

# liberator



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- welcomes written contributions on relevant topics, up to 1500 words.

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# COMMENTARY

## AT WHAT COST?

Suppose death, or civil insurrection, or some obliging general were to remove Saddam Hussein. Every liberal would cheer. His regime his one of the foulest in the face of the Earth, and its demise would cause rejoicing.

But American president George W Bush's ill-concealed plan to wage war on Iraq, uncritically supported by Tony Blair, risks the stability (such as it is) of the Middle East, the stirring of further hatred of the west in Islamic countries and possibly the use of the very weapons he claims to seek to disable.

In Afghanistan, the Taliban regime was replaced, in effect, by the restoration of the previous government, which had stayed in control of part of the country.

In Iraq the previous government is a forgotten and unappealing military regime that vanished 33 years ago. Replace Saddam with what, is one of the more obvious questions left unanswered by Bush and Blair.

Beyond that are questions of legality. Has America the right to go around the world disposing of regimes of which it disapproves? If done without United Nations backing the world is heading for some sort of anarchy of the strongest. What if China decides Taiwan is a threat, or if India decides that the best way to deal with a nuclear-armed Pakistan is to invade?

The record of American intelligence agencies in the run-up to 11 September is hardly impressive, but their collective efforts have failed to turn up any sign that Iraq was connected to that day's events. Should the world therefore take at face value assertions that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction?

Even if Iraq does, what could make their use more likely than a regime with its back to the wall, with hostile forces on its soil, and with nothing to lose?

The issue is not whether the removal of Saddam is desirable, of course it is, but whether a frontal assault by America and Britain risks setting off something a great deal worse.

Blair has not sounded like a restraining voice in recent weeks. In the face of hostility from at least a third of his MPs, and members of his own cabinet, he has sounded every bit as bellicose as Bush.

This stance has put Blair out of step with his party, with public opinion, and with the rest of Europe, where governments are taking a far more rational line.

Blair's closeness to Bush in the aftermath of 11 September is widely believed to have been a decisive restraining influence, though no-one has said what Bush intended to do that Blair prevented.

Last autumn there was some indication from both leaders that they saw the wisdom of attacking those they believed to be responsible for terrorism, without waging a general war against Islamic countries.

With the present dangerous situation in the Middle East it is hard to believe that Islamic opinion would accept an attack on Iraq, whatever its view of Saddam himself. Quite apart from an immediate threat to oil supplies, such an attack would be bound to encourage the recruitment another wave of terrorists.

Blair's relationship with Bush looks strange at first; the vaguely centre-left prime minister, a close friend of Bill Clinton, cosying up to his far right-wing successor. Any British prime minister needs to have cordial relations with America, but the trouble with a shallow pragmatist like Blair in such a situation is that he has no political compass to guide him.

Never forget what Bush is - something which only requires one to recall how the world saw him on 10 September - a right wing, half-whittled, incoherent creature of the worst elements of the business lobby, who turned the Texan penal system into a human abattoir while governor, and who owes his presidency to electoral fraud in a state governed by his brother.

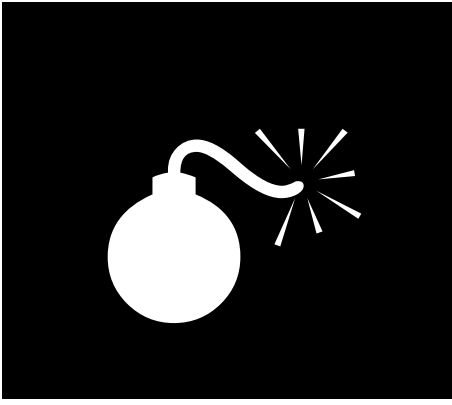
They say one can tell a man by the company he keeps. Blair's other current political soul mate is Silvio Berlusconi, a man who had to change the law to avoid a fraud trial and who is in coalition with the political heirs of Mussolini.

## JUST IN TIME

The vagaries of Liberator's production schedule mean that readers will probably receive this issue on local election day, or soon after. So to anyone who receives this copy in advance, the collective's best wishes for your campaign.

These wishes are the more heartfelt given the decline of the Liberal Democrats electoral base in recent years. In the mid-1990s the party controlled more than 50 councils. Prior to 2 May the figure is down in the mid-20s, and the record of holding the second largest number of councillors is long gone.

While local success has never guaranteed parliamentary success, the latter has rarely happened without the former. Just as the Liberal Democrats are in danger of exhausting the list of winnable Westminster seats, are they also in danger of reaching a glass ceiling in local government too?



# RADICAL BULLETIN

## BEVERIDGE DESPORT

For the first time in about 70 years, the parliamentary party is large enough to have factions organised within it, as became abruptly evident at Manchester.

In the right hand corner is a coalition spanning the ex-Tory organisation the Peel Group, chaired by Mark Oaten, and the secretive free market (and wonderfully misnamed) group Liberalfuture. Leading lights on this side other than Oaten are David Laws and Vincent Cable, with supportive noises from Menzies Campbell.

On the left is the Beveridge Group, which broke cover at the Manchester conference. It claims the allegiance of 14 MPs and is led by newcomers John Pugh, Alistair Carmichael and Paul Holmes.

What is more, the Beveridge Group claims the allegiance of a majority of the new intake. Its aim is to fight the corner for publicly funded, publicly run and publicly accountable services against those who would have these contracted out and/ or dependent of private funding.

Where leader Charles Kennedy stands is open to doubt. He was once close to Oaten, but is not particularly known for strong views on economic subjects. The Beveridge Group is banking on Kennedy's well-known aversion to internal conflict. The prospect of starting a fight with most of new intake, and without any very obvious political advantage in doing so, may make him rein in Oaten and his supporters in their wilder pro-privatisation ideas.

That would leave the field clear for MEP Chris Huhne's final report on public services, which is due to be voted on at Brighton in September, to appear to be the consensual middle course, and so sail through to sighs of relief all round.

One game to play in this debate is 'spot the unthinkable'. For 20 years, the supporters of privatisation have claimed to be thinking the unthinkable, to the extent that their line, as promoted by Oaten and those around him, has become just another orthodoxy.

It is the Beveridge Group that is really going up against intellectual fashion and conventional wisdom. If they flesh this out into a real programme, and avoid being trapped in a simple defence of the status quo, the party might start putting forward some truly original ideas.

## A SPRING OUT OF HIS STEP

What has Liberal Democrat chief executive Hugh Rickard got against the spring conference? And is he about to repeat the errors of certain of his

predecessors by failing to realise that his job is administrative, and not that of a political campaigner?

Rickard has got himself enmeshed in a complicated dispute about the future of the spring conference, which has so far managed to drag in the Federal Finance and Administration Committee and the English party executive, two bodies known only for their obscurity and lack of accountability.

Last autumn, the Federal Conference Committee began its regular strategic look at the conference operation. The conference office had had its staffing cut last summer and the committee wanted to lobby to have this cut restored, but decided that a thorough review was needed to decide what skills would be needed. This offended Rickard, who sees party staffing as his responsibility.

Early in the new year, FFAC member Jonathan Davies proposed that the spring conference should be abolished after 2003, espousing a saving of £80,000-odd.

FCC chair Liz Barker then lobbied FFAC chair Robin Teverson to the effect that one could not just scrap something that is part of the constitution, never mind that has forward bookings.

Rickard appeared to believe that the FFAC could simply scrap any event it pleased. The conference committee accepted that a proper review might come to this conclusion, but pointed out that it would be a brave person who appeared before the autumn conference to announce by diktat the abolition of its spring counterpart.

At this point Teverson proposed to draft in an outside consultant at £25,000 to make a marketing study of the conference operation. This would have involved someone outside the party attempting to appraise this operation in a short time and without actually attending a conference.

A curious interlude then occurred when Rickard gave an interview to the Times at Manchester, in which he proceeded to reveal details of party membership, finances, targeting and organisation that the Liberal Democrats would normally actively avoid becoming public.

This unwise foray into openness saw the follow published in a national newspaper, none of which has been denied.

"The Liberal Democrats are to target wealthy individuals in a fundraising drive aimed at tripling the party's annual income to £7.5 million in preparation for a more ambitious strategy of targeting seats for the next general election."

Thus we can deduce that the income is now £2.5 million. These "high net-worth donors", as The Times

quaintly calls them, currently number 22. So an average of £113,636 qualifies one for this title.

Party treasurer Reg Clark and Rickard will oversee the hunt, supported by “a network of figures who make contact with donors and whom officials are reluctant to identify”.

Still, at least the Lib Dems “are in reasonably good financial health for a post-election year, with a deficit of £130,200 last year that led to five redundancies to balance their books and an overdraft in the region of £100,000.”

Once the moolah rolls in, the party aims to win another 50 seats, mainly from the Tories but possibly including some in Lib Dem held cities.

And then the interview returned to the issue of the conferences.

The Times was told (not that this normally published) that the spring conference costs about £80,000, while the autumn one makes about £300,000.

It speculates that the spring conference, “may be stripped of its political rally elements of set-piece speeches and turned into a low-cost meeting in a cheaper venue. The leader’s speech and other such events, which are designed to generate media interest, may be transferred to the Scottish, Welsh and regional conferences”.

FCC blew a gasket at this lot appearing in a newspaper.

Teverson eventually accepted that his proposal would not work, and FCC is now setting up a review structure. But meanwhile, the English, Scottish and Welsh parties have been plotting about the spring conference.

There are elements that would like only one federal conference a year, even though this would mean, for example, that defence, foreign policy, Europe and national taxation could only be debated once a year, and that media coverage would decline from not a lot to nothing at all.

The English party may now try to move a constitutional amendment to recreate an English conference in the spring. If it does, it is a safe bet that the resulting event will be a disaster with a restricted agenda, zero media interest and a slump in attendance.

Ironically, this move is taking place at a time when the Tory and Labour parties are both beefing up their previously obscure spring conferences, recognising their value as a public platform.

The spring conference is not ideal. But it was created during the merger as a way of giving some interim accountability of the party to its members, given that the pro-merger side was determined to abolish the old quarterly Liberal party council. No party council and no spring conference would be the worst of all worlds.

## **EDUCATION, EDUCATION, EDUCATION**

The education debate at Manchester descended into farce as the party’s parliamentary team contrived to split three ways before the astonished gaze of the conference.

Spokesman Phil Willis has put up a motion, to which Richard Younger-Ross had tabled an amendment on faith schools. Younger-Ross was subsequently appointed to the education team, but Willis had no objection to him continuing to press his amendment to the team’s motion.

Then yet another education team member, Baroness Walmsley, successfully proposed a reference back of both Willis’ motion and Younger-Ross’ amendment. And to whom were these matters to be referred? The education team, of course.

## **ZIPS AND FASTENINGS**

The attempt by some MEPs to get themselves what would be in effect jobs for life (Liberator 279) did not make it onto the Manchester conference agenda because of a procedural dispute.

The conference committee ruled that whether or not MEPs should enjoy near-automatic reselection, was a matter for the English, Welsh and Scottish parties, not the federal conference, and with some relief slung this hot potato off the agenda.

But how are the selections for the next Euro elections to be conducted? ‘Zipping’, the practice by which men and women were alternated on the party list for each region in 1999, was a decision of the federal conference. So if zipping is to continue, who decides? The English party has lighted upon a system that needs a federal constitutional amendment (still with this?); but that cannot be debated until September, a few weeks before the selections are supposed to start.

## **WEARING JOOLS**

The conference hotel in Manchester, the Midland, had a tiny bar, and added to the perennial problem of conference bars that will not serve non-resident delegates after 11pm by the additional imposition of refusing to admit them at all.

The Saturday evening was the flattest social event ever seen at a Lib Dem gathering.

With no Glee Club (Liberator 280) some suggested pressing the bar piano into service once the hotel pianist had had his fill of tinkling his ivories.

But then the story got around that Jools Holland and his 40-strong band and entourage had booked into the Midland after playing Manchester a few months ago. Holland had started to play the bar piano, but was interrupted by an irate jobsworth who told him no one was allowed to touch this prized artefact.

It was quietly explained who Holland was, which provoked a response along the lines of “I don’t care who you are, no-one touches it”.

Holland politely agreed to stop, and the promptly phoned another hotel and switched the bookings of all 40 people for that night. Such an option was not available to conference organisers.

Worryingly, next year’s spring conference in Liverpool is due to use as its hotel the Adelphi, of reality TV fame.

Local Liberal Democrats say that while the Adelphi is a perfectly good hotel, it is scarcely appropriate to conference since it functions as a popular city centre watering hole, and is thus likely to have the same restrictions, and the same number of the general public around, as had the Midland.

This prevents any sense of the conference ‘taking over’ a hotel where members can be together socially, a vital part of the atmosphere of a successful conference.

And of course Liberal Democrats gathered en masse in a bar is not spectacle anyone concerned with winning votes would wish to share with the public.

## **POUND STRETCHERS**

A campaign launched by Liberal Democrat members in Bristol to have a £1 minimum membership has certainly ruffled some feathers in Cowley Street, with the result that its instigators claim that Liberal Democrat News refused to print three paragraphs of a letter on the subject.

Cowley Street's line, reasonably enough, is that it cannot have a minimum membership fee that is below the amount it costs to service each member. The Bristol activists respond that they are missing out on members in impoverished areas of the city who cannot pay the current £5 minimum.

But they say that these people are willing to help the party in various ways, in which case does it matter whether or not they are members? Conversely, this spat might give Cowley Street pause to wonder whether it services members in the most efficient way at present.

What has really got up the assorted noses of the Bristol group is receipt of party membership pads that anticipate an increase to £7.50 in the minimum fee, even though this has not gone through conference. The offending documents admit only in minute print that the minimum is still in fact £5.

Liberator has seen the paragraphs that Liberal Democrat News refused to print about membership director David Allworthy, and will not print them either. Allworthy is merely a member of staff and it would not be in his power to either refuse to implement what he is told to do, or to impose the changes the Bristol group wants.

However, their claims that a public session at Manchester heard that party membership was now only 75,000, compared with the figure of 100,000 which has been carelessly lobbed around for years, ought to provoke some rethink.

## **LANCING BOILS**

While most eyes were on the fiasco in Harrow, where 60 Liberal Democrats were disqualified for putting the designation 'Liberal Democrat Focus Team' on their nomination papers, something even stranger was happening in Adur.

Harrow was bad luck and an over-zealous returning officer.

Adur 20 years ago was one of the first councils under majority Liberal control in modern times, and the party ran it until the late 1990s. Now, startlingly, the Liberal Democrats have no candidates at all after falling from 29 councillors to three in just seven years.

Responsibility for this fiasco is attributed locally to a feud, the details of which are immensely complex and, as so often happens in such cases, incomprehensible to outsiders, most of whom find it impossible to say whether either side is in the right.

Adur's delegated nominating officer, caught between two feuding groups, declined to certify anyone as an official candidate, and mysteriously cited 'administrative confusion' as the reason.

The constituency executive has been taken over by some members from Lancing (part of the constituency, though this is based mainly on Shoreham).

The 27 March executive meeting had an agenda comprising only a proposal to revoke the membership of two Lancing members, a strangely short list of

business, it might be thought, given that local elections were due.

The south east region had undertaken a formal review of the conduct of these two members but had decided not to expel them.

But it did decide to prevent them from holding any party office for two years.

It also concluded that another prominent member should also hold no party office for two years.

He then resigned from the party, but his supporters are now trying to throw out the other side in the row, possibly with a view to his return.

This arguments has now gone on for two years, during which the local party has declined into ruins as members not engaged on either side have got fed up with the whole thing and drifted away.

## **TESTIMONIAL CORNER**

London MEP Sarah Ludford has been busy, to judge by the picture spread in her members' newsletter, even if one that describes her as "discussing the problem of battery hen production" is so badly screened that she appears to be in earnest confabulation with a fowl.

The leaflet also carries some comments from grateful constituents. Wasn't it a touch immodest to include "I think Sarah Ludford in great," the opinion of one 'JM of Carshalton'?

## **MARK OF RESPECT**

The Centre for Reform hastily removed a picture of the Queen Mother from one of its new pamphlets, which was at the printer as her death was announced. Unfortunately, it did not remove the caption.

The substitute picture of the Queen and the Pope still bears the legend "the Queen Mother at Newbury racecourse".

## **BUDA-PESTILANCE**

There is always at least one ruck at any Liberal International Congress, so Budapest, in March, was no exception. Predictably the arguments revolved around The World Today motion and the latest round of the Middle East crisis.

Hans Bahlen, of the Dutch party VVD, and Richard Moore, were duly dispatched to write a compromise draft, which most thought perfectly acceptable. Except of course the main protagonists on each side, who turned up with claws drawn at the working party session on the document.

On the one side, the Israelis, mob-handed, with some VVD, and on the other D66, Venstre from Norway and Radical Venstre from Denmark, both sides trying to shout the other down.

The chair rapidly lost control of the session, so the British Group, led by David Griffiths at this point, rallied reinforcements from elsewhere in the conference centre, to get the decision making shifted to the final session of the congress.

Outside the working party, the usual LI conclave took place, to agree the usual anodyne compromise motion that everybody could vote for unanimously. Unfortunately this leaves nothing much for the member parties of LI to take forward as policy to try to end the Middle East deadlock.

# JUST AS BAD

A survey on sexism in politics has found that the Liberal Democrats are no better than the other parties, says Helen Bailey

The Equal Opportunities Commission has got together with MORI to publish the study "Man enough for the job". This study of parliamentary candidates at the last election provides much ammunition for our own internal debate.

In a study of 408 candidates from the major parties, there are some real insights about selection, election, sexism and discrimination. The most striking conclusion is that with the passing of time, what changes most is the difference between the way in which men and women perceive and respond to sexism.

The report compares the parties but there is no room for comfort or complacency by the Liberal Democrats. To take one example, in the process, 44 per cent of women and only 17 per cent of men (in all parties) were aware of prejudice or discrimination. And, whereas half of Labour and Tory women believed that sexism or prejudice played a role in candidate selections, that was the case for 40 per cent of Liberal Democrat women - what does this mean?

It means that 40 per cent of our women candidates believe that they do not get a fair deal from local parties and members in the selection process. It means that 40 per cent of women run the risk of being so alienated by the process that they will not stand again. And that 40 per cent of our women candidates must be strongly tempted to warn others against following in their footsteps.

But who are these 40 per cent - few individuals these days own up to having been the victims of sexism within the Liberal Democrats - the political correctness of our time does not allow it.

In private discussions, I have met many women who tell of implicit and of overt sexism in the internal processes of our party. This ranges from the clearly unintentional but thoughtless, through to instances of individual members who are willing to comment on age, appearance and family make up - and do.

(It is hard to know whether the muttered "I thought you ought to know what they say..." is worse than the sexist question asked publicly. One candidate in the study really was asked about the colour of her underwear).

The only comforting thing about the recent EOC/Mori research is that this is not confined to our party. The Liberal Democrats, a party which many of us believe has a compelling record in terms of human rights and equal opportunities, is no better than our Tory and Labour opponents.

The vast majority of our women believe that women have to be better than men to be selected. The men in the group believed, on the other hand, that if women were good enough they would get through. In this

difference of perception lies the root of our problem. While so many of the influential people in our party (as in the others) are men, and while men are so comparatively unaware of sexism and prejudice, it is hardly surprising that we are slow to tackle the problem.

In fact it seems likely that as women are discouraged from believing that sexism exists and as more men (sometimes from political conviction) cannot acknowledge sexism at all, we will lose the will to change and develop.

And yet the overwhelming burden of the research is that women, whatever their party and background are far less likely to get selected than their male counterparts. The barriers of finance, family and peer group expectation weigh much more strongly with women than with men. None of this new - the perception is changing, not necessarily for the better.

So, given that the discrepancy between men and women's perceptions of equality is so great, given that this discrepancy arises in every party and given that until it changes, women will not make the breakthrough, is there any way out?

Will women, especially those who are increasingly successful in business and commercial life see these trends and decide that party politics is not the way into public life? Will they decide that there are other ways to change their environment or will many of them just opt out? (Perhaps many already have done?)

I do not know whether abandoning party politics would be empowering for women or not. What is clear is that party politics is abandoning too many women and leaving them without the chances that they need to influence society. In the twenty-first century, women who see no role for themselves in the party system will find some other way to be influential.

Women will demand and take power over their own lives. As a party, we doubtless applaud it, but can we afford to do nothing and wait until the world has moved on and politics is a discredited boys' game?

# NO TROJAN HORSE HERE

Don't let's be beastly to the ex-Tories, says Hugh Dykes, who himself made the journey into the Liberal Democrats some years before the Peel group was formed

Without sounding too complacent or self-serving, I thought that a lot of people took great pleasure in the Peel Group's launch and the turnout at the Manchester conference.

However, when you get a large number of people joining another party in one go, it is easy to see that the long standing members of the same party need both full information on these developments, as well as understandable reassurances about the motives, objectives, policies and ideas involved.

May I as a member of the Liberal Democrats for almost five years now, but not one of those coming from their group that joined en bloc, offer some thoughts which I hope will assist this process?

I stress first of all that a pretty large number - more than a dozen - of individual politicians, former MPs and MEPs mainly, but some others too, joined the Liberal Democrats after the 1997 election, when they had inevitably convinced themselves that the Tory party had forever lost its one nation tradition.

For me and others to claim logically that the Liberal Democrat party is the only natural home for such people, is not to indulge in cynical and convenient arrangements of a self-indulgent kind. It is in all aspects a completely idealistic move.

For like people, parties do change, as the Conservative party has now done. With some similarities to Canada, it is now the minority right wing party, mainly accommodating the prejudiced views of a section of elderly voters whose preference is to live in the past. Not only on Europe, but also in many domestic areas, it wishes to hark back rather than look forward.

So if the conversion to the Liberal Democrats by some well known former one nation Tories is not apostatic in the intrinsic sense, it is also not the arrival of a strange kind of Trojan horse, seeking partisan gain by using the resources of an ever-growing party to stick with old ideas but adopting the phoney mantle of modernism.

For the philosophical background is not the same as the panalogy of detailed policies now available to these new party members, for the first time.

By definition, policy details change constantly over time. When I was involved many years ago in Ted Heath's one-nation government - at a very humble level - some of the individual policies then would have looked very 'left wing' even by the yardsticks of some of Liberator's longstanding readers.

We see a further layer in the picture; for all politics is much more to the right nowadays, for good or ill.

Moreover, as Charles Kennedy rightly reminds us, these terms are really out of date, against the background of a modern society where the public overwhelmingly displays a lack of trust towards all politicians, and wants practical functional solutions to day-to-day problems, rather than ideological obsession or legislative legerdemain.

So just as all the new members are a complex mix of different views on different subjects, so too are the longstanding members. No one has a monopoly of purity, we are all struggling together to promote the cause of the only interesting leading party in the UK system.

At present, a spin-consumed neo-conservative governing party with trade union connections, armed still with considerable social conscience, but failing more and more to secure results for the public, faces us, a radical one nation progressive party that believes deeply in individual freedom and choice but which is imbued deeply and irreversibly with the Beveridge tradition of extensive social support.

The present day Conservative party, bereft of any credibility and residual moral authority (and led by an increasingly unconvincing junior army officer) demoralised and lacking wide support, has to confront the next election as the new minority party, as Labour had to in 1983.

It is of course axiomatic that we can only enjoy secular further growth - apart from short term targeting whenever election opportunities occur - by attracting former voters from both the Tory and Labour parties. By the way, that also means winning over ex-Tory voters who voted Labour in 1997 or 2001 or both.

This is of course a gigantic task in all senses. I worry however when I see too many of our own colleagues sometimes describing this as an impossible task, at least until proportional representation can be secured.

I am convinced that the Tories' power of recovery is starkly limited, which affords us a magnificent chance to take their place.

Despite the usual press complacency, the public perceive us more and more as a viable and credible national force with original ideas and fresh imagination. We offer a modern moderate centre party with a highly developed social conscience, and a profound sense of European and international co-operation.



It remains for us to present bold ideas that accord with the public propensity for just and honest politics. We really do need to avoid being artificially right wing to attract a certain kind of voter. We really do need to ensure that our Treasury spokesman highlights not only economic objectives, but also classic Liberal social philosophy, which emanated direct from the Robert Peel tradition.

Widening all choices wherever feasible, yes of course, but I also want to stress an extensive package of measures to ensure freedom from poverty, alienation, social exclusion and homelessness. Are we saying enough in these areas, I ask?

In our reviews of the public services, we need craftsmanship to secure meticulous attention to detail, as well as the caring rationale from which such services sprang in the first place.

I worry sometimes that the notion of private managerial effort, indeed even finance, has become too much of a gimmicky leitmotiv in the press. We need to sort out the pragmatic sense from the rubbish.


Some years ago, when Mrs Thatcher asserted that there was no such thing as society, and that the only things that mattered in life was making money, materialism and Sunday trading, I knew that the Tory party would eventually forego its grip on the public psyche, never to return.

I am sure that we will be the only national party to resist the excesses of American neo-imperialism in foreign, defence and trade policy. We need to support the long suffering State Department confreres, who strive to secure a better balance than the hyperbolic platitudes pouring off the Capitol.

We should take the decisive lead in Britain in promoting the notion that international civilised values, the correct controls on globalisation mania, require a proper framework of world rules, rather than military might.

In the meantime, I feel able to reassure my friends who read Liberator regularly. I am confident that all the recent new recruits from the old Tory caves will be genuine Liberal Democrats in every sense, including enthusiastic members of local party.

13th Edition  
(or 12a for the superstitious)



Mr Kennedy was usually  
more singed against  
than singing

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# THE LAND GOD GAVE TO THE PEOPLE

Ian Packer looks at Lloyd George, Liberalism and the Land

Today, the 'land issue' is essentially the series of debates that surround the protection of the environment. But in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries it meant something very different. To late-Victorians and Edwardians, the land issue was a number of interlinked controversies about the role of landowners in politics and society and especially about the control of much of Britain's land surface by a few thousand families.

This situation had troubled some prominent nineteenth-century Liberals, particularly Cobden and Mill, as well as provoking hostility from radical groups like the Chartists.

But, it was only in the 1880s and 1890s, when Britain was already an overwhelmingly urban society and the influence of landowners was waning under the impact of agricultural depression and the onset of democracy, that it became an important political issue for Liberals.

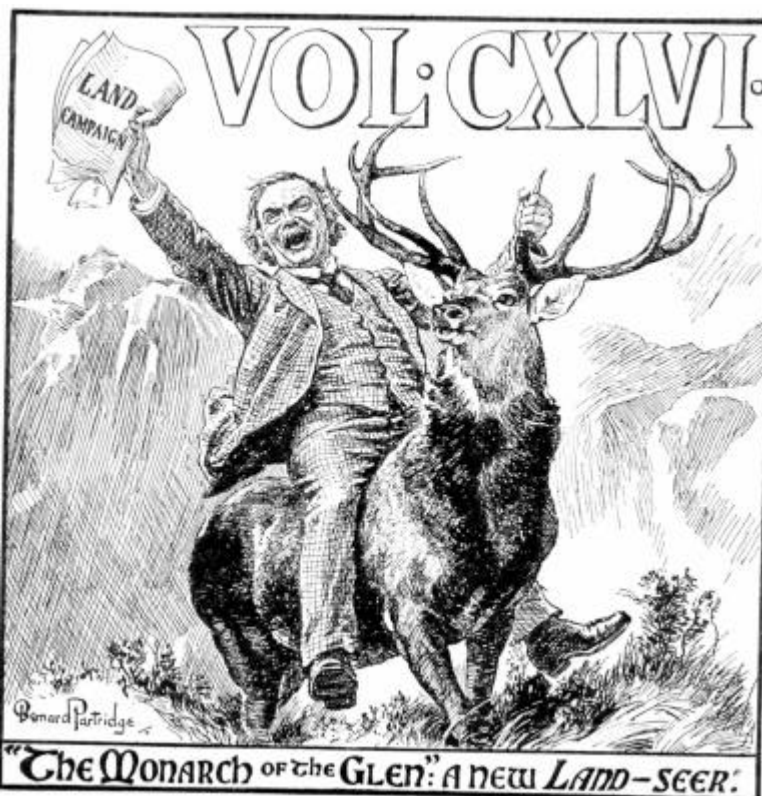
This rather surprising situation arose partly because of the importance of land reform in Ireland, Scotland and Wales, where it was closely linked to dislike of landowners on national and religious grounds and to specific national issues, like memories of the Highland clearances.

But England had its land issue, too. This was not because English Liberals could not cope with the complexities of urban reform, or were beguiled by myths about the need to revive the importance of the countryside as the location of the 'real' England. Rather, English Liberals became increasingly interested in land reform because the mass defection of landowners to Unionism over Irish Home Rule in 1886 and the determined hostility of the House of Lords led Liberals to single out landowners as a class as a major barrier to the cause of progress.

Liberals started to look for programmes that would both attack landed authority and address immediate political issues. In particular, the cause of state provision of allotments and smallholdings provided a method of appealing to the agricultural labourers who had been newly-enfranchised in 1885 and land taxation offered a potential solution to the crisis in local government finance.

But it has to be said that the Liberals did not seem to gain very much from these issues. The former was an important plank in the Liberal programme at the 1892 general election and the subsequent Liberal government gave parish councils the power to provide allotments. However, this did not prevent a poor Liberal performance in rural areas in the 1895 general election. Similarly, the next Liberal government introduced a Smallholdings Act in 1907 that did not prove very successful and the Liberal were trounced again in the counties in 1910.

The Liberals were unable to come up with any land taxation proposals for a long time, given the subject's fantastic complexity. It was Lloyd George who cut the Gordian knot by including some modest land taxes in his 1909 'People's Budget'. The land taxes themselves failed to provide any significant amount of revenue and the controversy they provoked was soon swallowed up inside the wider conflict in 1909-11 over the role of the House of Lords, caused by their Lordships' rejection of the Budget.



But Lloyd George, and many other figures in all political parties, concluded that an assault on landowners had worked powerfully to the Liberals' advantage in the 1910 elections, whatever the particular merits or demerits of land taxation. Landlords were simply not popular, especially when hostility to them was linked to wider issues, like the proposals to pay for social reforms in the 'People's Budget'.

This encouraged Lloyd George to base the Liberals' appeal at the next general election, which would have been due in 1915, on similar grounds. In 1912 he entrusted the development of a detailed programme to put before the party and the country to a land enquiry, dominated by the social researcher Seebohm Rowntree.

The rural aspect of the enquiry (published in October 1913) revolutionised the Liberal approach to land reform in the countryside by downgrading the importance of smallholdings in favour of a minimum wage for agricultural labourers and rent courts and security of tenure for farmers.

The urban side of the enquiry (whose ideas did not appear until April 1914) pushed land taxation into the background in favour of a great new scheme, based on the ideas of the town planning movement, to encourage house building of a higher standard.

This idea was supported by a raft of other initiatives on leasehold and rating reform. In effect, while the land enquiry still presented the land issue as a crusade against landed privilege it had transformed its content into a major programme of social reform - a perfect example of Lloyd George's desire to combine the old Radicalism and the New Liberalism.

Lloyd George was able to persuade his Cabinet colleagues to endorse the land enquiry's rural programme with remarkable ease in October 1913 and to launch a great new campaign in the country. In fact, the party as a whole was united behind the extensive rural programme produced by the enquiry - even cautious Liberals could continue to accept social reform as long as the pill was sugared by a coating of anti-landlord rhetoric, as in 1909-11. Moreover, all the available evidence from politicians of all parties, newspapers and by-elections suggests that the minimum wage proposal for agricultural labourers was very successful in winning the Liberals new support in the countryside.

In a close election, which most observers expected, this could make all the difference between success and failure. In fact, far from being in decline after 1910, the rural land campaign suggests Liberals still displayed considerable ideological resilience, tactical cunning and commitment to extending social reform.

The urban land proposals had only just been approved by the Liberal leadership before war broke out in 1914, so no firm conclusions can be reached about their popularity. However, they aroused no hostility in the party and even those Liberals who objected to aspects of Lloyd George's 1914 Budget were not hostile to the chancellor's urban land proposals.

What is certain is that the Lloyd George's land campaign of 1913-14 provoked considerable unease in both the Conservative and Labour ranks. The Conservatives were worried by another assault on landlordism and became badly divided between those who wished to pursue their own rural reforms and those who insisted on the need to defend the role and property of landowners. They were unable to produce a



coherent response to Lloyd George's initiative and became pessimistic about their electoral performance in English rural seats.

Labour's only response was to endorse virtually every aspect of the land campaign. The party shared much of the Liberals' ideology about the significance of landlordism and it was impressed by the breadth of the proposed social reforms. But this made it harder for Labour to present the Liberals as an insufficiently radical party or to outflank them with a more drastic social reform programme.

The land campaign of 1913-14 was a radical reassessment of the content of the land issue. But it was largely successful in uniting Liberals and providing them with an effective programme with which to fight the forthcoming general election. This conclusion suggests that reports of the 'strange death' of the Liberal party before 1914 have been greatly exaggerated. But the usefulness of the land issue to Liberals depended on the specific historical situation before 1914. After the war, the land issue, like the Liberal party, proved difficult to resurrect in its pre-war form. Most importantly, landowners no longer seemed a credible threat to the cause of progress. But this idea should not be read back into the pre-war period - in 1913-14 Lloyd George had found a way to combine land reform and social reform in a way that gave Liberalism real hope of victory in the next election.

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Lloyd George, Liberalism and the Land: the Land Issue and Party Politics in England, 1906-1914 by Ian Packer Royal Historical Society/Boydell & Brewer, Woodbridge 2001 £35.00... but see the special offer with this issue of *Liberator!*

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# PULLING OUR PUNCHES

Simon Titley examines how Liberal Democrats should react to the crisis in the Middle East

Only the other week, I was asked to review a new book about the Middle East. 'The New Intifada' is a series of essays about the plight of the Palestinians, written from a variety of perspectives. The book had been published only last November. It provides a very good historical explanation of events. Then events on the ground took another nasty turn.

It is always tempting fate to write about this subject. Events change day by day and, since you'll be reading this at least two or three weeks after I've written it, who knows what the situation will be like by then. So many words are being written in the media that it is difficult to find anything original to say. But what makes it hardest are the taboos surrounding Israel.

We are told that it is none of our business and there is nothing we can do. Older Liberals will recall a cautionary tale about grandstanding on international affairs. The Liberal Party Assembly in Torquay in 1958 was held not only at the nadir of Liberal fortunes but also when the foreign news event of the day was the conflict between Communist China and Formosa (Taiwan) over the coastal island of Quemoy. The Party President, Sir Arthur Comyns-Carr, warned the Assembly in stern tones "nothing we should do must exacerbate the situation in Quemoy." The party never lived it down.

The Middle East is different. Our opinions matter because the climate of opinion in the west is Israel's first line of defence. The lobby is an integral part of Israeli foreign and defence policy. It is what emboldens Israel to act as it does. Whatever it may claim, Israel cannot function without continued western support, particularly from the USA, but also from the EU, which takes 40% of Israel's exports. Whether we, as political activists in Britain, support one side or the other or remain silent, we cannot help but influence that climate.

The only reason Israel can flout international law with impunity is because the pro-Israeli lobby's strategy is to inhibit criticism and sanctions. Non-Jews who criticise Israel are invariably accused of anti-Semitism. Jews who criticise Israel are called 'self-haters'. The memory of the holocaust is invoked to defend anything Israel does. Discussion is presumed closed. In such a highly charged atmosphere, most people decide that discretion is the better part of valour and duck for cover.

On the whole this has been a very successful strategy. The most significant effect is not the isolation of critics, but the intimidation of the majority into silence or equivocation. Even as the truth about the slaughter in

Jenin emerges, western politicians and media feel obliged to adopt a spurious 'balance', which in any other context would be unthinkable. Even now, we still hear ritual calls from western politicians who, after criticising Ariel Sharon, then feel obliged to call on Yasser Arafat to "reign in terrorists", when it ought to be obvious that the besieged Arafat no longer has the capacity even to flush his own toilet.

The Israeli lobby has simultaneously argued that the conflict with the Palestinians is none of our business, while at the same time has expended huge efforts on persuading us of its case. For example, early this April at the plenary session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg, a massive lobby was mobilised in an attempt to defeat a motion critical of the Israeli invasion, in vain as it turned out.

But there is also a body of opinion with no strong views on the Middle East, which argues that this is a little local difficulty in a faraway land of which we know nothing. It doesn't affect us, it's more trouble than it's worth, they deserve each other, let them fight one another to a standstill. As we should have learned by now, if you don't visit the Middle East, it has a nasty habit of visiting you.

The dispute often spills over into Europe. Suez in 1956 and the 1973 oil crisis are the most notable examples. Today, it is leading to a deterioration of relationships between Jewish and Muslim communities in the west, with racist attacks on synagogues breaking out in France and Belgium. More than that, the current dispute is destabilising an entire region and threatens to plunge us all into war.

Even if there were no objective manifestations of the conflict in our countries, it would still matter to us because this is about the 'Holy Land', the location of places holy to the three great religions of Judaism, Islam and Christianity. At the time of writing, the Church of the Nativity, one of the holiest places in Christianity, has been under siege for more than two weeks.

Israel cannot place itself off limits. We cannot ignore it. This affects us, it's our business.

With an interest in the situation comes an obligation to help resolve it. With much hand wringing, we despair of ever finding a solution, when the shape of one is obvious to all but the most bigoted. It's spelt out in the Saudi peace plan and in the most recent UN resolution proposed by the USA. Israel withdraws to its pre-1967 borders (including the removal of the illegal settlements). Two sovereign states with mutual recognition. A sharing of Jerusalem. Border adjustments and land swaps by mutual agreement. Some form of

justice for Palestinian refugees. And, since neither side seems able or willing to guarantee the security of the other, there must be an international peace keeping force to enforce the agreement.

A political settlement, in other words. And what prevents this happening is a refusal to recognise the situation for what it is, colonial occupation. Israel is fighting to maintain some form of occupation; the Palestinians are fighting a nationalist war. The illegal occupation of the West Bank and Gaza are the underlying cause of the present problems and are at the root of the Palestinian grievance. Pretending that Israel and the Palestinians are somehow equal protagonists ignores the immorality of the occupation and the balance of power between occupiers and occupied.

The Israeli government depicts this situation solely in terms of Israel's 'security', as if this were simply a matter of law and order. In Ariel Sharon's lexicon, 'peace' means an absence of conflict on his terms. There is no component of justice.

Sharon is effectively offering the Palestinians a choice, of either permanent exile, or permanent subjugation and humiliation. No self-respecting human being would accept living on such terms. The Palestinians don't, and no one else should expect them to.

The reason Sharon and his supporters cannot see this is because they assume the Israelis are the only people with a narrative. It is simply inconceivable that anyone else might have any legitimate grievance or demand. From this self-centred perspective, it becomes easy to demonise all Palestinians as terrorists and all critics as anti-Semites. The terms "terrorist" and "anti-Semitic" are being bandied about so freely that the Israelis risk stripping them of any meaning.

Coupled with a selfish view has been the intense Israeli effort to shift the entire blame for the situation onto the Palestinians. It is plainly absurd to blame colonised people for their own occupation. And never in the recent history of colonialism have 'peace efforts' been based on a demand for the occupied to guarantee the safety of the occupier.

Central to the current Israeli arguments is that the Palestinians "had their chance" with the Oslo Agreements but "missed a golden opportunity" to accept a "generous offer". There is not only the dangerous assumption that political dialogue has been exhausted and that the only answer is military force. There is also the implication that the Palestinians have somehow forfeited their right to self-determination. This argument is disingenuous. Let us assume that the failure of the agreements was entirely the fault of the

Palestinians. Either the Israelis believe the Palestinians have a basic right to a state of their own, in which case any failure does not change that basic right, or they do not, in which case Israel was not negotiating in good faith.

We can now see Oslo as part of a pattern in which Israel has strung along the international community with a series of 'interim' agreements, measures designed to produce a ceasefire without ever resulting in a just resolution of the conflict. Demands for a 'ceasefire' now are pointless when the Israelis, by deliberately targeting the Palestinian Authority police force and security apparatus, have removed Arafat's capacity to impose any form of law and order. They also should not be a pre-condition for negotiations, since this gives any single extremist a veto over the whole process.

Sharon is hardly in a position to mourn the failure of Oslo. He consistently opposed the agreements and has done everything in his power to dismantle them. Even before he took power, the Israelis were not blameless. Since the Oslo accords were signed, Israeli settlements in the occupied territories have doubled in size. The Israelis continued their policies of collective punishments, demolition of houses, pillage of land and natural resources, closures, deportations, torture and assassinations. And all the while, militant Israeli settlers were frequently taking pot shots at Palestinians, most were never arrested and the few that were charged received derisory

sentences (we never heard the international community call on Israel then to "reign in its terrorists"). All of these activities were in breach of international law and all did nothing but undermine the position of Palestinian leaders prepared to negotiate.

Oslo was also intrinsically flawed. It envisaged a 'state' in the West Bank comprising three separate pieces of land surrounded by Israeli troops and settlers, without direct access to its own international borders. In return for prime agricultural land in the West Bank, the Palestinians would be given a strip of desert adjacent to the Gaza Strip that Israel currently uses for toxic waste dumping. The Palestinians would get only a few fragments of East Jerusalem. Prime Minister Barak was making not a "generous offer" to the Palestinians but only the trappings of statehood. The subjugation would have remained, and the international community would have endorsed the residual occupation. No wonder the Palestinians could not accept.

Another argument we hear from Israeli government spokesmen is that the Palestinians already controlled "95%" of their own people and thus no longer had a grievance. This is totally dishonest. The Israelis have confiscated 70% of the land in the West Bank and Gaza for settlements, along with most of the water supply,





agricultural land and natural resources. The Palestinians were corralled into towns and refugee camps. The Palestinian Authority's limited government was confined to a series of Bantustans.

But it is in the conduct of 'Operation Defensive Shield' that Sharon's case collapses. The ostensible motive was to "destroy the terrorist infrastructure." In reality, the objective seems to have been more of a scorched earth policy against all the institutions of Palestinian civil society. There has been a systematic destruction of infrastructure and dismantling of Palestinian Authority institutions, representing an attempt by Sharon to turn the clock back eight years before the signing of the Oslo peace accords.

Even if you believe a full-scale invasion was a justified response to terrorism, it is hard to understand how your goals could be achieved, for example, by ransacking the Palestinian Authority's statistics bureau, the education ministry and the ministry of local government in Ramallah. How is the deliberate destruction of 50 years' worth of school final examination results or land records or building permits supposed to stop suicide bombers?

A British resident of Ramallah, Tom Kay, reported how Israeli soldiers completely vandalised an eye clinic in a medical aid centre. "They pulled every machine on to the floor and smashed it. All the computers are gone, the optometric equipment was on the floor upside down, all the glasses are in piles on the floor." This eye clinic was not the scene of any fighting.

Worse still has been the deliberate obstruction of humanitarian aid, contrary to international law and all accepted norms of behaviour. Israelis attempting to deliver food and medical aid faced beatings by their own troops. There have also been numerous incidents of the Israeli army attacking ambulances and humanitarian aid convoys, even though these convoys had prior senior officer permission to travel. In the past 18 months, the Israeli army has damaged or destroyed 80 out of 100 Palestinian Red Crescent Society ambulances. On April 3rd, the Israeli army smashed five ambulances parked in a secure parking compound in Tulkarem belonging to the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The Israelis have also destroyed water and electricity facilities, homes and schools and have been shooting deliberately at journalists and unarmed peace demonstrators.

The World Bank estimates that the direct physical destruction of public infrastructure has cost \$600m to \$800m. It further estimates that most of the \$5 billion of investments made possible by international donor aid has been destroyed and that the economic loss to the Palestinian economy in GDP is about \$5 billion. Most of the infrastructure paid for and supplied by the European Union has been deliberately destroyed.

The Israeli public relations machine has gone into overdrive to justify what the Israeli army has done in the West Bank. Even though the full facts are not yet known, the Israelis have already been condemned by every reputable international body working on the ground; the ICRC (Red Cross), the World Bank, European Commission's humanitarian aid office, UNWRA, Amnesty International, plus numerous local human rights bodies, both Israeli and Palestinian. All criticise the denial of humanitarian aid and the damage to the economy.

Yet still there appears to be no shortage of people in the west prepared to play the role of cheerleader for Ariel Sharon. In April, members of the US Senate and Congress queued up to praise Benjamin Netanyahu, visiting Washington to win hearts and minds by conflating Palestinian nationalism with Osama Bin Laden. It was a sickening thought that many of the politicians on Capitol Hill pledging themselves to Israel's fight against terrorism were the very same people that blocked Britain's appeals to the US government to stop Noraid funding the IRA bombing campaign.

Armed force by itself cannot provide Israel with security. The 'terrorist infrastructure' consists of nothing more than a willingness on the part of some Palestinians to kill themselves. Sharon's invasion of the West Bank will make the security of Israel worse. It is ultimately self-defeating because it radicalises Palestinian opinion. With their economy in ruins and no political solution in sight, Palestinians will resort to ever more desperate means and no amount of sophisticated American weaponry will stop the killing.

This invasion will prove counter-productive. Israel's 18-year invasion of the Lebanon led to thousands of lives lost while achieving few if any of Israel's initial objectives. It radicalised previously moderate Lebanese people and created a new enemy in the form of Hezbollah. Likewise, the population of the West Bank and Gaza overwhelmingly opposes armed occupation, making it untenable in the long run. Sharon's strategy of humiliation will backfire.

But Sharon has trapped himself into a position where the only response he can offer to worsening security is military escalation. But how can he cap what he did in Jenin? Ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians (a course of action already openly advocated by some members of the Israel cabinet)? Killing Arafat? It would be hard to imagine more effective means of recruiting more suicide bombers.

This is why we have to refuse to be intimidated by the pro-Israeli lobby. Ariel Sharon, throughout his political and military career, has been someone with no moral borders. He has consistently shown savage brutality towards Arab civilians, and a callous disregard for international law and for the norms of civilised behaviour. If the lobby in the west were not protecting him, an international court for war crimes would long ago have indicted him.

But also, this about the consistent application of Liberal principles. When we pull our punches, when we indulge the current Israeli government, when we look the other way, we are in effect saying that we apply different standards of behaviour to different groups according to their race or religion. Double standards and equivocation corrode our own morality, distort international ethics and in the end do no one any favours.

Instead of intimidating their opponents, friends of Israel in the west would do better to focus on saving Israel from itself. The Saudi plan and latest UN resolution should be supported, not because they're perfect, but because all the alternatives are too awful to contemplate.

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'The New Intifada - Resisting Israel's Apartheid', edited by Roane Carey, published by Verso, 2001, paperback £13

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## FREEDOM FIGHTER

*Dear Liberator,*

Donnachadh McCarthy is someone I much admire, but I strongly disagree with some of his observations on the new defence policy (Liberator 280).

I regard myself as a radical liberal but I was one of those on the defence working group who wanted to see an increase in defence spending.

I believe Britain has a duty to be outward looking and to positively act to promote liberty for people beyond our own shores. Bosnia and Sierra Leone are but two recent examples of when military force has been necessary to do this. There are plenty more where the west should act but has shamefully failed.

The fact is that unless we increase our defence spending our capability to fight and win for freedom will continue to diminish. The whole European Union must take this seriously if America is not to extend its near-monopoly on effective military power.

This commitment to securing world safety is liberal in the sense that it is the opposite of the actions of the right-wing Labour government, which has allowed real terms defence spending to fall, it is thoroughly radical.

I look forward to the day when Britain can put arms aside. But that day has not yet come if we really are committed to defending freedom around the world, if we believe our duty is not only to our own freedom but to the freedom of others.

*Antony Hook  
Deal*

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## DEMONSTRATING CONCERN

*Dear Liberator*

Like many people, I am shocked by the behaviour of the Israelis in the Occupied Territories over the last few weeks. Last Saturday I joined a demonstration as it made its way along Piccadilly towards Trafalgar Square. I am not sure who organised the march, but practically all of the people on it were either

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# LETTERS

Arabs living in this country or Muslims.

A number of people thanked me for joining them. There were very few white British people present, even including the usual suspects from the SWP. Many people had only learned of the demonstration when they went to their Mosques the previous day, and had brought their whole family including lots of toddlers in pushchairs and ultimately on their parents' backs. This was clearly very different from the image of an Arab demonstration that the Metropolitan Police seemed to have. Most of the demonstrators seemed oblivious or unaware of the proximity of the American Embassy.

They all expressed disillusion with what the Government is doing. Why isn't Tony Blair being more forceful George Bush? The Israelis are doing exactly what the Serbs did in Kosovo - only worse - why aren't we taking some action against them?

There is quite clearly a very large British Arab and Muslim constituency. They are plainly very disillusioned and upset. It is time something was done to address their concerns; we saw where frustration leads on September 11th.

*Lucy Brennan  
Tower Hamlets*

## BARBARA EGGLESTON

Barbara Eggleston who died in March, will be remembered by those Liberal Democrats who attended Young Liberal conferences in the late 70s. As a member of the National League of Young Liberals she was known principally for her work with the its peace group, speaking, writing and campaigning for Peace and working with CND.

Barbara joined a local YL branch in Brighton and then went on study at the LSE. After the Young Liberals she moved towards CND rather than the then Liberal Party. She worked with London Region CND, which was where I met up with her again in the early 80s. She met her husband Guy Davies on a CND demo. Whenever I met them Guy always had that "I am so pleased I met such a wonderful woman" look about him.

Barbara went on to be national organiser of Christian CND. She seemed to me to be a wonderful advertisement for her religious belief, never pious and with a sharp humour summed up by her catchphrase of the time "bash a trot for Jesus". She and others in CND had regular battles with Trots.

I recall been on the receiving end of her sense of humour when she once visited me in hospital as I was recovering from an operation and I told her not to make me laugh. She ignored me of course and I found myself helpless with laughter clutching my wound!

Barbara had been battling against cancer for the last ten years and had been treated successfully. The cancer returned last October. The Royal Marsden Hospital provided excellent treatment, until it became clear she would no longer benefit from active treatment and she moved to a hospice near her home in Haywards Heath. Barbara is survived by her husband Guy, and her two sons Patrick and Jonathan.

**Barbara Eggleston**  
**Born 30 December 1955**  
**Died 1 March 2002**

*Peter Johnson*

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**Palestine**  
by Joe Sacco  
Fantagraphics 2001  
\$24.95

Joe Sacco's comic strip illuminates these review pages. It originally appeared over nine issues in 1992. Sacco had spent a couple of months in the Occupied Territories, and was plainly profoundly moved by what he witnessed. The story of the first Intifada is told through the eyes of a young, crew-cut American tourist, who wanders into the Arab world almost by accident. Americans in particular need a lot of educating about the Middle East, but the experience is common with that of many totally apolitical friends who have visited Israel-Palestine (one even working on a kibbutz) and had the scales removed from their eyes.

Edward Said writes a brilliant introduction to this book. It is great to learn that he was just another punk smuggling the Superman comics into school like the rest of us. He also underscores the political significance of the work. Comic media have come a long way since the early days of Superman. Transformed, I suppose, partly through the underground magazines of Flower Power, they have become an important educational medium, especially when dealing with illiterate or semi-literate (and reluctant to become literate) people. Educating the politically illiterate - not quite all Americans, nor victims of the British media, is an equally urgent task.

Me? I already know too much about Palestine, which makes this book uncomfortable, even painful to read experiences that I know about, have almost experienced. Sometimes I am even carried back, to say for example a crowd gathering which becomes a demonstration inside the Damascus Gate. Visually, the graphics are strong, almost Cubist sometimes in their layout/chronology. Graphically the crude realism of Sacco's drawing is strong, you are compelled to read on, though exhausted by the subject of the story.

I strongly commend this book to anybody who hasn't been to Israel or Palestine, or to anyone who wants to get a better understanding of the current situation there (I'd welcome a similar work putting the Israeli position - they can't fall back on Spiegelman's monumental *Maus*

# REVIEWS

(about Jews in the Nazi death camps) indefinitely. Sadly, Sacco concludes that nothing has changed since his visit. That was in July 2001. He must be totally sickened by what has happened since then.

*Stewart Rayment*

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**London Bread and Circuses**

by Jonathan Glancey  
Verso 2001 £13

There is a tendency, not least among Liberal Democrats, to regard 'London' as some malevolent and amorphous thing comprising solely politicians and bureaucrats dedicated to doing down the rest of the country.

This view conveniently ignores the 10 per cent of the population who live there, most of them by birth or choice.

Jonathan Glancey is native Londoner who loves the place as it is but knows it could be better, and his book is a piece of well argued invective against New Labour's treatment of the capital.

The government has given London a mayor with almost no powers, overseen by an assembly with even fewer, while inflicting upon it wasteful monstrosities such as the Dome, and an unwanted, costly and dangerous experiment in private finance of public infrastructure for the underground railway.

Glancey argues, with many examples drawn from conversation with ordinary Londoners, that Labour has taken on with enthusiasm the Thatcherite belief that the capital should be run by and for business, and that the government believes that the country's most extensive collection of bars, shops and entertainments will somehow compensate its

inhabitants for creaking infrastructure and services.

One does not have to be a Londoner to appreciate Glancey's surgical demolition job on New Labour's hypocrisy and its naive infatuation with the rich and powerful.

*Mark Smulian*

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**Churchill**  
by Roy Jenkins  
Macmillan £30.00 2001

There have been so many biographies of Churchill of varied quality so we owe so much to the few good ones.. This biography doesn't quite make it to the few although it ranks amongst the better ones.

Jenkins has attempted a meticulous academic approach making great use of primary sources, in particular, letters. It is however written largely with a politician's perspective and he would appear to have been less meticulous about some of the military matters described in the book.

In the case of Gallipoli, he describes H.M.S Inflexible as having been sunk when the vessel was merely damaged and went on to serve at Jutland. General Sikorski is described as being shot down by enemy action when he was killed in an air crash with the subsequent allegation of sabotage for political reasons, but there is no mention in the account.

The losses of convoy PQ 17 are described as heavy despite the presence of 77 escorts when the problems arose the withdrawal of the escorts and the scattering of the convoy arising from erroneous information that it was under imminent threat from the Tirpitz.



The author also displays a lack of understanding of military matters shown by his questioning of why the most modern British battleships were no match for the Bismarck, without realising that they, unlike the Bismarck, were designed to comply with the limitations of the Washington Treaty.

He also expresses surprise at Hitler's decision to hold back the panzers at Dunkirk without realising that what he describes as an ineffective British battle for Arras may well have scared the German High Command about the panzers advancing too far ahead of the infantry.

Possibly because of his lack of interest in military history he is not as critical of Churchill's intervention in naval affairs as Captain Roskill in Churchill and the Admirals. Churchill was essentially an armchair strategist who may well have seen through the shortcomings when he was a subaltern in the Sudan and South Africa but no great strategist in a position of power.

On the purely political aspect of Churchill's career, Jenkins fares better although he makes the mistake of describing John Ward as a Labour MP when he was initially elected as Lib-Lab MP and became a self styled Independent Labour MP supported by local Liberals and Conservatives.

He brings up the issue of the Tory party's alleged ingratitude to Butler without reflecting on whether the latter's conduct in the summer of 1940 may have played a role in his rejection as leader by senior Conservatives.

We are presented with a picture of Churchill as holding what for the bulk of his life were Liberal values and being a supporter of Free Trade. He is also shown as a reforming President of the Board of Trade and a Home Secretary who brought in penal reform.

Jenkins concludes by describing Churchill as the greatest prime minister of the last century and after reflection, the greatest Prime Minister of all time. A more accurate



description might have been the right person at the right time, albeit a crucial one in world history.

In attempting an academic study, Jenkins has made the account heavy going even in the early years when Churchill's life was akin to a Boy's Own adventure story.

Amazingly, he only mentions that the mine manager with whom he sought refuge after escaping from a Boer prison camp, had recognised

him from his first failed attempt to become elected when he describes Churchill's second attempt to stand for Oldham and not when describing his escape.

This is the kind of coincidence that occurs to heroes in John Buchan type adventure stories yet it is dealt with in a detached academic manner.

Andrew Hudson

## Mythology of the British Isles

by Geoffrey Ashe

Methuen 2002 £9.99

As Churchill put it 'This is true, or it ought to be...' which is certainly so of King Arthur, so why not the rest of it? Ashe's book first appeared in 1990, when he attempted to emulate Robert Graves' work on the Greek myths with what is known of the native traditions. Alas Ashe is not a Graves, though this may allow him to be more scholarly. In following Graves, Ashe sifts through the detritus of the years for possible kernels of evidence of the origins of these myths. Where are the hallucinogenic mushrooms? Not in that other Geoffrey - of Monmouth, that's for sure.

This is a new edition - just. The only post 1990 work I could find in the bibliography was Christopher Synder's *An Age of Tyrants* (Sutton 1998), which deals with post-Roman Britain AD400-600, from a more archaeological perspective, but is broadly in tune with Ashe's line of thinking.

Surprisingly, Ashe makes no mention at all of the *Pater Coliavi ficit Artognov* graffiti found on a piece of slate at Tintagel in 1998. The graffiti is of course, more important as evidence of continuing Latin literacy in a possible non-religious context after the Roman withdrawal. The press was more excited about the possibility of a link with 'Arthur' (three letters) than the academics - who saw it as more evidence along the lines of Synder's - another candle to illuminate the Dark Ages. It is great fun, whatever.

It amazes me that books on this subject rarely agree on content or form. What remains as 'British mythology' is that big a field, especially since those Irish myths that don't transcend both islands are wisely regarded as a separate subject. Where is Britomatus? Although out of the time frame, Robin Hood would have rounded things off quite nicely.

Too little discussion is given on the separateness of the British and Roman Churches before Whitby and Ashe doesn't really warm to the Saxons, despite source materials that would fill a book of a similar size. Yet it remains a handy little

edition and it is good to see it in print again.

Stewart Rayment

## Red Poppies

by Alai

Methuen 2002 £14.99

In that this story is of the (ostensibly) idiot son of a Tibetan chieftain, a lot of omissions are allowed. Set in the last period of Tibetan independence, this book probably portrays something of the situation there in the first half of the twentieth century.

Part of the dilemma of Tibet is its past relationships with China. Alai sets out how the eastern chieftains drew their political and military power and to some extent wealth, from the Chinese, whilst virtually ignoring their spiritual relationship with western Tibet. Thus underlying the book is the Chinese claim to Tibet.

Is then, Alai the lick-spittle running dog of the Beijing Communist Imperialist clique? Not withstanding what an author can get away with in the Chinese People's Republic (PCR), the answer probably has to be 'yes'.

We don't know the precise location of the clan that Alai writes about - somewhere to the north east. The Red Army turns up at the end of the story and is portrayed benignly, although the evidence is otherwise. Not only in 1950, when their atrocities are well documented, but also in 1936 during the period of the Long March, the 2nd and 4th armies, at least, were on the rampage in eastern Tibet. Edgar Snow (*Red Star over China*), whom I take to be an author mostly sympathetic to the Chinese Communists, tells us that the Red Army encountered resistance from the Tibetans in its passage through their land, and was frustrated as the local populace melted into the jungle and hills, leaving them to loot their homes.

This apart, Alai's is a story of power, and how simplicity, and doing the right thing (within the confines of human frailty) will usually win out. The Tibetan aristocracy is shewn as unworldly through their isolation and decadent. I am sceptical about the degree of this, but the detail of life in a chieftain's house is not dissimilar to that found in the late

Ani Pachen's autobiography *Sorrow Mountain*. Fiction is not pure anthropology, and the film rights not least will demand their fill of sex and violence.

Slavery, which is referred to throughout, is in the context of Marx's Oriental Mode, rather than that of the Atlantic trade, so we see some of the sort of landlord - peasant relationships common to some Anglo-Irish literature of the last century, perhaps more brutal, but matey.

Buddhism is shewn as a rather more primitive religion than its western adherents tend to hold - it is of course, many things, but one of the things that Alai captures well is a society that rationalises itself around magical (for want of a better term) beliefs, rather than the metaphysics of western science.

*Red Poppies* was awarded China's highest literary award, the Mao Dun Prize in 1998. Howard Goldblatt, the translator, stresses the significance of the award going to a member of an ethnic minority within China. Alai speaks and reads Tibetan, but only writes in Chinese. He edits the PRC's primary sci-fi magazine - *Science Fiction World*. He does not engage on the Tibetan issue, at least not publically. The part of Tibet where he was born and lives, now Chengdu, has been formally annexed by the PRC, although more Tibetans live there than in the so-called autonomous region. Goldblatt seems to think that the book has had more impact amongst Chinese readers than Tibetans.

So we have a story of adventure and lust, which keeps us going at a strong pace. Read *Red Poppies* at that that level and enjoy it, but whilst your knowledge of eastern Tibet will probably gain, be aware that this is coming from a pro-Chinese viewpoint. Han people, of what ever political complexion, tend to deny Tibet. The point is, these old imperialisms are dead, and the only ones that still cling are mainly those of Communism - China, Russia and Ethiopia. A people are self-defining in their political aspirations, and if they want to be free - as the Tibetans and Uighurs under the Chinese yoke do, ultimately they are going to be.

Stewart Rayment

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## **Housmans Peace Diary 2002 with World Peace Directory**

**Housmans, 5  
Caledonian Road, Kings  
Cross, London N1 9DX  
tel 0207 837 4473**

A bit late to be reviewing a diary, you'll rightly say. Unfortunately poor old Housmans had a bit of a glitch printing this year's peace diary, so they missed out on the peak selling time around Christmas.

It remains however, a valuable source of information about the peace movement and the pacific cause in general. Walpurgis Eve for example, is the tenth anniversary of the launch of the first British Trident submarine, or that 25th May sees a half-centenary since the explosion of a therm-nuclear device on Bikini Atoll? Now there's something to write to your local paper about, and by the way establish the true radical credentials of your Liberalism in a way they might attract others to the cause.

A feature of this year's diary, Chris Booth has written a tastylittle guide to using the worldwide web for peace campaigning. If don't don't surf the net regularly, you might learn from him and apply in other fields.

Next year's diary will be available from September at £6.95 inc. p&p. Do Housmans a favour, they've got stacks of these diaries, (as well as Liberator) on their shelves; give them a ring, or drop in and buy one... you'll get a very good rate.

*Stewart Rayment*

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## **Bigos and Chips by Mike Oborski 2001 £12**

Writing a book about yourself when one's main claims to fame are being the leader of Wyre Forest council and honorary Polish consul to Kidderminster might seem foolhardy, even if the profits are going to a children's charity.

Oborski was little involved with the Anglo-Polish community, and still does not speak Polish, up until the period that saw the emergence of Solidarity and then the imposition of martial law on Poland by General Jaruzelski. These events galvanised him and his wife Fran

into support activities, using the skills they had learned in years of Focus campaigning to build support in the UK for Polish freedom and to give practical help.

The book offers a number of insights in the problems of exile politics in general, and into Polish history, culture and cooking, as well as the requirements of being an honorary consul - Oborski is now the proud owner of a 20-foot flagpole in his front garden.

I've only a slight acquaintance with Oborski, and have never visited Poland, so I don't think this book was aimed at me.

But I expect that those with a particular interest in Poland, or those who have worked with him closely, particularly in the continuing Liberal Party in which he is among the leading lights, will find much to intrigue and divert them.

The book is available from the author at his consulate: 6 Osborne Close, Kidderminster DY10 3YY.

*Mark Smulian*

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## **The Oxford Companion to Twentieth-Century British Politics edited by John Ramsden OUP 2002 £35.00**

The judgement of a reference book is a very demanding task. First, one doesn't doubt the scholarship of the Oxford University Press, following which the credentials of the contributors are conveniently listed, though we may also know their biases. It seems that the main biographer of a politician has not written that entry, though their work will generally be referred to for further reading. This is reasonable, but there should be more referencing of earlier politicians.

Liberals, or related headings excluding Libertarianism (which probably changed its political meaning a few times in the last century) get the best part of eight pages. The Liberal Democrats go up from, say half a column in The Oxford Companion to British History (1997), to just under two pages... and all in five years, though the '97 general election hadn't taken place when that book went to press. Although we are told, therein, that Michael Meadowcroft

announced that he was reforming the Liberal party, we are told nothing more of it. Indeed the article on the Liberal party runs up to 2001 through reference to the Liberal Democrats. If one wanted more, the piece on Michael Meadowcroft gives the base of the Liberal party as West Yorkshire... I don't think so.

The LImps get a similar amount of space in each book - though they are not referred to as such in this one, which accuses them of 'coming together to resist further radicalization of their party' - this is Asquith, Grey, Haldane et al... I don't think I'd concur with that, more differences in international policy.

Cross referencing, we get, for example Liberal Action Group Common Wealth Party Sir Richard Acland, and Eddisbury by-election. Lesley Hore-Belisha Liberal National Party Sir John Simon Herbert Samuel David Lloyd George - all a bit one-way. Samuel also leads links General Strike Samuel Commission Herbert Samuel. He also goes to National Government 1931 Doctor's Mandate, also Ramsay MacDonald, which notes frustrated Liberal roots, goes to Lib Lab Pact 1903, cross-referenced MacDonald-Gladstone Pact. So far so good.

Young Liberals connect to Jo Grimond, Jeremy Thorpe, and Community Politics, but not Association of Liberal Councillors (which does not become ALDC). The Young Liberals are mentioned under Community Politics, but not cross-referenced. Also, no mention is made of South Africa surprisingly, nor Peter Hain, who doesn't warrant an entry.

Some of the entries can be idiosyncratic, consider Edward Pearce on Norman Fowler, a family man spending more and more time in politics, more of a bastion against the on-slaughts of Thatcherism than one might have imagined at the time; a sketch more than anything else. Ribble Valley bye-election tells us that the Liberals won, but doesn't name Mike Carr.

It is easy to pick holes... let's call them something to help the next edition... overall we have a very useful work here, either to dip into casually or for more serious research.

*Stewart Rayment*  
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## Monday

To The Hague for the trial of Paddy Ashplant. I was doubtful when I heard that Slobodan Milosevic was to be called as a witness for the prosecution, but he handled their exchanges well. "Come, come, Mr Ashcan," "Do you seriously expect the Court to believe that, Mr Ashtray?", "Yes or no, Mr Asphalt?" You know the sort of thing. Not being one to bear a grudge I have dinner with Ashplant, and it proves an enjoyable event. I am moved to expound upon the strength of Rutland's claim to a number of parishes which are at present in Lincolnshire and draw a map on his menu to explain our position. My memory of the evening is not entirely clear, but I fear I may have got a little carried away and sketched in the Yorkshire coast as well.

## Tuesday

I learn from the Manchester Guardian that the Scots wish to reclaim Berwick upon Tweed, making it a part of "Caledonia, stern and wild" once again. My old friend P. G. Wodehouse famously remarked that it is never difficult to distinguish between a Scotsman with a grievance and a ray of sunshine, but it seems they have a point. The town was taken by the English in lieu of a ransom in 1174, but when the Scots coughed up in 1189 we trousered the money and failed to hand it back. Not quite cricket, what? If the town is to return to Scottish hands, we shall have to decide what to do with its MP; he is, of course, our own Alan Beith. My preference is for a solution whereby the Scots buy Beith but allow us to lease him back for a number of years. When the time comes to hand him over we could have a ceremony with Northumbrian pipers, marching bands, a display from the Miss Peggy Inverarity School of Scottish Country Dancing and so forth. Why, I could say a few well chosen words myself!

## Wednesday

For the past few weeks I have had an engaging fellow called Powell staying at the Hall. He tells me that he is on his way to the Holy Land, but shows few signs of continuing his journey. One day he asks Cook for a packed lunch as he plans a bicycling trip to the Stilton mines near Launde: the next he asks me if I would mind awfully taking him to see the Wise Woman of Wing again. (Well, she really is Terribly Wise.) He is an engaging fellow, and particularly Sound on the deficiencies of President Kenny W. Bunkport Jnr; indeed, if one sets aside Powell's inability to pronounce a perfectly sensible Christian name, I have not a word to say against him. My only worry is that the fellows in the Middle East will be wondering where he has got to. Perhaps I should send the Wise Woman in his stead?

## Thursday

Have you been following the latest scandal closely? If you have not, let me briefly explain. An Indian fellow called Lakshmi Mittal has been in the habit of slipping the odd fiver to the New Party. He recently took it into his head to buy up the Romanian steel industry, and Blair put a word in the right ears on his behalf. At the same time, this Mittal bird has been lobbying President Bunkport to ban steel imports to America. (Are you still with me? I think there was something to do with a smallpox vaccination involved too, but we shall skate over that for now.) The result is that British mills are now faced with the prospect of the importation of a flood of cheap Romanian steel. I write with some feeling, for in the 1980s we had to suffer the import of

# Lord Bonkers' Diary

numerous cheap Romanian orphans, which made things very different for those of us engaged in the orphan trade over here. (Note to Calder: Slip something about "charity" in hereabouts, there's a good chap.) Free Trade is a fine and noble thing, as Bright and Cobden were wont to point out, but one can take it too far.

## Friday

Poor, poor Lady Ludford! It seems that she will no longer be allowed to sit in the European Parliament because she is a member of the House of Lords. I now feel terribly guilty. I was not one of those who besieged her Islington home night after night until she weakened and agreed to stand as an MEP, but I did bring them soup and sandwiches on more than one occasion. And what of poor Emma Nicholson? When she joined the Liberal

Democrats in 1995, and accepted a life peerage in 1997, she can never have dreamed that one day she would find herself a member of the European Parliament. These European fellows are over fond of regulation - think of the problems their Underwear Directive is causing - and I wonder if it would not be better to respect the robust good sense of the voters. If the electors of, say, Rutland wish to see someone who is already a peer hold several elected positions (be they at Oakham, Westminster or Brussels) and draw the appropriate salaries, why should he not be free to accept them?

## Saturday

What has been going on in Harrow? No fewer than 60 of our candidates have had their nomination papers ruled invalid. I am told that it was something to do with the candidates' party descriptions and the logo. It is sad that after a century or more of compulsory secondary education the voters need pictures to help them tell the parties apart, but there you have it. It just shows how badly we need that extra penny on income tax to pay for more spending in our schools. In my day, of course, there were no party labels allowed on the ballot paper. In '06 my agent and canvassers went around saying "Remember, he's Bonkers" to our voters, and it seemed to work tolerably well. Mind you, if I had been allowed extra wording on the paper, something along the lines of "The Liberal Party Candidate - Remember your rents fall due on Lady Day" would have been decidedly useful.

## Sunday

Did you see what Blair had to say in the House the other day? "The trouble with the Liberal Democrats is that they are very good at making spending commitments but less good at controlling numbers. For example, they have recently asked for more money for personal care, teachers, doctors, nurses, police, dental services and more hospital beds. They asked for the abolition of prescription dental and sight charges, the scrapping of all tuition fees and the reintroduction of all student grants. They also asked that benefits be given to all students during the summer holidays and for an increase in housing benefit; the payment of no-fault compensation, compensation for Gulf war veterans, greater spending on debt aid relief, and the giving of greater subsidies to small and medium-sized farmers." People can be so unfair.

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Lord Bonkers, who was Liberal MP for Rutland South-West 1906-10, opened his diary to Jonathan Calder

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