Has the replacement of Mrs Thatcher by Mr Major made you more likely or less likely to vote Conservative or didn't it make any difference?

1 More likely to vote Conservative

2 Less likely to vote Conservative

3 Made no difference

13 Have the changes in policy and style of the Labour party under Mr Kinnock made you more likely or less likely to vote Labour or has it made no difference?

1 More likely to vote Labour

2 Less likely to vote Labour

3 Made no difference

14 We would like to know how you rate the performance of the following politicians as party leaders If you were asked to give them a mark out of ten for their overall effectiveness what would you give them?

Paddy Ashdown	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Roy Jenkins	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
David Owen	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
David Steel	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

15 Many explanations have been given for the break-up of the Alliance between the Liberals and the SDP and the subsequent demise of the SDP How important do you think each of the following factors were?

	Very Important	Quite Important	Not Important
The British electoral system	1	2	3
The vagueness of SDP policies	1	2	3
Labour becoming more moderate	1	2	3
SDP and Liberal policies and traditions incompatible	1	2	3
Quarrels among Alliance leaders	1	2	3
The personality of David Owen	1	2	3

16 What do you think was the most important reason for the demise of the SDP?

_____

_____

_____

_____

17 Which of these statements comes closest to your views on what British policy on nuclear weapons should be?

1 Britain should keep its own nuclear weapons independent of other countries

2 Britain should have nuclear weapons only as part of a Western defence system

3 Britain should get rid of its nuclear weapons as soon as possible

18 And which of these statements comes closest to your views on how the European Community should develop

1 Towards a fully integrated Europe with most decisions taken by a European Government

2 Towards a Europe more integrated than now but with decisions mainly affecting Britain staying in British hands

3 The situation should stay much as it is now with Britain retaining a veto over major policies that it does not like

4 British should withdraw from the European Community

19 Where, in terms of the 'Left -Right' scale, would you place

	Left		Centre		Right
The Conservative Party	1	2	3	4	5
The Labour Party	1	2	3	4	5
The Liberal Democrats	1	2	3	4	5

20 We would like your opinions on a number of issues Please indicate your responses to the following statements

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Taxes should be put up to increase government spending on health and social services	1	2	3	4	5
Privatisation of publicly-owned industries has gone too far	1	2	3	4	5
Recent laws restricting the activities of trade unions have been generally good for Britain	1	2	3	4	5
Cutting crime is more important than protecting civil rights	1	2	3	4	5
Britain should build more nuclear power stations	1	2	3	4	5
Government should redistribute income from the better-off to the less well off	1	2	3	4	5
For some crimes the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence	1	2	3	4	5
The British electoral system should be left as it is	1	2	3	4	5
Preserving a good environment is more important than increasing the standard of living	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION C: YOUR PERSONAL BACKGROUND

21 Which daily morning paper(s) do you usually read?

1 Express	5 Sun	9 Guardian
2 Mail	6 Today	10 Independent
3 Mirror	7 Telegraph	11 Times
4 Daily Star	8 Financial Times	12 Other (please specify)_____

22 Do you have

	No	Yes
'O' levels/grades	0	1
'A' levels/Scottish Highers	0	1
A degree	0	1

23 What is your current employment status?

1 Employee	5 Retired
2 Self employed	6 Looking after the home
3 Employer	7 In full-time education
4 Unemployed	

24 What is your occupation? (If out of work or retired please give previous occupation)

_____

25 Which sector do you work in?

Private Sector	*Public Sector*
1 Small business	4 Central government
2 Large business	5 Local government
3 Public company	6 Education
	7 Health Service

26 Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular religion? Which one?

1 None
2 Roman Catholic
3 Church of England/Anglican
4 Church of Scotland/Presbyterian
5 Methodist/United Reformed/Baptist/Other Nonconformist
6 Jewish
7 Hindu/Moslem/Sikh/Buddhist
8 Other (please specify)_____

27 In your main accommodation do you or your household

1 Own the property
2 Rent from the local council
3 Rent from a private landlord
4 Rent from a housing association
5 Other (please specify)_____

28 Are you 1 Male 2 Female

29 In what year were you born? _____

If you would like to hear about the results of this survey when they are ready please tick here

Thank-you for completing this questionnaire. Please post it to us in the envelope provided.

SURVEY OF FORMER MEMBERS OF THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Hugh Bochel
David Denver

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

In the early 1980s the Social Democratic Party (SDP) burst upon the British political scene and caught the attention of voters and the media in a remarkable way. Membership reached a peak of 78,000 in March 1982 but remained substantial until the 1987 general election. In 1988 the majority of members voted to merge with the Liberal Party to produce the Liberal Democratic Party whilst a smaller number preferred to carry on as the SDP. However, the 'continuing SDP' was an electoral failure and was formally closed down in June 1990. Following the effective disappearance of the Social Democratic Party there was considerable speculation about what happened to its former members. The survey set out to produce evidence on this. In addition information was collected on the political background, political opinions and personal background of respondents.

METHODOLOGY

The Liberal Democratic Party provided the researchers with a random sample of 3,911 names and addresses of the 50,841 people who were members of the SDP at 1st June 1987 and who were not since recorded as 'deceaseds' or known 'gone aways'.

A self-completion postal questionnaire was used to obtain information on social characteristics, attitudes and political support, utilising largely closed questions. This was sent out in late 1991 with responses being received in late 1991 and early 1992. The survey covered the entire United Kingdom.

Replies were received from 2,073 people, a response rate of 53 per cent.

Data were input onto a PC using the Foxpro database. Analysis was undertaken using Foxpro and SPSS/PC+.

Data were monitored as replies were received, 'wild' responses were checked and one in ten of the recorded responses were also checked against the computer-held data.

The data are presented as a raw data file and a data definition file. There are 2073 records and 56 variables. The variables are named so as to bear some resemblance to the information contained within them.

The data do not contain any derived variables.

The data do not contain any confidential information.

Missing data were coded as 'M' in Foxpro which translates into '.' in SPSS. Alternatively missing data were coded as '0'.

DATA DICTIONARY DESCRIPTION AND LISTING

A data dictionary listing and frequencies (including range, mean and standard deviation) is included for each variable.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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