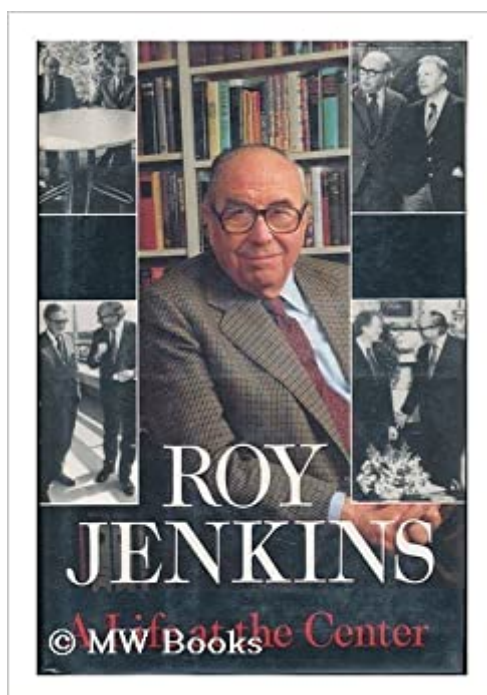


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A Life At The Center: Memoirs Of A Radical Reformer



Synopsis

One of Britain's most important political leaders recounts his odyssey through British and world politics and offers penetrating portraits of Wilson, Thatcher, the Kennedys, Nixon, and other memorable personalities.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Lord Jenkins is a British politician at home equally in the chambers of power and the world of letters. A leading Labour figure for 35 years, serving as Home Secretary twice and Chancellor of the Exchequer, and only narrowly missing the premiership, he always seemed to be slightly out of step with much of his party; he was both more pragmatic and less doctrinaire. Eventually Jenkins became leader of the nascent Social Democratic party, which during the early 1980s looked capable of forming a viable third-party government in combination with the Liberals. It was not to be, and Jenkins, politically active only as a peer, is now Chancellor of Oxford University. The author of a number of political biographies, Jenkins produces polished prose that throws much light on puzzling passages in postwar British history--the careers of George Brown, Harold Wilson and David Owen, for instance. Jenkins also recounts his frequent visits to the U.S. and vivid meetings with LBJ, JFK and an appallingly frank and alarming J. Edgar Hoover. The book provides a greater sense of the cut and thrust at the upper levels of power--and of the astonishing impact of the British press--than do most political memoirs, though the length and detail may daunt readers. Still, this is the best book of its kind since Denis Healey's 1991 memoir, *The Time of My Life*. Photos not seen by PW.

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For Americans who follow British politics closely, Jenkins's autobiography is essential reading. His career took him through every major postwar event--from Bevanism and the Gaitskellite struggle to the European Community and the Social Democratic party (SDP) effort to "break the mold"--and most senior offices. The feel he gives for the inside world of British and Labour politics has rarely been surpassed. Though he lacked, perhaps, the dash or charisma of some of his contemporaries, the story he tells is detailed, gracious in judgment, and marked by a generosity of spirit. Given the battles he fought and the people he dealt with, his gracious, temperate tone may come as a surprise. There are some disappointments: Jenkins offers too little on Europe and on the SDP-"Alliance" period and has dropped ten percent of the British edition--probably rich gossip detail. Still, this is a first-rate autobiography by one of America's best British friends. (Index not seen.)-- H. Steck, SUNY at Cortland

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