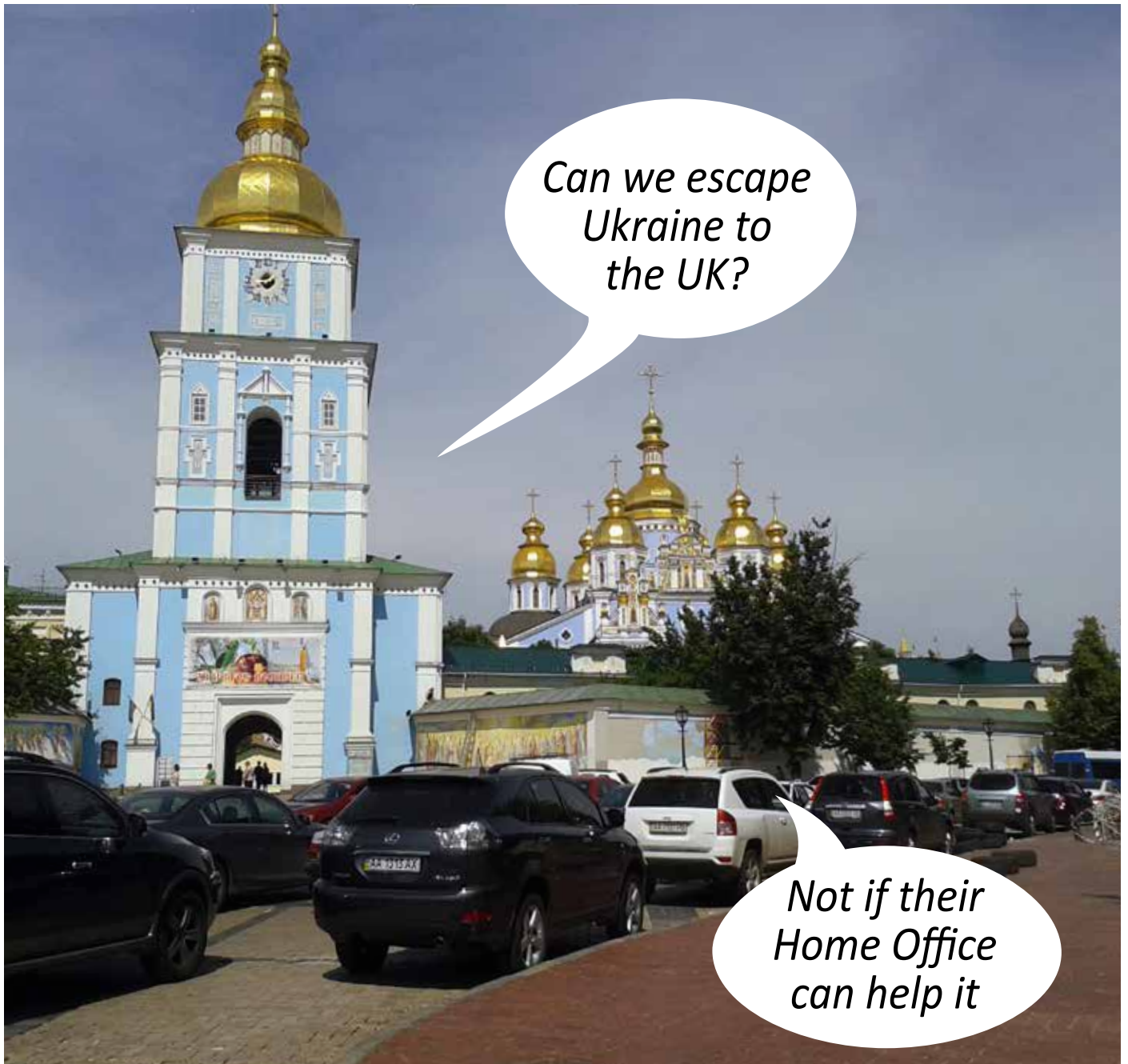


liberator



*Can we escape
Ukraine to
the UK?*

*Not if their
Home Office
can help it*

- 🌟 What you need to know about Ukraine - Kiron Read, Carol Weaver and an eyewitness
- 🌟 Russia's African wars - Rebecca Tinsley
- 🌟 Biden and a wafer thin majority - Andrew Edlin

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COMMENTARY

CALLOUS CONSERVATIVES AND KREMLIN CASH

Not since World War 2 has there been an international conflict in which one side is so clearly right and the other wrong as between Ukraine and Russia.

Indeed it is hard to find any but the most lunatic fringe voices to have spoken up on Russia's behalf.

The sickening footage of Russian atrocities against civilians and residential areas have led to a rare unanimity across the political spectrum in the UK and elsewhere in Europe.

It has also led to an outpouring of public sympathy for Ukraine with fund raising, relief efforts and offers of accommodation.

This though has happened in spite of, rather than because of, the UK's Conservative government.

The initial reaction to terrified Ukrainians seeking sanctuary in the UK was woeful and showed there were fresh depths of callousness and incompetence that home secretary Priti Patel could plumb as the UK stood out as the only country in Europe that still required visas and other complex documents from Ukrainian refugees. The spectacle of people who had made perilous journeys of hundreds of miles then being shunted around France to play 'hunt the British visa office' was shaming.

It was not though surprising. Ever since Theresa May's 'hostile environment' began the Home Office has been focused on keeping people out, of which the turning back of boatloads of refugees in the English Channel (Liberator 411) was another grim example.

Left to itself the Government would probably not have admitted any Ukrainians - only the weight of public opinion and media coverage of their plight belatedly pushed ministers into offering sanctuary and even then it appears to be outsourced to the general public.

Perhaps this should not surprise us since the Conservative party has long been a wholly-owned subsidiary of Russian oligarchs, with millions of pounds raised from people who appear to be barely legal as donors and with honours and even peerages ladled out to those with the deepest pockets.

In 2020 the parliamentary intelligence and security committee tried to assess whether there had been Russian interference in the Brexit and Scottish independence referendums and found: "The written evidence provided to us appeared to suggest that HMG had not seen or sought evidence of successful interference in UK democratic processes or any activity that has had a material impact on an election, for example influencing results." Why ever could that be? Imagine the uproar from the Conservatives if any other foreign government was suspected of meddling in British politics.

This has made belated UK efforts to help Ukraine welcome - if slightly surprising - but once the immediate crisis is over searching questions will be needed about the links between the Conservatives and Putin's cronies and what impact these had on past British polls.

Ukraine has driven 'partygate' off the front pages, but the police response to this is still due at the time of writing.

While hardly in the category of invading another country, Boris Johnson's actions in ignoring pandemic rules he had imposed on everyone else were contemptible and the public must be forcibly reminded of this in the run-up to the May elections.

For the two are linked in a narrative about how Johnson and those around him don't accept that any rules apply to them. Whether it was swilling wine at social events while the population was locked down, or taking money from the cronies of a foreign dictator - against the spirit if not letter of the rules - the attitude was the same, that rules are for other people and not for senior Tories.

Given the events in Ukraine it might seem almost indecent to relate them to internal Liberal Democrat matters but for several years pressure has been building on the Federal Conference Committee to allow a debate on the British independent [sic] nuclear deterrent.

It has been deeply disinclined to do so, fearing a divisive and embarrassing debate quite unlike most recent ones that have been completely uncontentious.

Most of the parliamentary party has also been disinclined to reopen the Trident can of worms.

As defence spokesperson Jamie Stone told anti-Trident campaigners when they last tried to raise the subject, he was "strongly opposed to this motion being on the Spring Conference agenda" because "A divisive debate will focus on splits when our recently elected leader, Ed, will be seeking to contrast us with the deeply divided Tory and Labour parties." (Liberator 405).

Hints were though dropped after the last autumn conference that this debate might come to the first post-pandemic in-person one, now due in Brighton in September.

If so the context will be very different to even a few months ago. No-one knows what might happen in Ukraine by then, but Trident supporters will hope that Putin's aggression will bolster their case, and opponents that Ukraine has should the impossibility of the UK ever acting 'independently' of America, which anyway effectively control the missiles. There might even be a real debate at conference for once.

RADICAL BULLETIN

POWER GRAB

It was a close run thing but the party ended up with the least worst option for a revised Federal Board after a complicated debate at the virtual conference.

Like House of Lords reform, everyone could agree there was problem in having a 41-strong board, but few could agree on how to change it.

President Mark Pack and other proponents of change narrowly survived a vote to hear a reference back by 197 to 190, and looked to be in trouble when it turned out chief whip Alastair Carmichael opposed them.

Having survived that, options were duly voted on. Conference rejected a particularly outrageous proposal to allow the board to choose almost half its own scrutineers, under which a Federal Scrutiny Committee would have comprised nine elected members and eight “appointed for their relevant scrutiny skills by the Federal Board subject to ratification by the Federal Conference”.

These eight would of course have been appointed for nothing of the kind, chosen instead as the tamest lapdogs possible to leave the board undisturbed and unchallenged.

Conference saw through that attempt at the FB marking its own homework and went for an option under which 30-odd people mostly elected by the membership - though some by specific bodies - will be given the task of scrutinising the FB “including ensuring that decisions are being taken in line with the party strategy as voted for by conference”.

It remains to be seen how effective this council is and whether its meetings will be open to other party members to attend on an observer basis.

One oddity of the debate was the repeated references by proponents of change - and in particular those who supported the lowest levels of scrutiny - to the report on the 2019 general election disaster by Dorothy Thornhill, Lib Dem peer and former elected mayor of Watford.

It was as if she had descended from Mount Sinai - or at least from Watford Junction - will tablets of stone setting out how the FB should be reformed. Endless speakers cited Thornhill saying the FB must change.

Her report in fact said nothing at all about specific changes to the FB and observed only that it was “too large a group to be a realistic decision-making body” concerning a general election campaign and too large to form the party’s leadership team.

Much was made of how members of the new 16-strong board will be elected rather than appointed, but most of them will be there ex-officio because they were elected to some other role: the president; leader; heads of the three state parties; vice-president responsible for working with ethnic minority communities; a vice-chair of the Federal

Policy Committee; chairs of the federal conference, communications and elections, finance and resources and people development committees; chair of the Young Liberals and a local government representative. On top of that precisely three will be directly elected.

One can see the potential for further trouble. While a board of 41 may have been too large to be effective, one of 16 may be too small to be representative. For example, England, Scotland and Wales get one member each, despite membership in England being vastly larger. How long will this reform last?

WHAT DOES HE HAVE TO DO?

So former Montgomery MP Lembit Öpik lives to fight another day, despite having spoken at a meeting titled ‘How to Stop the Lib Dems: an insider’s guide on how Lib Dems plan their campaigns’ at a Conservative party event.

Merton councillor Simon McGrath lodged a formal complaint about this that eventually found its way to a party disciplinary panel, which concluded Öpik should be thrown out of the Lib Dems for conduct incompatible with membership.

Öpik announced he would appeal, which caused some head scratching as to what grounds he could possibly advance given he did not deny speaking at the event.

Having chucked away a safe seat in 2010 in part through his highly public personal antics, Öpik might indeed be thought to have some expertise in ‘how to stop the Lib Dems’, although perhaps not what the Tories had in mind.

The original complaints panel that heard the case noted: “The blurb for the event contained several quotes from [Öpik] which criticized [sic] and ridiculed the party”, and that he must have chosen to speak at an event intended to damage the Liberal Democrats, been aware of the damage this would cause and intended to cause such damage.

Rather surprisingly, the Federal Appeals Panel (FAP) has ordered a fresh hearing. This is in part over disputes about whether Öpik was properly notified of the original hearing but mainly over the absence of any investigation into what occurred.

The original panel had relied on the Eventbrite notice of the event and a report in Nation Cymru but did not carry out its own research.

Öpik told the FAP that he attended an event “predominantly attended by Conservative party members”, but stated that it was “not designed to damage the Liberal Democrat Party – or if it was I was unaware of this”.

He said he was unaware of the title given to the event and said: “Ironically, I actually made the case for what the Lib Dems need to do to recover their position when I was talking to the Conservatives, and this led to an interesting and enlightening debate.”

The lead adjudicator objected to Ōpik’s appeal on the grounds no investigation was required because “it is farcical to suggest that an event organised by an opposing political party where you are asked to share inside information about their campaign tactics is not designed to damage the Party... I find the idea that [Ōpik] was not aware of the topic or title of the event to be so unlikely that it is unbelievable ... [Ōpik] making publicly critical remarks to publicise an event aimed at your opposition... I think the argument raised here to be so unlikely that an investigation is unnecessary.”

The FAP though held this to prejudice “the very facts that required investigation and determination by a panel: was he asked to share insider information, did he do so, what did he know about the publicity, did he make the alleged remarks, and did he do so in order to publicise the event?” And so the whole thing starts up again.

PICK A NUMBER

We read ‘em so you don’t have to. The turgid platitudes of Reports to Conference have yet again been enlivened by a game in which party members try to find out what the overall membership total is, and find it is not stated. The much vaunted supporters’ scheme - a pet project of party president Mark Pack - did not even merit a mention.

A tip-off from a reader suggested membership stood last November at 76,000 (Liberator 411) www.liberatormagazine.org.uk low against 2019 but historically not bad.

Reports to Conference through contained this from Mary Regnier-Wilson, chair of the Federal People Development Committee: “The decline in membership numbers has continued, but slowed further as we have reached the second year post the 2019 influxes around the European Parliament and general elections.

“We remain deeply concerned at overall levels of recruitment and retention, whilst accepting that these are often driven by external factors out of our control.”

With no number given this does nothing to inform the party as to how ‘deeply concerned’ it should be.

DIPLOMATIC INCIDENT

Many have complained about technical issues with the virtual conferences but few can have such a tale of woe as Phil Bennion, chair of the Federal International Relations Committee.

His report to conference recalled: “Many of our speakers experienced serious technical problems and many were unable to join debates because of the problems with Hopin.

“My own attempts to chair three events (two to diplomats) from my iPad were chaotic, as it was impossible to unmute, and we were unable to bring in Ilhan Kyuchyuk MEP or play the video from Reinhard Butikofer MEP for the China fringe.”

It got worse, Labour peer - and former Lib Dem - Andrew Adonis was inaudible in a fringe meeting on Europe and Bennion had to read Adonis’s speech for him.

Former MEP Graham Watson was also unable to join the fringe meeting at all as were some other billed speakers from overseas, leading to it eventually being abandoned.

TANGLED WEB

Not for the first time, the Federal Appeals Panel must grapple with a legal conundrum brought to it by Jo Hayes, who believes she was defamed by Margaret Joachim who recently defeated her by 66 votes to 30 for the post of English candidates chair.

This dispute arose improbably enough over what was originally a message of condolence about the sad death of Paul Clark, who was once eastern region candidates chair.

Joachim opined that Clark “did an excellent job and was effectively forced out by the current incumbent”.

Since Hayes is the ‘current incumbent’ and the election for English candidates chair was then still in progress, Hayes complained that Joachim’s remark was contrary to the rules by being defamatory. She says she stood against Clark and defeated him in a normal election.

A ruling on this complaint found Joachim’s words did not meet the ‘serious harm’ test in the Coalition-era Defamation Act and having been in a WhatsApp exchange was not ‘material published’ by a candidate or ‘personal canvassing’ and so merited no penalty.

Hayes though has spotted that defamation legislation is different in Scotland, while internal election rules should be the same. One for fine legal minds to resolve.

HOLDER HOLDING ON

The unquiet ghost of Ethnic Minority Liberal Democrats (EMLD) continues to cause trouble even four years after it was forcibly closed and replaced by the considerably more effective and better run Liberal Democrat Campaign for Racial Equality (Liberator 390).

EMLD’s offences included a bizarre annual general meeting in 2016, which ended in vituperative disorder with secretary Ashburn Holder being suspended in disputed circumstances.

When this convoluted tale eventually found its way to a disciplinary panel hearing, it ordered Holder to be reinstated (even though by this time EMLD no longer existed and there was nothing to reinstate him into) and that he should receive an apology. He has said no such apology had been made and the matter still drags on.

FRONT RUNNER

Results of the fabled election for London region chair, which started in the winter of 2020-21, have finally, though unofficially, surfaced.

These show that Ann Glaze gained 1,147 votes, Rod Lynch 445 and Julliet Makhapila 332.

An appeal was lodged over Glaze’s alleged improper use of social media in her campaign, but returning officer Cec Tallack decided her 60% vote share was so vast that this could not have affected the outcome (Liberator 407).

This dispute though went through an appeals marathon making it 11 months before Glaze could take office. The figures now known rather suggest Tallack was right.

UKRAINE'S COMEDIAN PRESIDENT IS NO COMIC

Kiron Reid saw great hope on democracy's eastern border in Ukraine when this article was published in *Liberator* 398 in November 2019 after the election of Volodymyr Zelenskyy as president. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, we reprint it here, followed by some necessarily anonymous reflections on Ukraine now and the path to war from an observer who knows the country well

Note 'Zelenskyy' is used as the official Ukrainian transliteration of the president's name, prior to 2019 'Vladimir Zelensky' was a common rendering. Zelenskyi was used in the original text. At the time of writing the author did not know that Zelenskyy had been the voice of Paddington Bear in Ukraine. Will Putin kill Paddington?

Ukraine's April 2019 presidential election made headlines around the world because of the landslide election of 'comedian' Vladimir Zelenskyi, and the totally peaceful transfer of power.

Zelenskyi is still an unknown political commodity, but his party has since made history again by taking outright control of Parliament (the Verkhovna Rada – people's assembly), the first time by any party. He has great hopes pinned on him. Early signs are that Volodymyr Zelensky (official Ukrainian transliteration) will bring people together and accelerate reform in a way that outgoing President Petro Poroshenko could not manage. Zelenskyi's mostly young activists are idealistic and optimistic. They want economic development and fair chances. While behind the throne lurk dubious henchmen, oligarchs and money. Not to mention Vladimir Putin's small nasty war that has killed 13,000 people. People are impatient for change – often contradictory changes. So, reasons to be cheerful? This comic is no Trump or Boris, this man is serious, a real star, a successful (and wealthy) businessman, but still we know little about what he believes or stands for.

COMEDY TROUPE

Vladimir Zelenskyi started as a comedian but he is a highly successful comic actor who owns the production company, Kvartal 95 – name of the comedy troupe that made him famous across the countries of the former Soviet Union. Most well known abroad for 'Servant of the People', where he plays an innocent schoolteacher who by happenstance is elected president as people vote for a break from corrupt politics.

He rose to prominence as an alternative comic in the post Soviet days, a bit like the Al Murray, David Badiel, Herring & Lee generation in the UK. He is no highly educated Liberal intellectual like Al Murray.

His family friendly films loved by babushkas and young people alike – a bit Python, but not a Michael Palin, a Rowan Atkinson image, turned political activist like Tony Robinson. As a star he is akin to one of the great US comic actors, Hope or Crosby; perhaps an Eddie Murphy, Mike Myers or Jim Carey. Highly notable is that the new President is a first language Russian speaker from a post Soviet industrial city. This screws Putin's Russian nationalist narrative. His election victories – from personality, and protest voting against the incumbent / the establishment – gained majority support from nearly every part of the country except some parts of pro-Russian south east, and more nationalistic west.

Part of the mythology is that Zelenskyi's victory was won via the internet and without big money. The political and media analysts for the OSCE election observation missions showed that television is still the most important media in Ukraine. The volume of Zelenskyi billboard, poster, tv and internet advertising was huge. Even if very cheap, the volume still required a lot of money. True mythology is that there was no physical campaign, except offices to coordinate volunteers,

Sluha Narodu (Servant of the People) party won the presidential election with no ground war. It was the most surreal election I have ever seen. I was a Long Term Election Observer from February to May in Chernihiv, north of Kyiv, east of Chernobyl. In this historic region which my team covered, the winner, unlike Petro Poroshenko, Yuliya Tymoshenko and local challenger Oleh Lyashko, did not visit. After round one defeat the incumbent's campaigners stopped (our region one of few where former President Tymoshenko did better; her team ran a technically brilliant campaign in the rural districts around Bakhmach). There was no election campaign to observe at all.

How could the incumbent lose in a system where the people in power control jobs and patronage; people are afraid to not vote for the winning side in case they or their children lose their job?

People were desperate for change and voted for it. The incumbent ran his campaign against his main rival – Orange revolution leader Yuliya Tymoshenko



Also deployed against Poroshenko was the TV channel of oligarch Kolomoisky that did not pretend to be at all impartial. (Billionaire Victor Pinchuk's channel was neutral, while multi-billionaire Rinat Akhmetov and fugitive oligarch Dmytro Firtash's channels leaned towards the pro-Russian state opposition block spin off candidate).

Of 1.7 billion hrynia officially spent by candidates 67% was spent on mass media according to declarations to the Central Election Commission. Poroshenko spent more than €8m on media in round one.

– and too late saw the real chance of the new man winning. Three weeks out I still thought that Zelenskyi would not win because conservative older voters would in the end pick the safe choice; the administrative/ party/ politician/ oligarch machines would get the vote out; the coffee loving youngsters who liked the television star would not get off their bean bags to vote. They did, and the babushkas voted for the nice young man off the television, so did many in the West who want a western European facing Ukraine, in the East who want peace and a roll back on nationalist language policies, and every taxi driver I talked to who had served in the war and blamed Poroshenko for not stopping a war only Putin can stop. Petro Poroshenko's Solidarnist bloc concentrated on the man as statesman, a role that many European and North American leaders acknowledge he has performed well.

There were many allegations of illegality, and much practice outside the spirit of the law. A lot of dodgy money swimming around, but a lot less than in previous elections and it didn't influence the result. The 39 candidates paid a €79,000 deposit - the vast majority did not campaign. So called 'technical candidates' were put up to split the other sides' votes and give an advantage in the party nominated elections commissions that run the elections. There were so many technical candidates that they cancelled each other out and the commissions mostly ran the elections professionally and in a collegial fashion. 'Clone candidates' are reminiscent of the 'Literal Democrat' episode in Britain when a malicious intervener cost Adrian Sanders an MEP seat in the time before party logos on ballot papers. Ukraine needs numbers or logos to deal with the Yuriy Tymoshenko and Yuliya Tymoshenko confusion.

The Government was keen to show the outside world that this would be a genuine free and fair election. Administratively it was and it became clear that mass abuses of the past by the main parties was not happening this time. Voters were not bought. The president's sense of fair play handed an opportunity for people to realise they could freely vote against him.

The lack of independent journalism is a huge problem. In many newspapers political content is only covered if it is paid for – the same with the financially struggling local and regional press in Georgia and North Macedonia. In the south east, regions next to the war zone, many people get their news from Russian language sources and believe the Russian propaganda.

Policies designed to increase use of Ukrainian by promoting it over Russian even in majority Russian speaking areas (the south east, cities of the centre and Odessa) have ensured that Putin propaganda has more fertile ground to spread. Unbelievable - given that 95% of it is obviously untrue.

Unfortunately people who dislike their political leaders seem keen to believe the parts that they agree with. As across many former Communist countries, recently in Bosnia - just like in Britain and Northern Ireland - people complain about politicians then usually vote for the same ones again. One side effect of the wholesale change in Ukraine was that some genuine reformers and hard working MPs lost their seats as well.

BLOODY WAR

There is a small bloody war in the far south east of the country that is occupied by Russian controlled terrorists and Russian troops. Ukrainian soldiers are killed and injured every few days. Civilians are killed as sides fire at each other. 100 Ukrainians are held as political prisoners (hostages). Putin toned down the war before E-Day to embarrass Poroshenko. Then turned the war on again when Zelenskyi was elected - gift to a new president he refused to congratulate. The British, Americans and Canadians are active in training Ukrainian forces; contrary to propaganda spread by Russia's far left and far right stooges in Europe they are not fighting the Russian occupiers.

Disappointingly the illiberal old order of Opposition Platform for Life polled well in the south east and are the main opposition, but with only 13%. At one point the new candidate against the establishment

was likely to be pop star Svyatoslav Vakarchuk, front man of Ukraine's most popular band, Okean Elzy. Vakarchuk did not stand for president and formed his Holos (Voice) party, late. It gained 20 seats. Older reformist parties were swept away. Anatoliy Hrytsenko, former defence minister, leader of ALDE member Civic Position earlier in the year did a deal with Mayor of Lviv, Andriy Sadovyi. The latter, leader of Christian Democrat-like Samopomich ('Self Reliance'), backed Hrytsenko for President. They ran against each other in the parliamentaries and both disappeared.

Boris Johnson has repeated the consistent British line of total support for Ukraine, while undermining stability in Europe, and making our political car crash over Brexit headline news in Ukraine. This cannot be an easy time to be a British diplomat. The UK Embassy in Kyiv is highly active and has increased its work across the country, to all major cities and regions. UK programmes include Active Citizens - training for young people to take action in their own communities - and support citizen journalism, especially on fact checking.

The man of the people's right hand, chief of staff Andriy Bohdan, is the lawyer of oligarch Ihor Kolomoisky. Kolomoisky helped stem Kremlin unrest in the major city of Dnipro but was in self-imposed exile since the collapse of his Privat Bank at great cost to the public. He has now returned. Zelenskyi has picked a political fight with Mayor of Kyiv, famous boxer, Vitaliy Klitschko. It begins to look as if the new administration is settling political scores.

Many of the candidates for Zelenskyi, now MPs, were linked to his business, many others are new to politics. The whole parliamentary party was sent to a special University crash course on government and economics.

Putin goaded the new president by announcing it would be easier for Ukrainians to gain Russian citizenship. Zelenskyi issued an inspired rebuff saying that Ukraine would give citizenship to freedom loving Russians. Judicial reform is a longstanding demand to ensure rule of law, and stability for business. Reformers want wholesale replacement of existing judges, which interferes with judicial independence. The many local and regional judges I've met are as educated and professional as judges anywhere. The failure of high level political / oligarchic and killing of journalist and activist cases is a very real concern.

I first went to Ukraine in 2014 when Petro Poroshenko was elected in a landslide. Kyiv Post editor, Brian Bonner, fairly pointed out that the chocolate magnate had significant successes as well as failures. Returning each year I see many improvements in the country and that many people have a good quality of life, though utility prices are high and many, especially pensioners, have very little money. Poroshenko did not expect to be a war president, and Ukraine was saved as a state under his tenure. Millions of Ukrainians have invested their hopes in the TV star and give him a huge mandate to carry out major reforms. Zelenskyi has the chance to make history again.

Kiron Reid is a member of the Liberator Collective and spent four months in Ukraine as professional election observer and volunteer university professor

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT UKRAINE

A contributor with close knowledge of Ukraine

There are rights and wrongs in all wars. In this war the wrong is all on one side and the right on the other. President Zelenskyy has stated: "Now can be no 'half' decisions or 'halftones'! There is only black and white, good or evil! You are either for peace or support the bloody Russian aggressor to kill Ukrainian children and women.

Now I agree that neutrality is possible and that not opposing does not mean supporting. But if you take a moral and political human rights stand you have to stand with Ukraine.

Russia under Putin has been at war in Ukraine since 2014, killing civilians and military alike. NATO, the US and Britain have not attacked anyone in Europe and are not at war in Ukraine. The exception was stopping the Yugoslav wars with bombing Serbia.

The democratic world, the EU, Britain and America failed and were defeated when the Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 was downed over Ukraine. When a Russian unit, maybe regular army manned, murdered the passengers and crew Europe and America did nothing, and that emboldened Putin. This should have been a Lusitania moment (and MH17 was a civilian aircraft not carrying weapons), a Pearl Harbour. But our leaders let Russia get away with it while our far right and far left believed and spread the numerous contradictory propaganda stories.

Putin's Christian Slavic Russian army is killing Russian speakers in basically pro-Russian cities and towns. As the writer Leonid Ragozin has said, Putin has done more against the Russian language than anyone since WW2. "Putin's destruction of Russian-speaking cities in eastern Ukraine is indeed the worst thing anyone has done to Russian interests and language since WWII."

Kharkiv city is largely Russian speaking, Melitopol, Mariupol are Russian speaking, Chernihiv is Russian or Ukrainian or a mix of Russian/ Belarussian/ Ukrainian. A valid criticism of Ukraine state policy is that the state (following the 'Ukrainian' national/ist mythology) insists on institutions in Russian speaking areas use the official Ukrainian language, even though the people's first language is Russian. The universities for example, where Ukrainian language and history are compulsory in first year. There are however still Russian primary schools for example and no one is persecuted for speaking Russian. In the countryside however around the cities in the centre and east many people still spoke Ukrainian as their mother tongue. Since 2014 more and more people choose to speak

more Ukrainain. Chernihiv is one of the holiest and most ancient cities of the Kievan Russ – for Russian Orthodox Christianity. The Russians are destroying it, including the 1939 art deco cinema in the main square, let alone kindergartens and residential blocks. I lived yards from that cinema for two months.

What the Russians are doing to Mariupol and Kharkiv is what was done in World War Two. Russia is wiping out cities and civilians. Odessa is a wonderful European city, Russian empire, Soviet, Jewish, French, German, Ukrainian, even Greek – we cannot let this be destroyed in 2022.

Anyone who is still repeating the grotesque propaganda of the Russian state is complicit in the atrocities and war crimes. Lavrov, Maria Zakharova, the keyboard terrorists who applaud Russia's atrocities in Syria and Ukraine. Each should be personally held accountable.

Of course these people will all come to a sticky end – like Russian commanders in Donbas or crew of the Buk that killed MH17 – if their testimony might endanger Putin. To those on the British Left who point to British and American war crimes, atrocities and destabilisation in Afghanistan, the Middle East – two war crimes do not make a right and war in Europe is not a price to pay for you sucking up to a brutal elected leader of Russia and his new puppet dictator in Belarus. People in Ukraine are dying for your anti-Western imperialist support of Russian criminal state imperialism. Why do the far Left in Europe oppose a voice and self determination for people in Ukraine?

British and American military intelligence were right. We didn't believe them, did we? We didn't believe them because of past blunders, it sounded like they were warmongering. A well informed ex-military colleague told me in February before the new invasion what Russia was going to do. We will also find it hard to believe as British liberals, but Britain has been much better on Ukraine than many other countries. Liz Truss made some hapless gaffes but has long been a critic of Putin and his war in Ukraine. The repulsive Tory Government have just relented to make it easier for more Ukrainian refugees to come to Britain. Liverpool political scientist Ben Williams (himself a refusenik Corbynista) is probably right that Russia's war has saved Boris. Keir Starmer was getting the edge before that – albeit on Partygate rather than the policy and character flaws of the British PM.

There are neo-Nazis and extreme nationalists in Ukraine but they are a tiny percentage and have minimal political support. But it must be obvious why patriot badged nationalist battalions such as Azov have had much support. Your country being attacked and invaded and told it has no right to exist can do that.

“Putin’s destruction of Russian-speaking cities in eastern Ukraine is indeed the worst thing anyone has done to Russian interests and language since WWII”

British soldiers going AWOL to fight in Ukraine, Britons and all other nationalities fighting with Ukrainian people against Russia are fighting for peace and self-determination against brutal repression and consumer citizen moral vacuum.

These people should be feted and their commitment, foolhardiness and skills rewarded on their return. Britain failed to recognise or reward the International

Brigaders. And this war in Ukraine is not a war with wrong on each side like the Spanish civil war, the good guys are solely in blue and yellow. For six or eight years we said this wasn't like the 1930s; for four years we said there were some parallels with the 1930s, for two years we said the worry that it is becoming more like the 1930s was becoming true. Now the war in Europe is on us and we failed to heed the right lessons from history. Social media and big tech is doing a lot of good, but still the hate and misinformation gets through – by bot, state agent and not useful idiots. One fund worth joining, after the war, will be a defence fund for any British soldiers who have gone to defend Europe in the east against a country that has chosen to be outcast from modern Europe.

Britain, America, Poland, Scandinavia, Spain, almost all of Europe and North America and Japan are helping Ukraine. But not giving it the tools to finish the job. Not stopping Putin's artillery or planes.

We will have to rebuild this European country that we failed to fight with. The challenge for when Putin is finished is how Russia will pay reparations without the mistakes being made that Keynes warned about after Versailles. And how Russia can be turned into a modern liberal tolerant country, and Ukraine, Poland and their neighbours not retreat into nationalism.

Britain and France should probably not have been fighting in Ukraine in 1918-20, but the humanitarian consequences of the Russian civil war were appalling. Now it a Russian humanitarian catastrophe and we are watching as it gets closer to and affects all of Europe. It is a real and direct concern that NATO fighting in Ukraine would lead to World War 3. In many ways Biden is being principled and cautious in avoiding that escalation. The question is can the democratic countries and NATO allies keep Ukraine supplied enough to survive. And who has won except Putin if the country is destroyed before 'victory'.

THE MEANING OF 'Z'

Carol Weaver looks at how Putin's propaganda conceals the truth about Ukraine from ordinary Russians

Imagine the authorities coming into your place of work or your university and telling you to get on a bus to go to an event. When you are on the bus you are told you are going to London, to Wembley Stadium, and when there you must shout 'England' and wave a flag.

You are given either a flag of St George or a flag with a symbol on it that you do not really understand. However, it transpires that it is not a football match you are attending but a political rally, with your prime minister celebrating the annexation of neighbouring territory and speaking out about the 'denazification' of one of your neighbouring countries.

This would be the equivalent of what happened in Moscow on 18 March, with Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin speaking and a Z symbol on many of the flags. Initially the symbol was just a military marking but now it seems to be a symbol of support for Putin and his war though he must know that the ordinary citizens bussed in might not be his supporters.

Comparisons must be made with the rallies of Hitler, Milosevic and Trump except that Putin's speech was short. The Z could be seen as a kind of swastika meant to induce fear. Certainly, this war would seem to us to be less about the denazification of Ukraine and more about the Nazi-like behaviour of Putin who is taking the suppression of truth and the spreading of lies to extreme levels.

The letter Z is appearing all over Russia which does not necessarily mean that all the people

participating support Putin, just that they are being compliant knowing that many anti-war protesters are in prison. During the annexation of Crimea and the war in 2014, orange and black striped St George ribbons were displayed which seemed less sinister.

A Guardian report <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/07/why-has-the-letter-z-become-the-symbol-of-war-for-russia> says: "A number of schools have also posted images of children standing in a Z formation. One image that has been circulating online since Sunday showed terminally ill children from a hospice in the southern city of Kazan forming a Z to support the invasion of Ukraine."

The same article also reports that those brave enough to oppose the war might end up with a Z painted on their doors (for example a member of Pussy Riot). Yet many Russians are trying to ridicule the letter online and are promoting the colours yellow and blue for Ukraine. On 19 March three Russian cosmonauts arrived at the International Space Station wearing yellow space suits with blue markings.

Propaganda is 24 hours a day in Russia with many ordinary people choosing the easy path of believing it, especially if their teenage sons have been conscripted.

Most ignore it and try to get on with their everyday lives which are becoming more difficult.

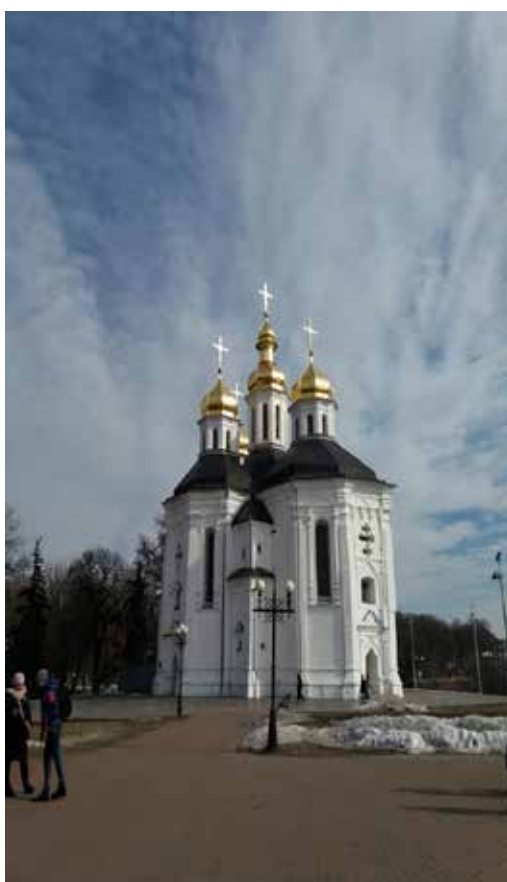
Due to the 'power vertical' structure Putin has built up, with the Kremlin having power over all institutions, and Putin making personal appointments, he cannot be easily deposed, if at all. Few get close to him and it is not even known for sure if he has a mistress, fiancée or wife or more children than his two daughters from his first marriage.

Those around him who oppose or criticise are humiliated or put under house arrest. He has few advisors. There is a fear he might shoot the messenger. So, he carries on like a tsar with his war of glory, or a war criminal who accuses others of the genocide he might seem to be committing himself.

No-one knows what will happen next. Maybe the peace talks will give a result though Putin is unlikely to give in until he has Mariupol as part of Russia's land corridor to Crimea and effective

ownership of the Sea of Azov.

But we certainly know more than the ordinary citizens of Russia where the words 'war', 'invasion' and 'attack' have been banned by the media regulator and only state-sanctioned sources of information are permitted. A recent Facebook post by ALDE member party Yabloko used *** as a symbol for one of the banned words.



Dr Carol Weaver is an academic, author and independent political researcher specialising in the Black Sea region, the European Union and European Security. She contested Rutland & Melton for the Liberal Democrats in 2019.

WILL 41 GO INTO 16?

The Liberal Democrats have slashed the size of the Federal Board. President Mark Pack answers his critics on this

May 1993 was the best-ever time to be a Liberal Democrat constitutional geek. May 29 to May 31 to be precise. A special extra long Liberal Democrat federal and English spring conference, extending to cover bank holiday Monday to get through 160 pages of constitutional amendments and amendments to amendments.

Yet that extended constitutional bonanza ended up, in one crucial respect, like all our other governance reviews. They start off with many people saying the Federal Board (FB) or its predecessor the Federal Executive is too large, and they ended up failing to reduce it. After 34 years of people saying it was too big, all we have really managed to do was to change its name (from 'executive' to 'board') and to... make it slightly larger than it was at the party's creation.

There has been other good work along the way, such as the creation of the Federal People Development Committee in the last governance review.

But at the heart of it all, the size of the FB was ducked. Of course, not many people have defended a board of 41. After all, there is a reason why our local party, regional and state party executives don't go for such a large body. Or why 41 sounds such a huge number to people involved in other membership organisations, charities and other not for profit organisations.

That size has been a problem because, as the Thornhill Review into the 2019 election debacle documented, a board of that size acts like a talking shop and a rubber stamp rather than the democratic, effective decision-making board we need at the heart of our structures.

Which is why change has been supported both by party members – 94% saying they wanted the board to change in our consultation last year – and then by party conference this spring – with 71% voting in favour of amended proposals to reform our board.

Those amended proposals – and credit to the three different batches of amendments, all of which improved the package – will create a 16 member board from the next set of committee elections this autumn. There will also be a 40 member Federal Council to provide scrutiny for the board.

Of those 16 board members, 13 will have to win at least one party election in some form – some by all party members (such as president) and some by a subset of members (such as all Scottish members electing the Scottish convenor). They'll be joined by three appointees – our elections, finance and membership experts (the chairs of FCEC, FFRC and FPDC – counting the latter as appointed as although FPDC elects its chair, the chair comes from people appointed to the committee).

Those 13 will be leader, president, vice-president responsible for working with ethnic minority communities, three 'non-portfolio' slots elected by all party members, the three state party chairs/convenors, the Young Liberals chair, a local government person elected by our councillors and directly-elected mayors, the Federal Conference Committee chair and a Federal Policy Committee vice-chair.

Having those different key post holders on the new board matters for just the same reason why it makes sense to have your treasurer, data officer or diversity officer on a local party executive. If you're not bringing those people together, you end up with a structure that is either shambolic or secretive (those people do get together, but have to do so outside the official structures).

The Federal Council will be a mix of 21 people elected by all party members along with 18 people elected by different constituencies in the party (the state parties, councillors and directly elected mayors, Young Liberals and parliamentarians all electing three each) and finally the chair of the Federal Audit and Scrutiny Committee. The council will elect its own chair.

Alongside that, are two other changes. One is a new power to no-confidence the party president. I've been very keen on this as an important safeguard against a president being incapable or failing to do their job. I'll continue to do my best to make this a power that isn't needed... But given the damage that could be caused by a president, it's important that there is a safeguard. Now, a two-thirds majority of the FB could force a by-election – forcing a resolution in such a difficult situation but still preserving the final say for party members.

In future too, the FCEC will report to conference, giving conference a better route to hold people to account.

Of course, structural change can only go so far. People and culture are the real deal breakers. But a bad structure hinders good people and cultures, and tends to bring out the worst in people.

Even a good team can still screw up. But now we've got a much better chance of the team that gets elected this autumn delivering the sort of Westminster general election campaign we – our party and our country, so desperately need.

Mark Pack is president of the Liberal Democrats

RUSSIA'S GOTTERDAMMERUNG GOES GLOBAL

Putin's Russia hides behind mercenaries to keep thugs in power across the 'global south', says Rebecca Tinsley

My first encounter with Russians in Africa was in 2004, flying from Nairobi to Khartoum on a plane filled with heavy-drinking, grizzled mining engineers, there to exploit Sudan's gold and oil deposits with the ruling junta's permission.

The next day I boarded a 1970s Soviet Antonov bomber repurposed as a domestic carrier, heading for Darfur. As we trundled down the runway, the housing of one of the engines fell off and smoke poured into the cabin. The worldly, conflict-hardened aid workers around me started praying. At the time, the Sudanese regime was using more cast-off Soviet planes to dump junk, including old trucks, on Darfuri villages, hoping to kill the locals with rusty trash.

You could be forgiven for assuming the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 terminated Russia's meddling beyond its Eurasian 'sphere of influence'.

However, Russia nurtures the links forged with liberation struggles during the Cold War. It remains by far Africa's biggest supplier of weapons, and its mercenaries (now active in Ukraine) destabilise countries from Venezuela to Libya, propping up repressive regimes.

This time, their motivation is financial, as well as ideological, and they have the full cooperation of the Kremlin.

Older readers will recall the devastating proxy conflicts that blighted millions of lives in Indochina, Latin America and Africa as the USSR and the USA backed their respective puppet tyrants.

BLOATED MONSTERS

The West funded and protected Noriega in Panama, D'Aubuisson in El Salvador, Pinochet in Chile, Stroessner in Paraguay and many others. The freedom-loving democracies embraced bloated monsters like the Emperor Bokassa of the Central African Republic and Zaire's Mobuto. They also bankrolled long-running apartheid-era civil wars in Mozambique, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Angola, not to mention Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

On the other 'side', the USSR and Cuba expressed solidarity with liberation struggles, providing training, weapons and more. (Because they have long memories, these countries abstained from censuring Russia for the invasion of Ukraine).

Gorbachev once described it as the world's most expensive failed propaganda campaign. I was in Moscow as the USSR collapsed, staying in halls of residence that were conceived as a training college for third world terrorists, but had been quickly rebranded as a hotel as the Soviet Union disintegrated.

When the Berlin Wall fell, the West largely withdrew from the global south, believing the risk of dominoes tumbling toward Moscow was in the past. China astutely took the West's place, offering loans, infrastructure projects and bribes to warm the bank accounts of third world dictators. Anyone traveling to conflict zones in Africa would encounter bleary-eyed veterans of the Afghan or Chechen wars flying planes, but it was wrongly believed that the Russian state restricted itself to selling weapons systems to anyone willing to buy them.

SAUSAGES AND NAZIS

In 2014, a team of 300 Russian paramilitary mercenaries arrived in Donetsk and Luhansk, supporting pro-Russian separatists and helping to annex Crimea. Emerging from this successful operation was the Wagner Group, an arms-length unit of the Russian Ministry of Defence. Putin denies it exists, but it has become a private military company with 6,000 former Russian soldiers. It is allegedly owned by Putin's close friend Yevgeny Prigozhin, who made his first fortune in the sausage business and who is affectionately known as 'Putin's chef'. Prigozhin denies knowing anything about the Wagner Group.

Dmitry Utkin, who commands the group, is an admirer of Hitler, choosing the name in honour of the Fuhrer's favourite composer. Wagner's disregard for the Geneva Conventions brings to mind the methods used by the very Nazis that Putin claims he is crushing in Ukraine.

Since 2015, Wagner soldiers have fought alongside the Syrian Army, guarding oil installations and granted oil and gas leases by a grateful Bashar Assad. Their involvement, and that of the Russian air force, guarantees a Russian military installation at Tartus, giving Putin a Mediterranean port.

Wagner soldiers were and are transported and supplied by Russian defence ministry aircraft. In addition to countless atrocities against Syrian civilians, they were implicated in the mutilation and beheading of a disillusioned Syrian soldier who tried to desert.

When Maxim Borodin, a Russian journalist, investigated the killing, he 'fell to his death' off his balcony. Meanwhile, the official Russian armed forces have committed war crimes by targeting civilians in Syria, not that the rest of the world seemed to care or notice.

In 2018, a team of Russian journalists went to the Central African Republic after rumours that a group of Russian mercenaries were committing atrocities

against unarmed civilians there. The subsequent UN Panel of Experts report on private military companies in the CAR does not use the name Wagner, but it is clear that Russian soldiers traveling around in Russian armoured personnel carriers are killing, robbing and raping civilians, and helping themselves to gold and diamond mines. The Russian investigative journalists were ambushed and killed, by the way.

Since 2019, up to 1,000 Wagner soldiers have supported General Haftar's attempts to overthrow the UN-recognised government of Libya. Financed by the United Arab Emirates who dread the prospect of a democratic Arab nation, Wagner are implicated in war crimes, booby-trapping civilian areas and laying land mines which continue to maim and kill. The Russian defence ministry supplied state-of-the-art technology with which they feed back intelligence. Wagner protected oil platforms, and are reputedly helping Saif al-Islam Gaddafi who has ambitions to lead Libya.

The Wagner Group would not exist without Putin's approval. Hence in 2018, Wagner was training Daniel Ortega's security services in Nicaragua, cracking down on pro-democracy protests. In 2019, they supported Venezuelan autocrat Nicholas Maduro as he went through a sticky patch, with massive protests against his incompetent and corrupt rule.

The Wagner soldiers arrived on a Russian air force plane, so there was no ambiguity about the Kremlin's backing for Maduro. This is foreign policy by proxy mercenaries, although Russia denies Wagner is closely enmeshed with its security apparatus.

On the same day Russia invaded Ukraine (24 February) General Hemedti of Sudan's Rapid Support Forces (the rebranded Janjaweed responsible for genocide in Darfur) arrived in Moscow to support Putin. The Wagner Group has been assisting the Khartoum junta's security forces as they kill unarmed crowds protesting against the October 2021 military coup. The Russians were also present in 2019, in the dying days of the Bashir regime, trying to keep their client in power despite the popular uprising.

The Sudan expert Gill Lusk links the Wagner Group to Hemedti, now vice-president of Sudan's military Sovereign Council: "Russia was already officially involved in gold mining in Sudan and Wagner has long worked protecting mining sites, from which Hemedti and his family are widely seen as benefitting.

"As with all industries linked to the military-Islamist nexus during Omer el Bashir's 30 years at the head of the Islamist regime, party and personal gain have been intertwined. That remains the case today, especially with the public but low-profile return of Islamist officials since the 25 October 2021 coup led by Abdel Rahman el Burhan."

Lusk says Sudanese generally take it for granted that Wagner represents the Russian state and is no simple private military company: "Since Wagner employees are highly paid, according to what they indicate in the BBC film Haftar's Russian Mercenaries, the question is of course who is paying for their protection?"

"This documentary showed clearly, in interviews with former Wagner soldiers, that they do not expect to take prisoners in combat: captives are used 'as slaves' or killed \no one wants an extra mouth to feed'."

Under Bashir, Russia signed a deal to build a military base in Port Sudan on the strategically important Red Sea. When the people's pro-democracy

revolution purged Bashir and his corrupt cronies, the interim administration put the deal on hold, angering Putin. No wonder the Wagner Group are helping to reinstall the generals and Islamists.

Wagner's path is not always this smooth, though. In 2019, the Mozambique government paid the Russians to fight the Islamist Jihadists who have been terrorising the oil-producing Cabo Delgado area. The fundamentalists beat back Wagner's men and left an unknown but significant number of Russians dead. Wagner withdrew in disgrace, to be replaced by the Rwandan army which had greater success, although the Islamists remain a threat.

Wagner learned its lesson from Mozambique: they have been hired by the military junta running Mali, and have brought more weaponry with them. For \$10.8m a month, and all the minerals they can extract, Wagner has replaced France's Operation Barkhane in fighting the Islamists. Their heavy-handed tactics are acting as a catalyst and recruiting agent for the terrorist group, however. The Mali junta denies the deployment of Russians, but their equipment and vehicles are in plain sight.

PUTIN'S REWARD

Russia, like China, wants the developing world to conclude that authoritarianism works well for the ruling elite, unlike democracy, with its tiresome accountability, transparency and environmental impact assessments. Hence Russia exports weapons, grain, and the services of the Wagner Group, and is repaid with their support at the UN.

Putin is said to have been intoxicated by the success of Russian forces in Syria and vicariously through the Wagner Group's antics. Russia's foreign policy has accordingly moved from defensive to offensive, while still clinging to its self-image as a victim of Western duplicity. Both Britain and the USA continue to provide training and weapons to unsavoury regimes, which campaigners do their best to expose. But just because 'we' do it does not mean we should not question the toxic effect of the Wagner group.

The USSR was famously described as 'Upper Volta with rockets.' It still is: the Russian economy is no bigger than that of greater Los Angeles. As Putin disparages international law, humanitarian conventions, diplomacy and multilateral institutions, we can expect to see more of "Burkina Faso (today's Upper Volta) with rockets and mercenaries" enriching themselves in the developing world.

They are unaccountable and their mission is usually to defeat pro-democracy movements, or keep autocrats and thugs in power. If the west believes it can co-exist with a Russia that behaves in this manner, then we should avert our eyes from the implications. Instead, we must support democratic institutions, open media and civil society in the Global South, pushing leaders who get our aid to reinstate term limits and to condemn coups.

Rebecca Tinsley founded the human rights group Waging Peace, which supports Sudanese dissidents

WHO WILL PUTIN HELP IN AMERICA?

Will the Ukraine conflict allow Joe Biden to appear a war leader, or benefit Republicans through the impact on America's economy? With only a wafer thin Democratic majority in Congress, Andrew Edlin looks at the options

A prediction of Democratic future prospects, especially in respect to President Biden, could not be more challenging to make at this point in history.

As with nearly all politicians of the major players in the world, Biden's fortunes will be affected by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This war has disrupted and destroyed so many tenets of conventional wisdom, indeed the entire rules-based post-World War II structure of international relations, that projecting ahead more than a week is foolhardy.

Anyway, let's examine Biden's prospects prior to the invasion. They were then poor. Democrats have a 50/50 divided Senate, with two right-leaning Democratic senators holding, and often tipping, the balance unfavourably. In the House of Representatives, with only a nine-seat majority, the progressive wing is constantly sniffing for betrayal/compromise of their morally powerful but equally impractical plans.

Biden is hamstrung wherever he turns, his signature programs smothered. He is still being blamed for the failure to implement them regardless, which is usual in American politics. For example, presidents always get the blame, and never the credit, for changes in fuel costs.

UNENVIABLE POSITION

This unenviable position is not even taking into consideration a 6-3 Supreme Court acting against core Democratic interests such as abortion rights – and of course unwavering Republican Congressional hostility.

Biden is very low in the polls for this point in his term. His cabinet seems invisible – and vice-president Kamala Harris most of all.

On its face, losing both House and Senate in the midterms seems almost certain. This would follow the pattern of history, where the party of Government usually loses ground. In 2010, in the midterms of Obama's first presidency, Republicans gained 60 House seats. They need many fewer to gain control now. And just one or two Senate seats give the Republicans control there, depending what the rogue Democratic Senators Manchin and Sinema do.

And if Biden feels emasculated now, the prospect of Kevin McCarthy, or worse Jim Jordan, as Speaker, and Mitch McConnell as majority leader in the Senate – again – will be even more constricting.

On the plus side, Biden has done well physically for a man of 79. There are the usual barbs from Republicans if he so much as clears his throat during a speech, but they are half-hearted. This was considered a major

vulnerability during the last election campaign, but not much anymore. However, I do not see him running again for the presidency in 2024.

Who will? It will be a big open field much like 2020, and with Kamala Harris being so anonymous she has little or no status as heir apparent. The Democrats need a star, like Bill Clinton or Barack Obama, to capture the imagination of the population. My dark horse would be Amy Klobuchar.

Ukrainian President Zelensky has taught the world many things – not least just how desperately hungry the time cries out for courage. Churchill, following similar comments by Aristotle and Samuel Johnson, said: "Courage is rightly esteemed the first of human qualities, because... it is the quality which guarantees all others." Zelensky exhibits character, eloquence, and old-fashioned leadership that perfectly rises to the need of the time, and the World War II zeitgeist we all find ourselves facing.

Biden's best – and some would say only – hope of a dramatic turnaround in the midterms is the Ukraine war. It has made Zelensky an instant global superstar, rescued Boris Johnson from quite likely losing his job, turned Macron into the de facto leader of Europe, turned Chancellor Scholz of Germany overnight into a military hawk, and made the governments of Switzerland, Sweden, and Finland break the neutral habits of many decades.

The unintended consequences will continue, and become more tragic, more complex, and more dangerous. And Joe Biden will have to deal with them all, and lead a varied and fractious alliance of frightened leaders in the most challenging test since World War II.

This is arguably a bigger shock than the 9/11 attacks. Probably the biggest since Pearl Harbor.

However, Biden is - on paper - the perfect President for this crisis. He has been around forever. He was elected a senator in 1972, 17 years before the Berlin Wall fell. He is steeped in Cold War and Russian behaviours. He knows Putin personally. He stated with unnerving (to Putin, I'm sure) certainty that the Russians would definitely invade Ukraine, and showed the intelligence photos needed transparently to everyone to support his point.

He was proved right, and that allowed NATO, plus other nations on the fringes, not to be caught off guard, and to present the world with a startling and unexpected unanimity of purpose and action.

Whether he gets credit for this from the bizarre, polarized, isolationist American electorate is hard

to predict indeed. But all, truly all, depends on how the war plays out. Almost certainly no credit from Republicans at all. Maybe some Independents, always a decisive group. And hopefully yes from the eternally squabbling Democrats.

But for how long? If I had to guess - with higher petrol, natural gas, and food prices by autumn, which the Republicans will blame on Biden with zero regard for the real reasons – the Democrats will still lose both Houses of Congress. If they don't, it really will be a miracle, and the only way that miracle happens is if Biden is seen as a Roosevelt-style war hero. And can American interest and compassion be sustained by a war far, far away that voters even now perversely feel they are paying for, when their coffee goes up 20 cents?

The pandemic has shown the limited attention span of Americans to inconvenient truths that cost money.

CULTURE WAR

The Republicans will fill up their election messaging with the usual culture war items – immigration, LGBTQ rights, abortion, gun control – but by then the 'pocketbook' effects of the war will likely be the main talking point.

Maybe Trump will have been sidelined by legal troubles and his increasingly erratic behaviour by that time. Maybe he'll be reduced to a kingmaker, not a king. His championing of Putin is already passed over, where any other politician would be long discredited by it.

“With Kamala Harris being so anonymous, she has little or no status as heir apparent”

If a week is a long time in politics, it is a lot longer if you are being attacked by a megalomaniac nationalist with thermobaric and possibly battlefield nuclear or chemical weapons.

The Ukraine war will have many further cataclysmic effects on politics and economics worldwide. What effects? Who knows. Too early to say. After 9/11 it seemed the world was

united against Islamic terrorism. That support for the US ebbed away quickly. Outrage at the Russian invasion of the Crimea was transient.

I spent my youth in southern England looking up at the sky, knowing there were Russian nuclear-armed submarines in the North Sea a minute away. I followed, as a child, the Cuban missile crisis in existential dread, as air raid sirens were tested. And at a stroke we are back to that mindset - asking unimaginable questions about appalling possibilities.

Andrew Edlin was a modern history scholar at Magdalen College, Oxford, and has lived in the USA for 30 years. He performs a one-man play, 'Churchill' churchillplay.com

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SITTING AND SMOKING

An encounter with Extinction Rebellion got David Grace thinking about whether direct action persuades or alienates

Many years ago at a conference of the Young Liberals the members on the platform lit up a marijuana spliff and passed it around.

This was not just a sign of the laid-back, cool nature of the organisation. It was a political statement. That year the Federation of Conservative Students in a fit of libertarianism had passed a motion in favour of the legalisation of cannabis. It was rumoured that the Labour Party Young Socialists had greeted this news not by agreement but by declaring that smoking pot was a bourgeois deviation. The Young Liberals had decided that it wasn't worth debating and expressed their opinions by direct action. Some of those on the platform who subsequently stood for parliament were always grateful that no photograph of the event was found (you know who you are).

We can all be grateful that there were no mobiles with cameras and no Facebook. The question of when it is right to take direct action including deliberate law-breaking remains an open one.

Peter Hain, a founder of Liberator, when still a Young Liberal and before sinking into the slough of the Labour Party, became known to the British public through the Stop the Seventy Tour which succeeded in preventing the tour of the all-white South African Cricket team in 1970.

PARENTS' OUTRAGE

I remember my parents' outrage when the protestors attacked 20 county grounds, dug up the wicket at Cardiff and set fire to Lord's. Hain carefully distanced himself from the violence. Many anti-apartheid campaigners would claim that it was this direct action which stopped the tour. You could however argue that the result was more to do with the threat of African and Asian countries to boycott the Commonwealth Games if the tour went ahead and the intervention of home secretary James Callaghan requesting the MCC to cancel. Wisden has a thorough account of the story here: <https://bit.ly/3ieJWZS>. As often in politics post hoc does not always mean propter hoc; we find it hard to determine which cause produced which effect.

The whole question of whether direct action is good or bad was debated at the Cambridge Union recently when the focus was Extinction Rebellion.

I suspect that the two men speaking for XR, Rupert Read and Roger Hallam, left with their prejudices about Cambridge confirmed in their minds. They were self-righteous and patronising, lecturing a well-informed and aware audience on the dangers of climate change but failing to make a case on the key question whether XR's tactics are the right response and will change what happens.

Their stance, which I have heard for years from Green activists, was that they were right, they had the facts and therefore they have the high moral ground and if we don't agree with them we are all wrong and guilty.

They also trotted out post hoc ergo propter hoc, arguing that government policy had changed after they had glued themselves to motorways and disrupted commuter trains. Well, it didn't change much or nearly enough. Governments are loath to change policy if they look as though they are giving in to law-breaking.

A more successful example of law-breaking which changed attitudes was when demonstrators turfed the statue of slave trader Edward Colston into Bristol Harbour.

Public reaction was mixed with good liberal-minded people agreeing with the motives but not applauding the criminal damage of statues. Interestingly when the statue-topplers were tried, the jury acquitted them despite the clear fact that they had done it. Another jury acquitted some XR protestors.

These two acquittals had Tory MPs including Peter Bone and Tom Hunt foaming at the mouth. One even wanted to 'address' the jury system if it was a 'barrier' to doling out punishments. The appalling attorney general Suella Braverman was considering an appeal against the Bristol verdict. To my amazement and for the only time in my life, I had to applaud Jacob Rees-Mogg who said juries are the "great sublime protector of liberties".

We all remember the violent direct action of the suffragettes trying to persuade a Liberal government (shame on Asquith and co for resisting votes for women 40 years after John Stuart Mill proposed it in parliament). I don't personally remember the campaign of course but I once knocked on doors with an elderly woman who had been a suffragette.

HAIR WASHING

We came across a first-time voter of 18 who said she wasn't going to vote because she had to wash her hair. My companion rounded on the girl shouting, "I marched so you can vote". It worked. The reluctant voter turned out. Can't be sure she voted for me.

Historians continue to debate whether change came because of the suffragettes or because of the more moderate campaigns of the suffragists who confined themselves to peaceful, constitutional methods.

We will surely all honour and applaud a recent piece of direct action by Marina Ovsyannikova, the news editor who appeared on Russian Television holding a banner which read "No war. Stop the war. Don't believe the propaganda. They lie to you here. Russians against war." She broke the law and has been fined and further punishment may follow. Would we also applaud a similar action if someone appeared on BBC during an interview of one of the current collection of liars which masquerades as the UK government? The Young Liberals of the 1970s didn't just smoke pot; they held many late-night discussions about the necessity for direct action. One thing was agreed that while some laws are unjust and it might be right to break the

law, you could not complain if you were then punished by the law. Indeed the publicity of the punishment might even help a campaign to get the law changed.

We are left with the original question: when is it right to take direct action and break the law? We could answer that it's right if it achieves the objective of the campaign but that's hindsight. When planning or carrying out direct action you cannot know whether it will change things. You may never know if it did. Clearly when there is no alternative, as with Marina Ovsyannikova in Russia, direct action is your only option. In our more liberal, more nuanced society the choice is harder.

It is not enough to be certain that your cause is good. You must also have considered whether your tactics are good? Will they persuade, will they attract support or will they alienate it? Will they put pressure on government or even make them less willing to change?

“Their stance, which I have heard for years from Green activists, was that they were right, they had the facts and therefore they have the high moral ground and if we don't agree with them we are all wrong and guilty”

As so often happens, the most useful contribution at that Cambridge debate on Extinction Rebellion came from the audience. A woman who had persuaded the university to disinvest in fossil fuel companies claimed that it was the more militant student action of occupations of buildings which had made the authorities listen to her reasoned case set out in a paper. She concluded that campaigns need radical elements to get the moderate ones listened to. I conclude being right doesn't change the world, persuading enough people that you're right can.

David Grace is a member of the Liberator Collective

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HOW WE WORKED WITH THE GREENS

South Oxfordshire's Lib Dem and Green pact has worked well, but isn't for everywhere, says Sue Cooper

One of the reasons I joined the Lib Dems was that they believe in devolving responsibility for decisions to the lowest tier of local government which is appropriate.

So to provide the context of our experience of working with Green Party councillors in South Oxfordshire, I need to provide some background and history. It also means that what works for us here is not necessarily appropriate elsewhere.

I was first elected to South Oxfordshire District Council in 1991, one of a group of nine Lib Dems on a Conservative-dominated 50 member council. I soon learnt that any suggestion put forward by a non-Conservative member would be automatically rejected, even if a few months later the same or very similar idea re-emerged with a Conservative label on it.

By the next election in 1995, Conservative popularity had waned and we led an administration working together with Labour. This continued for eight years until the Conservative regime returned. But it meant that we'd had experience of working with another political group. By 2015 the now smaller 36 member council had 33 Conservatives, and one each for Labour, Henley Residents and Lib Dems, which became two when I returned to the council in a by-election. This was hardly a strong base from which to take over leading the administration in 2019.

VERY UNPOPULAR

The Conservatives at this time were well on the way to producing a new local plan with far too many houses planned in the Green Belt around Oxford. This was very unpopular with those who believed in protecting the Green Belt. With such a large contingent, it is perhaps not surprising that different factions emerged in the ruling group, which resulted in a major fracture in 2018 over preparation of this local plan. A first version was defeated at a full council meeting, leading to the replacement of the leader, continued unhappiness over the direction under the new leader and the resignation of a ward councillor and my by-election victory.

So in the 2019 elections we expected to make some gains in seats but were obviously quite surprised, albeit delighted, to take control with 13 Liberal Democrats and six Greens in May 2019.

We believe that agreeing with the Green Party not to fight each other in the election, which went down well with the electorate, was a major factor in our success. It did give us the chance to concentrate our fairly limited resources where they were likely to be most productive.

In the aforementioned by-election in 2018, the Green Party had agreed not to put up a candidate against me

on the understanding that in the following year they would have a clear run at one of the seats without our opposition. Mine is a two-member ward and in 2019, after agreeing a joint list of aims for the coming four years and having joint leaflets, the Lib Dem and Green candidates comfortably topped the poll. Personally I had little difficulty in agreeing a joint manifesto with the Greens as I regard myself as a very green Lib Dem. Differences between Lib Dems and Greens tend to be more marked at national rather than local levels. My main objections to their policies come in financial matters where I don't think they are as realistic as they might be. Fortunately my fellow (Green) ward member is very competent and capable, with a strong appreciation of financial practicalities. Anyone with any knowledge of local government finance will know that we have very little scope for wild spending sprees anyway.

We had other wards with joint leaflets and in the remainder, we agreed that the party putting up the candidate would be responsible for leaflets and their distribution with an endorsement from the other party explaining that we did not want to fight each other but we were all working for the good of the residents of South Oxfordshire. We were indebted to our Oxfordshire organiser who had knowledge of the way Richmond had conducted their elections working cooperatively with the Green Party.

When it came to organising cabinet positions after the election, as leader I asked who wanted one and which areas they were interested in. I am a great believer in letting people work in areas where they want to on the basis that you are likely to get better input that way.

Being a cabinet member is quite hard work and needs a fair amount of time. Normally one might use experienced councillors for these positions but since there were only two of us around in the last council, these were in short supply. We did have two Lib Dems who had served on previous councils, one of whom was persuaded to become chair of council as I really felt it would be unfair to put a completely new councillor into such a post and the other didn't want to be a cabinet member but did take on a committee chair.

We have been extremely fortunate that our intake of new councillors in 2019 included many bright, enthusiastic and capable people, which enabled them to get up to speed with council work more quickly than might otherwise have been the case. Relationships between most of us have fortunately been good or at least civil.

The big issue in 2019-20 was our local plan. To say it was stressful, hard work dealing with it is an understatement and our officers were very uncomfortable with the whole procedure too.

Knowing what I know now (you know how wonderful hindsight is) we should have knocked it on the head as soon as we were elected before anyone in government realised what was happening as was recommended to me by a Conservative rebel. But we felt obliged to try and safeguard the housing infrastructure funding which the county council was extremely keen to get for some roads in the Didcot area which has much new development and traffic problems to go with them.

The leader of the Green group and I went with our chief executive to see some senior civil servants in MHCLG (as it was then) to try to explain that we wished to abandon the local plan and start immediately on a more ambitious plan taking account of climate change and numbers of houses more related to the needs of our district.

But secretary of state Robert Jenrick was having none of that and eventually he forced the council to adopt what is now South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035.

TRICKIEST ISSUE

The voting on this was the trickiest issue we have had to deal with. The Green group decided to abstain on the basis that councillors were not being given a free vote. Some of the Lib Dems, including myself, had spent so much of the previous 18 months and more writing critiques of the plan and the various policies which we were not happy with and attending most of the inquiry sessions felt that we had to vote against its adoption while some voted for, believing that they had no alternative because of the Government diktat.

Their votes, together with Conservatives and Labour, whose three councillors are all from Didcot, and the three Henley Residents - who all voted for as the plan did not threaten their patches too much - were sufficient to push the plan through. Fortunately some of the more enlightened planning policy officers who knew of our keenness to improve the environmental credentials of the plan managed to insert some improvements into the design policies demanding higher standards along the lines of the Oxford City Plan which had its inquiry before ours.

Aside from planning, we have not had too many particularly contentious issues to deal with. Labour and the Henley Residents are often more likely to side with us than the Conservatives so the rather precarious looking numbers we live with haven't been as serious as they might have been.

In addition to our party group meetings we have regular partnership (our name for the Lib Dem and Green administration) meetings to discuss any issues. We have tried to limit the number of motions coming to full council, simply to try to keep the length of meetings manageable. We also try to support each other's motions, often having a proposer and seconder one from each party.

Our experience of working in partnership with the

“Differences between Lib Dems and Greens tend to be more marked at national rather than local levels”

Greens has been almost entirely positive. In particular:

- electors react very positively to two parties with a similar outlook cooperating with, rather than fighting, one another;
- where both parties have limited resources, these can be shared effectively, rather than duplicated or used in fighting one another;
- we ran a joint manifesto, which formed the basis of our partnership agreement,

when we found ourselves (surprisingly) in power;

- we talk to one another a lot, through regular partnership meetings, but also informal cabinet chat sessions and other informal occasions.

The success continued in the May 2021 county council elections across South Oxfordshire and other parts of the county. Due to a number of local arrangements, Lib Dem and Green campaigners focused our joint efforts on unseating the Tories rather than fighting each other. The result was eight gains for the Lib Dems and two for the Greens. Liberal Democrats in West Oxfordshire took the scalp of the Tory leader. Oxfordshire is now being run by a joint Lib Dem, Green and Labour administration, the Fair Deal Alliance.

This co-operative formula seems to be working for us, but may not do so in some other settings, so it is important to get a proper agreement in place at the outset to avoid many future conflicts.

It is important to note that Oxfordshire, with the exception of Oxford city itself, is very much a Conservative facing area. In Labour facing areas things could well be different. Hence the need to always assess the local situation.

Sue Cooper, was Liberal Democrat leader of South Oxfordshire District Council 2019-21 and is now cabinet member for the climate emergency

DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT

Dear Liberator,

How ironic it was that, two weeks before Russia invaded Ukraine, the Economist published its annual League Table of Democracies showing that only 6.4% of the world's population enjoys the full freedoms and democratic rights which we Brits appear to take for granted.

Furthermore, the UK is shown languishing toward the bottom of the table of 'full democracies', having been overhauled by nations such as Taiwan, a community whose democracy defence analysts agree will be snuffed out by Communist China within three years.

The Economist's report tracking democracy's decline did not appear to receive much publicity. Perhaps few cared. Well, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, everyone should care now.

Have we learnt nothing from history? Parallels with events in the late 1930s abound; an isolationist administration in Washington emboldens a European megalomaniac who lives in the past, who openly sneers at liberal democracy, claims he has no more territorial demands to make, is then shown by his violent invasion of a peaceful neighbour to be a liar, prompting a gut reaction among many of us to want to do a lot more than just penalise the aggressor with slow-burning sanctions.

In 1939, diplomacy proved worthless and so we did the right, if entirely illogical, thing by declaring war on a belligerent nation far better equipped for combat than were we, thanks to inadequate spending on defence by our appeasement era politicians.

Back then we had an empire. Today, all we have is our membership of NATO which has been weakened by an inward-looking USA and by most of its membership who have consistently refused to meet their obligations to spend 2% of their GDP on defence, with an estimated total annual shortfall of \$89bn dollars, a figure which exceeds the UK's entire annual defence spending. Moreover, thanks to decades of cost-cutting by UK politicians of all persuasions, our own defences are pitiful; we now have a tiny 'boutique' army, whose main battle tanks have been reduced in number from 1,200 in 1990 to 220 today, and which is certainly no longer capable of prosecuting a land war across vast areas of territory.

Perhaps, whatever is claimed, our military is out there. Perhaps we are deploying our own answer to Russia's 'little green men', with our own special forces operating under cover in Ukraine armed with weaponry that can deal with those murderous helicopter gun-ships.

But it is all far too little, far too late and we may have to accept that our failure to keep our democracy and defences in constant repair has cost 43 million Europeans their freedom. To make amends, we all need to improve our democracies, bolster our defences and consider uprating NATO from a regional to a global institution, with a name change - Global Organisation of Liberal Democracies (GOLD) - to reflect its new status, and at the same time endow the transformed institution with a new narrative which draws heavily on NATO's original 1949 Preamble by proclaiming "to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilisation of our peoples, founded on the

principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law". Let's hope there's still time.

David Green
Southport

LABOURING IN SHROPSHIRE

Dear Liberator,

I was surprised to read in Liberator 411 that Labour had not tried very hard in the by-election in north Shropshire. I read in a newspaper that Labour had carried a large amount of canvassing in Owestry which is the largest town in the constituency. Stewart Rayment told me that Labour put out an anti-Liberal Democrat leaflet. I read the Guardian. During the campaign, Labour activists wrote in making it very clear that they were going to campaign as hard as they could for the Labour candidate.

Russell Neale
Sutton

IN DEFENCE OF SEAFARERS

Dear Liberator,

Today I joined my friends and comrades in the RMT on a journey to London to protest our outrage at the appalling treatment of these workers by P&O and their owners DP World.

The facts behind this outrage are beginning to surface, and politicians from all sides are having to weigh in. Previous track records on maritime issues illustrate how empty their rhetoric proves.

For daring to strike in 1966 for a forty hour week at £1 per hour the governments of the day have never forgiven the maritime sector, and ever since have relentlessly ground down the industry while removing as many protections as possible and favouring offshore registration.

From the 1980s, seafarers' strike to the present day, we have seen in Dover the hit to the economy, where there were once thousands of ferry workers and associated jobs.

Now we are experiencing the 'cull' by a powerful Middle Eastern multinational with a massive portfolio. A strategy they proudly announced to shareholders to 'synergise' the company - driving down the wages and terms and conditions as low as they can. This probably looks great on a spreadsheet, but here in Dover we see the real impact on families and their children facing a terrifying and uncertain future.

Paul and Kath met on board, fell in love and married. A couple of years on, they decided, both being in 'secure' employment, to buy a house and start a family. Two kids and a mortgage to pay and they are scared.

Sally is a single mum. As the only breadwinner, she pays for everything from her salary on the ship.

Davey did reasonably at school then went on to an apprenticeship with P&O - where lies his future?

The whole of the area is devastated by this news, but for the big wigs and politicians in London, it's just another day in the office.

We are not going away. In Liverpool, Hull, Northern Ireland and here in Dover.

These are the consequences of political incompetence in the face of rampant neo liberal capitalism. This, once again for seafarers, is the thin edge of the wedge. All working people should get behind us,

Mike Sargent - RMT Dover

OBITUARY: ERLEND WATSON

Ed Fordham pays tribute to a noted by-election activist

Activist, Orcadian, linguist, election agent, psephologist, vexillologist, data and number cruncher, world traveller and by-election stalwart Erlend Watson passed away.

Erlend lived and breathed elections: few people have attended as many: Kensington, Vauxhall, Eastbourne, Bradford North, Ribble Valley, Monmouth, Hemsworth 1, Kincardine and Deeside, Langbaugh, Newbury, Christchurch, Barking, Dagenham, Eastleigh 1, Newham North West, Perth and Kinross, Littleborough and Saddleworth, Hemsworth 2 South East Staffordshire, Wirral South, Uxbridge, Beckenham, Winchester, Leeds Central, Eddisbury, Kensington and Chelsea, Ceredigion, Romsey, Tottenham, West Bromwich West, Ipswich, Brent East, Birmingham Hodge Hill, Leicester East and Hartlepool. (and this is just the list up to 2005)

It was the Brent East by-election in 2003 that triggered the moment when Erlend, printing leaflets, was distracted by a gossip or food, and the campaign agent Victoria Marsom shouted across the office “Erlend, I can't hear the Riso”.

One time the riso was broken, jammed, the engineer called and emerged from the ink spatter of the riso and said: “There's a potato stuck inside” and from the folding machine room next door came a voice – “oh that's where the potato went”.

Despite being a near permanent feature of any election, Erlend was not employed by the Federal Party much. His work in the candidates office as volunteer assistant to Sandra Dunk gave him unrivalled access to knowledge, to all levels of the party as well as political gossip that he loved and enjoyed.

In 1999, Erlend became paid campaigns assistant in Western Counties. He and I worked in the lean-to annexe of Don Foster's Bath offices. There, we sought to put together a regional campaign that reflected the challenge of seven held constituencies and seven targets.

On 27 January 2000 a constituent went to see Nigel Jones MP in Cheltenham, drew a samurai sword and in the ensuing melee Nigel's casework officer Cllr Andrew Pennington was murdered. Three days after Erlend and I arrived in Cheltenham to lead the team in the aftermath of the murder.

In a constituency so very experienced it's always hard to fit in. Erlend was perfect – he was sensitive, charming, blunt when needed and incredibly hard working. All day and all night. We were to be in Cheltenham for nearly five months.

Polling Day for Romsey was delayed to the local elections and we were still handling Cheltenham. The rest of the Party was in Romsey.

Cheltenham activist Andy Williams asked if we had

a chance of winning Romsey. “Oh we will win tonight” said Erlend confidently. How do you know said Andy. “If it wasn't clear the party was going to win, we would not be here.” He was of course correct.

In Mid Dorset and North Poole we had a strong chance and had a good candidate in Annette Brooke, but they had their own ideas about how to do things. On one of the many train journeys back to Bristol Erlend suggested that he go to Poole full time - and it transpired a brilliant suggestion.

With Erlend's stubbornness, his pushing, shoving and his 24 hour a day campaign-ethic they won the double header by-election of Canford Heath and subsequently in 2001 Annette Brooke was elected as MP. Erlend had not so much fitted into the role as melded into the lives of this very female-led campaign team. They all despaired at how little he looked after himself, but they trusted him.

Electing Annette Brooke was Erlend's greatest single election triumph. and he often boasted that Annette went on to be the longest serving female MP for the party.

After 2001 Erlend became something of a touring election talisman – he had work but rarely settled in the job, he had employment, but was rarely the best member of staff – his ability of brilliant randomness, and his lack of familiarity with being prompt or tidy meant he could be hard to manage.

Erlend loved bookshops, libraries or museums and churches. His own book collection was eclectic. Who else would list languages that he could read, speak, dip into and comprehend as being English, Icelandic, Old Norse, Ancient Greek, rudimentary Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, Greenlandic, Finnish, Estonian, Lithuanian, Frisian, Armenian and Czech.

We also had his driving passion – encouraging others – his advocacy for Liberal Youth and he was exceptionally proud that he served as their honorary president and returning officer for so long... he wasn't young himself, but that he acted like a perpetual student untroubled by professional life.

More than anything else however, what stood out about Erlend was his Liberal character. He was completely uninterested in any form of sartorial compliance (though was proud of tartan kilt that emerged for Glee Clubs). He always had a rucksack that was constantly being filled and emptied of hundreds of leaflets for whichever election he was helping at. Erlend would quite literally deliver leaflets all day - he didn't enjoy the doorstep banter of canvassing - though would 'run the board' if requested. His love of electioneering, and his complete lack of interest in his own health and well-being.

Ed Fordham is a Liberal Democrat councillor in Chesterfield

One Party After Another – the Disruptive Life of Nigel Farage

by Michael Crick
Simon & Shuster £25

Most readers of *Liberator* will regard the increasing polarisation of politics, the decline in probity in public life and the simplification of politically complicated concepts as causes for regret and concern.

After all, democracy should depend on the consent of the defeated, the humility of the victor, respect for the views of others, a rejoicing in diversity, and a rejection of bigotry, innuendo and half-truth.

Sadly, however, the wish to serve in public life is seen as self-seeking, the desire for cooperation a sign of weakness, and tolerance and decency the mark of a loser. Society in Britain is becoming increasingly unpleasant: intolerant, offensive and vicious. Much of this can, I suggest, be traced back to the Thatcherite “I’m alright, Jack” ethos, where (particularly among the young, white, upwardly mobile, and predominately male lower middle-class) the desire for self-advancement could easily come at the expense of others.

This generation has now reached an age where they are in positions of authority – running businesses, public bodies, the media, financial institutions and even government at local and national levels.

Sadly, they have not shrugged off those values instilled into them in the 1980s and are engaged in propagating them to younger generations, seeking to sow discord instead of harmony, error instead of truth and despair instead of hope.

In the world of politics, both in the UK and in many countries abroad, a petty, mean-spirited and chauvinist populism has become the dominant political force. The distrust of others (and certainly of those with different skins, faiths, values and lifestyles) is now embedded in society, providing a platform and a willing audience for the Trumps, the Orbans and the Farages of this world.

In Britain this begs the question: did its most successful exponent, Nigel Farage, benefit from this trend or was he one of its creators. Did he set the agenda or merely tap



REVIEWS

into a prevailing mood?

In his book, Michael Crick examines the background of Farage, from the ‘Loadsamoney’-aspiring city trader, the Enoch Powell-admiring political ingenue through to arguably the most successful and influential politician of the post-war period.

On the way, he details Farage’s ruthless intolerance of others, his lack of financial probity – verging on the dishonest, his double-standards, his not-so-subtle dog-whistling and what former Ukip Godfrey Bloom describes as his “Stalin school of management”.

The point is that with Farage – and indeed with Trump – there is no pretence to hide what he is. He will laugh off questions about his sexual infidelities, his approach towards his use of MEP expenses, his relationship with extreme groups and allegations of racism or homophobia.

But the tragedy is that for Farage, or indeed Johnson, no pretence is necessary. A large section of the electorate (possibly even a majority) don’t mind or care how our leaders behave and their political colleagues will accept anything provided it is accompanied by political success.

Crick’s book, the product of an extensive array of interviews, is an extremely impressive and immensely readable account of the career of a man Crick says had the greatest impact of any politician outside the two main parties in the past 150 years. It takes the Farage story up to his engagement with GB News. Will there be any more chapters in his political career? It would be rash to bet against it – but if Farage does quietly fade into the background, it is unlikely a better biography of him will emerge for a very long time.

Nick Winch

Belfast by Kenneth Branagh (dir)

Before I saw this film I had been treated to a string of critically acclaimed films, some now Oscar nominated. *The Power of the Dog*, *Lost Daughter* and *Don’t Look Up*. All of which were, in my view, massively disappointing for various reasons

So after that trio of disappointment I went to see Kenneth Branagh’s new semi-autobiographical film *Belfast*. The film is set in the summer of 1969 just at the brink of when Belfast descended into, in that classic understatement, ‘*The Troubles*’ a term which I have never understood.

Having watched the chaos unfold on television screens nightly in my youth; *Troubles*? More like bloody internecine urban war.

The film starts with full colour view of Belfast today rather like an ad for the Northern Ireland Tourist Board with the Titanic Museum, Belfast City Hall and the city centre and the inevitable shot of the Harland & Wolff ship yard yellow crane. The film then changes to sepia and the graphic August 1969 appears on screen. An efficient device to transport the audience to those days in Belfast before all hell broke loose. The film told from the young Ken’s child’s eye point of view, beautifully captures those summer days in the close knit streets where Buddy (the young Ken) lived. Everyone Catholic and Protestant looking out for each and calling out to Buddy when his mum is calling him for home for tea.

The cast assembled for this film is a gilt edged, and unlike the trio of films I refer to above, their talent is not all wasted. Buddy is played by Jude Hill in a splendid film debut capturing a young bright happy boy. His grandmother is played flawlessly by Judie Dench and her husband by Ciaran Hinds, the best role I have seen him play. Buddy’s

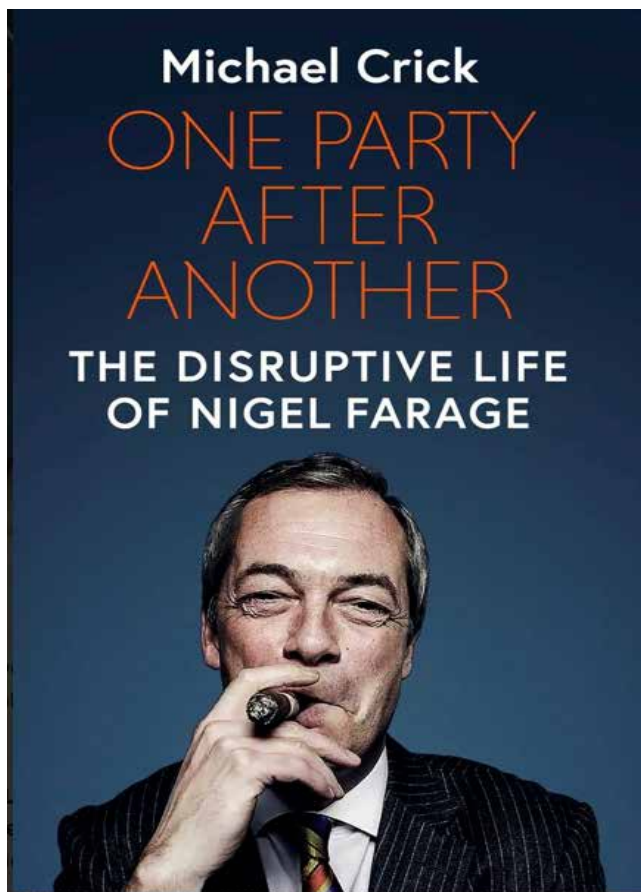
parents, played by Jamie Dornan and Caitriona Balfe, struggle as the dad finds work as a joiner in England and is away from home for weeks on end as mum is left to bring up Buddy and his brother and juggle the bills.

As well as out playing with his friends or competing with a Catholic girl he rather likes, to be best in class at maths, there are moving set pieces where Buddy talks to his granddad in the tiny backyard with his grandma chipping in as she sits in the window asking about how to approach his maths sweetheart and all the other questions a nine-year-old has.

Sadly the tranquil atmosphere is soon to be engulfed in a tidal wave of mayhem. We see Buddy his mum and brother hiding under the table as gangs come down smashing the windows of Catholic houses and subsequently driving those families out. Buddy's father on his visits home is repeatedly approached to join Protestant gangs with all the threat and menace that entails. He repeatedly repels approaches but clearly such a strategy can only hold for a while. Meanwhile the family is further rocked by news of Buddy's grandfather's worsening lung condition. We see him for the last time in a hospital in the country away from the city as Buddy oblivious, and his family gather around the bed as granddad says goodbye. A moving performance by Ciaran Hinds.

After the funeral at the wake Jamie Dornan turns in a great performance of *Everlasting Love* by *Love Affair*; very evocative of the time. Meanwhile Buddy's mum cannot bear the thought of leaving Belfast and all she knows as her husband is offered a job with a house in England. She discusses the idea with friend who tells to go with the immortal line: "Sure if the Irish didn't go to those places who'd run the pubs."

Matters come to a head after the whole family gets caught in a riot and are rescued and brought home in an army armoured troop carrier. The day comes when Buddy and the family board the bus to Belfast Airport to leave for good.



His widowed grandma goes to see Buddy and the family off. She turns to walk back to her door not looking back for the last time. So painful for them all. It reminded me of my own mother's experience of leaving Ireland albeit for economic reasons, she left County Wicklow in the 1930s when she got a job in England. Thereafter she always found leaving her family after visiting very difficult.

The film ends with a dedication 'For those we stayed', 'for those who left', 'for those who died'.

A really well made film with moving performances, and for which all the plaudits and award nominations are justified. Do go and see it.

As a post script Ciaran Hinds interviewed since has said Northern Ireland remains a tinderbox and added the sooner the British come to their senses and vote to rejoin the EU the better. Amen to that.

Peter Johnson

Citizens by Jon Alexander with Ariane Conrad Canbury Press

This is a timely, inspiring, flawed book. The argument: three principles define the individual

– subject story; consumer story; citizen story. This should appeal to Liberals aware of their long tradition of mutual self-help. There is only one (favourable) reference to Liberal Democrats: though Jon is active in the Social Liberal Forum, he's targeting a wider audience. He is a prophet, pushing his Big Idea; and many prophets succeed through single-mindedness.

Jon's personal story is told vividly: he became disillusioned with working in advertising, literally sickened by it, and found citizenship.

Unlike some advocates of participative democracy, whose attacks on politicians and elections sound oddly like Fascists, the authors recognise new forms must reinvigorate traditional structures, not replace them.

They condemn an approach where all transactions are market deals and users of public services are customers, demanding the best but uninterested in other people or shaping the service. However, they skate over 'the subject story', lumping together very different phenomena.

The history is caricature. The First World War was caused by a "crisis of masculinity" and Grey, often criticised for not being assertive enough in the run-up to war, was asserting his masculinity. In fact, similar issues would have led to war in the 18th century, but cynical monarchs and oligarchs would then have done deals.

In this account, from first civilisation to the 19th century, rule by and loyalty to the Big Boss reigned. But what actually dominated medieval Western and Central Europe was a pyramid: duties and power related to the people just below and just above you. When a baron rebelled against a king, loyal knights followed him. If the rebellion failed, the baron suffered, but not those who obeyed him. This system featured rules and obligations at all levels – even a defined right for barons to rebel.

When it broke down, all-powerful monarchy demanded direct subservience from all, a truly Big

Boss system – and resistance led to European Liberalism. Then came a third state of mind, the totalitarian, where individuals merged themselves in the cause represented by the ‘great leader’. In this book, though, these are all ‘the subject story’.

While they say citizen-type approaches were always present, probably characterising hunter-gatherers and never disappearing, they underestimate citizen thinking in the 18th and 19th centuries: what distinguished the Liberal Party and nonconformity was precisely commitment to free co-operation for the common good.

When the consumer story swept in, it replaced the citizen as much as the subject story. The US story is about citizen as well as individual - democracy based on citizens co-operating and acting responsibly; few entities could be more citizen-based than the early New England settlements, though their co-operation was disastrous for Native Americans.

Colonialism is rightly presented as the subject story, but the book characterises Indian anti-colonial movements using product boycotts as ‘consumer story’ despite their origins in citizen co-operation. Apparently, citizen action can’t use consumer pressure without losing its citizen character.

Everything is channelled into one ‘story’ with almost Marxist thoroughness. They condemn altruism and substitute interdependence: helping others because they reciprocate. What if I can assume someone who wants help won’t reciprocate – because he’s selfish, dying or condemned to death? Any major religion would say I have a duty to help. By this argument, it seems, I don’t.

They attack making people feel guilty for environmental damage, but it is a fact that the current great extinction is caused by humans. Their solution is interdependence (not just between humans), but citizen-type co-operation can damage outsiders or the planet, as with a criminal gang of equals.

They attack the idea of ethical consumption, (still telling the consumer story, trying to convince us all we need do is consume responsibly). Band Aid’s “Do they Know it’s Christmas” was the Consumer Story “eating” activism.

But while marketisation can be reversed, there will still be consumers. When I buy a jacket, I’m unlikely to consult a citizen jury or have time to join the business’ decision-making.

They demonstrate damage done by marketisation to environmental agencies and are right that more people can be mobilised by stressing happy people achieving things together – a recent Greenpeace video showed nothing else – but complain some organisations’ headquarters still show pictures of beautiful places without people. Why not? Many people are motivated by such beauty to preserve it. That would be still more so with preserving endangered species.

They make powerful points about charities that seek to benefit powerless recipients instead of empowering people.

They describe citizen champions - and organisations changing; the tone is rather ‘Lives of the Saints’. They were right; opponents were wrong. The stories are inspiring; but readers may have reservations.

In one case study, of Brewdog, the company turned out to have appalling management practices: laudably, the case study wasn’t dropped, but the problems are discussed.

Some statements deserve querying: “The planet does not even need saving” and a suggestion that conservatism in German democracy is down not only to bureaucratic, hierarchical party organisation, but also to devolved power in a federal system. Before Brewdog, one could believe, there were hardly any small brewers and no good beer. No, Jon, there was plenty of good beer and small brewers – and still are – but producing real ale, not heavily-promoted craft lager.

They aim to “address and remove all...obstacles so everyone can contribute”, but says little about how to remove obstacles or out-compete the alternatives of a dystopia where the rich are beyond the reach of democracy and of high-tech Chinese-led new totalitarianism.

We read about various organisations, but none started fixedly hostile. The Monsanto, Exxon Mobiles, News Internationals and the Chinese, Russian, Saudi states with their high-tech capacity, will actively

seek to defeat citizen movements. Indeed, recent ominously aggressive Chinese threats towards Taiwan may be because Taiwan’s citizen democracy is a threat, not because of historical territorial claims. The vision is “a citizen-driven, crowdsourced renewal of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, reinventing it as a global constitution for the human race.” How can this be accomplished, given hostility from powerful states?

They say: “The consumer story is collapsing on itself”, but “progress is stuttering”. One reason is certainly the strength of the ‘consumer story’, but may another be that active citizenship demands time and commitment? Enthusiasm drives change, but as it wanes, citizen action weakens.

The shortage of specifics about methods is disappointing. We hear of “participatory spaces”, but little on how they work and Loomio and Cobudget are referenced without explanation. All Liberals should consider this book deeply.

Simon Banks

Naoroji, pioneer of Indian Nationalism by Dinyar Patel Harvard University Press 2020.

I was always rather pleased that the first Indian elected to the House of Commons was a Liberal. Dadabhai Naoroji is no longer regarded as the first ethnic minority MP but lacking a connection with Finsbury I had not pursued the matter. It is not so long ago that Naoroji was cited as the first ethnic minority MP. James Townsend, elected as early as 1767 as Whig MP for West Looe in Cornwall is currently the first known, and it is likely that other West Indian slave owning planter offspring will be added to those already identified.

Naoroji was elected to Finsbury Central in 1892. What will shock you is the level of racism that he encountered on his path to Parliament, not least within his own party, though it was the prejudice of Lord Salisbury that helped him finally break through as the member for India.

Patel shows Naoroji to be a shrewd operator, in and out of

House, but his career was short-lived with Gladstone's demise. Gandhi, an admirer, would pick up the reins and the focus of Indian nationalism would move out of Parliament. Beyond biography, Patel gives us an insight into the workings of grassroots politics in late Victorian society.

Stewart Rayment

Anatomy of a Nation – A History of British Identity in 50 Documents
by Dominic Selwood
Constable (2021)
£30.00

What makes a nation? It's more than just its physical boundaries, so is it its people, its history, its culture? Or is it a series of unconnected events which merge to form a nation and to give it an identity?

The historian, barrister and broadcaster Dominic Selwood has attempted to consider this in this book.

Going back to prehistory, he identifies specific events, topics and concepts, giving each about ten pages of background and narrative and it must be acknowledged that the scope of the documents under examination is as wide as it is imaginative since Selwood uses a dictionary definition of document which includes, for example, a work of art, tombstone, coin or radio broadcast.

They are not all British. The German SS's Specially Wanted List GB of those to be detained and liquidated in the event of German victory in the 1940s, while fascinating (whatever did Nikolaus Pevsner do to deserve inclusion), and the Parthenon marbles are certainly not British. They are not all the printed word – Constable's painting of Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows and Vaughan Williams' *The Lark Ascending* provide a bucolic vision of Britain – and Selwood used the London Tube Map as the basis for consideration of typeface and its role in printing.

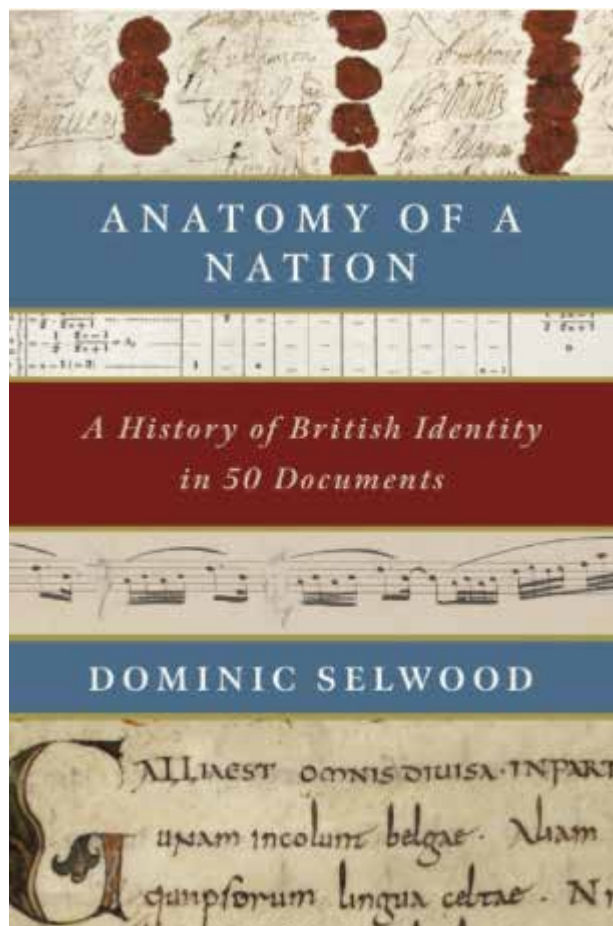
Not all the documents are of historical importance either: the rejection of Karl Marx's application for citizenship did not have a significant impact on Britain, but Selwood is clever in finding a

way of linking each of them to an aspect of British identity – in Marx's case, Britain's preference for constitutional, rather than revolutionary change. His selection of a 1477 love letter gives rise to consideration of the role of the church in affairs of the heart; Heston Blumenthal's tasting menu leads to an essay not just on the British ambivalence to good food, but also the ephemeral concept of Cool Britannia; and Griffith-Jones' opening speech in the Lady Chatterley Trial is the basis for discussion of the changes of the 1960s.

Other selections are better known and more obvious. The Magna Carta has shaped British rule of law and the Brexit ballot paper exposed both Britain's historic distrust of Europe and the politics of immigration and some do not shape our national identity although *The Ships*, the title of the document read four times daily on the BBC – starting with Viking and finishing with Shetland and telling us about North and South Utsire, Selsey Bill to Lyme Regis and Sandtette Lightvessel Automatic – is splendidly British.

In 2006, Melvyn Bragg published *12 Books that Changed the World*. As with any such listing, the choice was subjective, with many obvious choices (such as the First Folio, the Vindication of the Rights of Women and the King James Bible); others were more eclectic – I though the inclusion of *The Rules of Association Football* was particularly inspired - but the books examined certainly had a lasting effect and provided an interesting topic for late night discussion.

Selwood's book is not an attempt to do the same – to identify documents which have contributed to what Britain is today. There is, for example, no place for the Great Reform Act of 1832, the Tamworth Manifesto or the Labour Party manifesto of 1945 as possible inclusions from the world of politics



and readers of this book will all be able to take issue with some of Selwood's selections (it is a pity that Selwood did not develop his essay of the *Wipers Times* into a more generally study of satire – there is no mention of Swift, *Beyond the Fringe* or *Private Eye*), but each essay can stand alone as consideration of an aspect of British history.

So, while it could be argued that, as a result, the book reads like an anthology of vaguely connected essays, never quite becoming the history of British identity promised by the title, it is an interesting and ingenious assortment of subjects, identifying events, processes and ideas which are distinctly part of the nation's zeitgeist and, like Bragg, offers food for thought. A good book to read a chapter a night before lights out.

*Lord Bonkers
is Away*