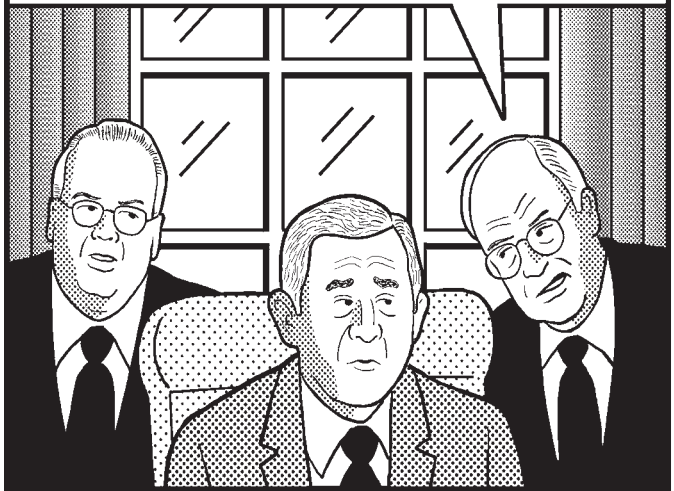


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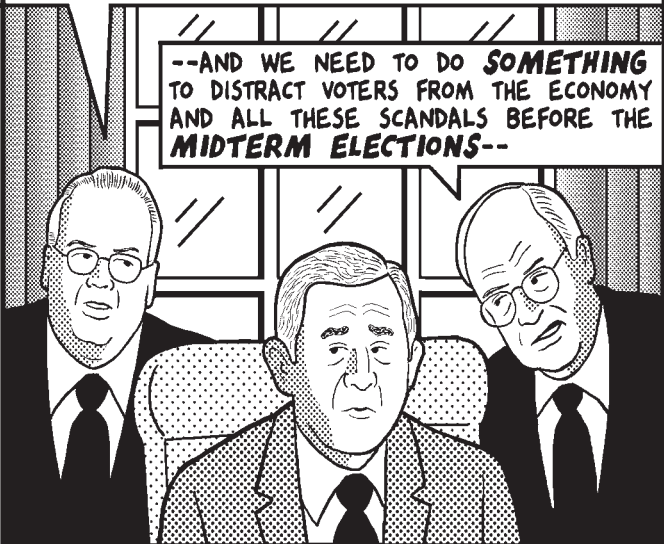
WE HAVE ABSOLUTELY NO EVIDENCE LINKING THEM TO 9-11 OR AL QAEDA--OR EVEN ANY PROOF THAT THEY PLAN TO AID TERRORISTS IN THE **FUTURE**--



--AND AN INVASION OF THIS MAGNITUDE **WILL** INEVITABLY COST THOUSANDS OF LIVES ON BOTH SIDES-- ENRAGE NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES--AND GENERALLY MAKE US A **PARIAH** IN THE COURT OF WORLD OPINION--

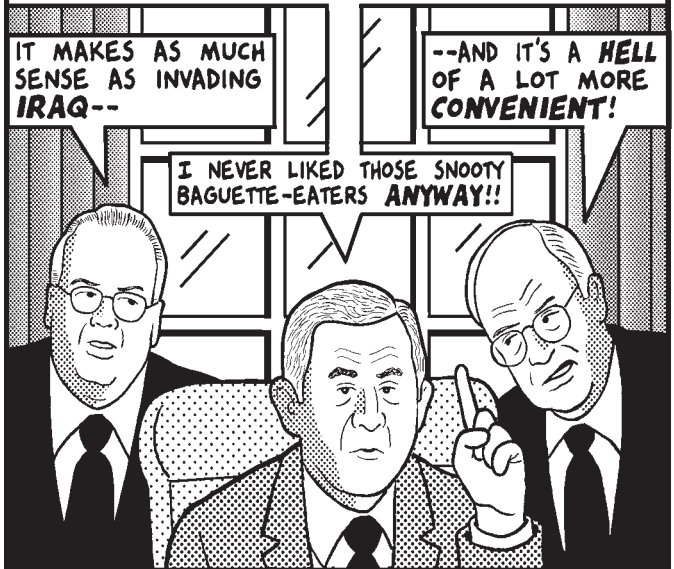


--BUT FRANKLY, MOST **AMERICANS** WOULD BE PERFECTLY HAPPY TO SEE THE WHOLE DAMN COUNTRY WIPED OFF THE MAP--



--AND WE NEED TO DO **SOMETHING** TO DISTRACT VOTERS FROM THE ECONOMY AND ALL THESE SCANDALS BEFORE THE **MIDTERM ELECTIONS**--

--SO IT'S **SETTLED!** COME OCTOBER--**WE'RE ATTACKING FRANCE!!**



IT MAKES AS MUCH SENSE AS INVADING **IRAQ**--

--AND IT'S A **HELL** OF A LOT MORE **CONVENIENT!**

I NEVER LIKED THOSE SNOOTY BAGUETTE-EATERS **ANYWAY!!**

## In this issue

- 💣 **Rethinking Europe - Nick Clegg MEP**
- 💣 **No Yankee Poodles - Jonathan Fryer**
- 💣 **Never Trust a Professional - David Boyle**

- 💣 **Fighting Postal Voting - John Hemming**
- 💣 **Decentralisation not enough - Nick Harvey MP**
- 💣 **The Public Service Debate - Chris Huhne MEP**

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# COMMENTARY

## MONEY FOR OLD ROPE

One proud British invention that has stood the test of time is the humble postage stamp. Buy one, stick it on a letter, and there's a reasonable chance it will reach the other end. Except that, thanks to the ludicrously named Consignia, this civilised practice is coming to an end. To guarantee delivery before 9am, your recipient will now have to pay a hefty premium for the privilege.

This latest racket is symbolic of various changes to contracts that were once assumed inviolate. The latest thing you can buy which no longer guarantees to deliver is your pension.

The current fad in the City is for companies to close admission to their 'final earnings'-based pension schemes. Board directors, tweaking their annual reports in order to inflate the paper value of their companies, have discovered that these schemes represent a considerable liability. Apparently, they're "too expensive" to maintain any longer.

Funny, that. In the mid-90s, these very same companies took 'pension holidays' by temporarily suspending payments into their pension funds. As the values of shares soared, pension funds were mushrooming. Rather than inflate these surpluses still further, the companies argued, better to save for a rainy day.

Well, it's certainly raining now, but the companies have shifted their ground. If you want a company pension, you'll have to take your chances on the stock market like everybody else (and remember, the value of your investments can go down as well as up).

But the big employers are not the only guilty parties. The saga of pensions is one in which no one emerges with much credit.

State pensions are a legacy of the 1906 Liberal government. Although there was much Tory hostility at the time, state pensions did not represent such a huge economic burden then or for the next sixty years. The population was growing and life expectancy was such that most working people survived only a few years beyond retirement.

Nowadays, people typically survive for 15 or 20 years beyond the statutory retirement age and life expectancy continues to grow. Meanwhile, a falling birth rate means that there are fewer taxpayers to sustain a system of state pensions. Demographic change means that pensions at anything much above a very basic level cannot be sustained from current expenditure, at least not without massive tax rises. If people want pensions that can support a comfortable middle class lifestyle, they cannot expect governments to find all the money and will have to save for their old age.

It was this realisation that led the Thatcher government to encourage people to take out private pension schemes, as a way of shifting the burden from current expenditure to capital funds. Clumsy deregulation, however, led to widespread mis-selling of pensions. Despite all the hype and the tax breaks, a high proportion of adults failed to make any private provision, either because they could not afford it, or because they assumed they could fall back on the state, or because they simply chose to enjoy their money now.

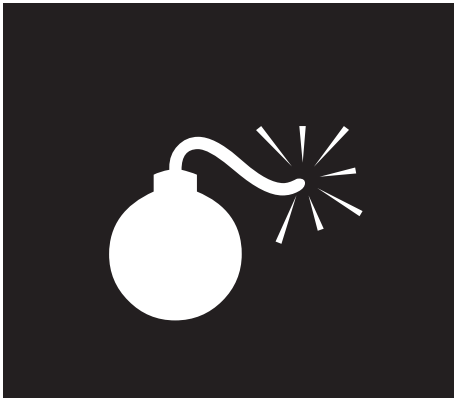
Still, share-based pension schemes looked like a wise investment in the 80s and 90s. But now, with stock prices tumbling, and Chancellor Gordon Brown raiding pension funds for tax revenue, who would want to invest their savings in a share-based pension scheme when they can make huge profits simply by buying a house?

When even a nondescript semi can fetch a quarter of a million pounds, perhaps that's the source of money for pensions? If people are using the property market as a means of saving, why not ask retired people to convert their property into annuities? Because they have no intention of doing so. Their middle-aged children expect a windfall and don't want to see their inheritance spent on pensions and nursing care.

If employers can't or won't fund adequate pension schemes, if people won't pay the high taxes necessary to fund state pensions above subsistence level, if people can't or won't save for their old age, if the people who do save find that their savings aren't sufficient to fund an affluent lifestyle, and if people won't sell their houses, then what is the answer?

The alternative that will almost certainly be chosen by default is to raise the statutory retirement age to 70, or perhaps even abolish it altogether. The birth rate throughout the western world is declining so much that we face a serious shortage of skilled labour. There will be an increasing need for people in their fifties and sixties to stay on to provide the necessary knowledge, experience and skills. And anyway, they'll need the money.

The people who were able to take early retirement during the 1990s were a lucky generation. Their successors can expect to work a damn sight longer.



# RADICAL BULLETIN

## **PORN BROKER**

The Lib Dem press office see it as their duty to protect the press from any news about the Lib Dems that might get the party talked about. For this year's conference, the object of their "If we keep quiet, it might just go away" strategy is not drugs or the monarchy, but porn. Mortally embarrassed by the concept of debating pornography, the press team were aghast to find a journalist enquiring of them about the LDYS liberalisation motion. Where could the hack have found such information? "Oh, I was having lunch with Evan Harris and asked him if there was anything interesting on the agenda," they said. It's understood that the party's Shadow Health Secretary has been severely taken to task for answering a journalist's question in a way that might provoke interest in the Party Conference.

## **RADIO HAMS**

Charles Kennedy's former press secretary Daisy Sampson was the Lib Dem on the August 31 edition of Radio 4's Talking Politics, where the subject was the lack of involvement and representation of ethnic minorities in politics. She somehow steered this round to arguing in favour of all-women shortlists, despite this policy having been resoundingly rejected by Lib Dems last year, in part after arguments that these would make it more difficult to get ethnic minority candidates selected. When pressed on the unpopularity of this idea, she admitted that many Liberals feel it goes against what they stand for, but had a splendid wheeze for how to persuade them. "A strong Leader should just put his foot down," she declared, surely not entirely in tune with the party's new policy emphasis on decentralisation and resisting diktat from above.

Meanwhile, Radio 4 featured an entertaining Mark Oaten turn on Any Questions before the summer break. Answering a question on an English Parliament, he declared first that it was Lib Dem policy (it isn't) and then that he was against it, rubbishing his party for a policy that doesn't exist. Nice to see the Party's self-styled 'Chairman' with the facts at his fingertips! It was best summed up by Conservative Oliver Letwin, who declared: "I know why Mark Oaten's got a majority of 21,000 in Winchester - he's a Tory".

## **MAKING DEMOCRACY OUR BUSINESS**

One of the few apparent purposes of the Federal Executive currently seems to be reviewing a series of

outline presentations and drafts of business plans organised by the FFAC. Many of the documents appearing from this esteemed body have been the subject of lengthy and prologed debate. The irony, is that the FE has been presented with David Griffiths to introduce such tomes. Griffiths, however, has not been a voting member of the FFAC, when he finished last in an FE ballot. He was immediately co-opted by the FFAC and has obviously been placed in such a key position for a reason.

## **GENETICALLY MODIFIED POLICIES**

The usual tedium of a Liberal Democrat policy paper on rural issues has been energised by those two countrymen Donnachadh McCarthy (Camberwell and Peckham) and Dr Evan Harris MP (Oxford West and Abingdon). The subject exercising them was policy on genetic modification, mixed into rural policy following a Conference reference back. McCarthy was tasked with writing this section, perhaps surprisingly given his uncompromisingly anti-GM stance; and this was chewed over at an FPC meeting that featured an otherwise intelligent scientist's assertion that "a potato tuber is more dangerous than any possible genetic modification".

Harris - not a member of the working party - promptly turned up at FPC to get the section overturned, and an option was duly inserted. Unsatisfied with his opportunities to amend the paper during the consultation process, the Shadow Cabinet's meeting on the paper, the Parliamentary Party meeting and the FPC (uninvited), Harris followed on with a series of such topical thrills such as attempting to remove the paper's anti-pesticide stance. McCarthy rose to the bait and temperatures continued to rise well after the paper should have gone to the printers. Bombarded by e-mails from both sides, the FPC Vice-Chairs gave further changes short shrift. Members of the Conference Committee who remember lectures from Harris on the subject of endogenous retroviruses look forward to an enlightening series of meetings at Conference.

## **ANIMAL CRACKERS**

As the existing policy was made nearly ten years ago, the Lib Dems have reluctantly set up a new policy working group on animal welfare. As expected, the only applications were from those with fairly entrenched views on one side or the other. Even before the draft membership was presented to the FPC, Animal Welfare Spokesperson Norman Baker (side: Save the Cuddly Animals) had demanded that

Science Spokesperson Evan Harris (side: I Didn't Fight My Way To The Top of The Food Chain To Climb Back Down Again) be removed as a supporter of the evil vivisectors.

FPC had little time for this suggestion, but great merriment ensued at the selection of FPC monitors, or in this case referees. Claiming that the applicants were too heavily in favour of animal welfare, Alan Beith called for more voices on the side of hunting and experimenting to be added, then volunteered himself as one of FPC's 'honest brokers'. Alex Wilcock was then volunteered for experience in policy-making and after making the mistake of professing disinterest in either side.

The first meeting of the working group, usually notable for different sides being nice to each other and professing open minds, was a mass of teeth and claws, and featured animal welfare activist Dr Richard Ryder storming off afterwards to tell Norman Baker and Simon Hughes that the group was unbalanced and he was resigning.

Petitions were then made to the FPC to get more of the pro-animal rights side appointed to replace him. FPC, having already 'rebalanced' the group once, reckoned both sides were now about even and only agreed to replacing Ryder with the RSPCA's Dr Penny Hawkins. Except to zealots on each side, there seems to be an even divide on the group, so why did Ryder explode? Two theories have emerged from within the working group: he didn't get on with the group at its first meeting, apparently being especially dismissive of the young women on his own 'side'; and perhaps looking for an excuse to rubbish the group, after he'd assumed he'd be in line to chair it, but was passed over as too partial.

## FORCED TASKS

Attempts to get the Liberal Democrat roster of target seat candidates to contain more women have been progressing under the Gender Balance Task Force, set up as a result of the defeat of attempts to impose quotas and all-women shortlists. This august body was chaired by Helen Bailey until her appointment as Islington council's chief executive. Recent reports to the Federal Executive have highlighted frustrations due to the shortage of woman candidates applying.

In Bristol West, one such seat, this might partly have been explained by the application pack's demands for a campaign plan to 'improve local representation on Bristol City Council'. Observant applicants might have spotted that, as Bristol West's councillors are all Liberal Democrats, this might prove a bit difficult.

Such frustrations have led some, notably FFAC chair Robin Teverson, to call for the FE to ignore the views of Conference by leading yet another attempt to impose quotas, less than a year after such a move was resoundingly defeated.

## LIBERAL ACTION

Browsers of the Liberal Party's website may be questioning the meaning of 'Service and Action All Year Round'. The website does not seem to have been updated since last winter's 'rationalisation' of their offices, bar a very incomplete list of last May's local election candidates.

## PIG FOR VICTORY

According to Chris Rennard, in a guide set out to Lib Dem activists outlining Conference training, the Lib Dem professionalism 'has led to an explosion of training far beyond anything organised by our political opponents.' Key to this is a Campaigns training slot on the Sunday of Conference which sets out 'how a pig can help you win your seat'. Is there something we should be told?

## DOWN AND OUT DOWN UNDER

The Australian Democrats, the nearest thing in that country to the Liberal Democrats, have managed to lose two leaders. Once might be misfortune, but this looks like carelessness.

Leader Meg Lees was ejected and chose to sit in the senate as an independent. Her successor Natasha Stott Despoja has now been ejected in turn after the senate group split 4-3 against her, with one of the 'four' having taken on the status of a self-proclaimed 'Democrat in exile'.

The party grassroots, who elect the leader, back Stott Despoja, and the party executive therefore installed as acting leader one of her two supporters in the senate group, who thus finds himself opposed by a majority of his colleagues, but backed by a majority of the party. Unsurprisingly, the Democrats' poll ratings have sunk to low single figures.

## IDENTITY CRISIS

The Mitcham and Morden Commemorative Gold Toilet goes on an overseas trip for the first time this year, to Brussels and Luxembourg, to be exact.

The toilet, awarded for the worst motion submitted for each conference, is packing its passport because of a motion from the Liberal Democrats Brussels and Luxembourg branch in favour of identity cards.

The branch notes that the lack of an identity card might 'cause inconvenience', and that credit reference agencies 'are experiencing serious problems in establishing proof of identity'. Diddums.

The motion does at least note that there are civil liberties issues to be addressed. So that's alright then. Quite rightly, conference committee is not soiling the agenda with this ill-written to attempt to put bureaucracy before liberty.



## GROVEL...

When Ian Packer's article on Lloyd George, Liberalism & the Land appeared in Liberator 281, we announced a special offer on the book that we had negotiated with the publishers. Unfortunately we failed to include details in the magazine. The missing flyer is now included in this issue, and the offer still stands until the end of October... **buy that book!**

# RETHINKING THE MESSAGE

Nick Harvey MP argues for the restatement of Liberal principles and that 'decentralisation' and 'book-keeping' are not enough

With the sheen now truly rubbing off "New Labour" and the public far from ready to forgive the Tories, Liberal Democrats approach the conference season and new Parliamentary year in buoyant mood.

We relish the prospect of an election in two and a half years. All bets seem to assume that the election will be fought on public services - a reasonable basis for planning, though a disastrous war in Iraq, or a NO vote in a euro-referendum, could blow that off course.

Events, dear boy, events.

So we've had the Huhne "commission-of-all-sorts" devising for us a new stance on public services. A year ago this was being envisaged as a titanic battle between two wings of the party. The Luddite left would defend producer interests to the last ditch, while the reformist right would argue for handing every last vestige of public service to the private sector.

Let no one accuse the leadership of stifling debate. Refreshingly, Charles Kennedy has privately urged MPs - and publicly urged the party - not to be shy of having a philosophical debate openly.

But now the Commission's report is here, can we expect a battle royal at the conference?

Its "big idea" we are told is decentralisation. Now I defer to no one in my commitment to decentralisation. Local government in Britain works with hands tied behind backs - a shadow of that in the rest of the democratic world.

Councils should be free to raise what taxes they want, borrow what they can persuade anyone to lend, and with a power of general competence do whatever they want. They should answer to their local electorate, not Whitehall. I am also a committed regionalist.

But Liberal Democrats must be realistic about our ability to set the agenda during a general election campaign. We just will not, and cannot hope to, get more than a couple of clear and simple messages through to the country.

Decentralisation plays well against a backdrop of Labour control-freakery and spin. But, with the best will in the world, I just do not see placard-waving people out on the streets protesting: "What do we want? Decentralisation! When do we want it? Now!"

Decentralisation is a good idea, but not a big idea. It's actually rather a medium-sized idea, and certainly not a new idea - it's been in every manifesto we've ever published.

Another idea is for National Income contributions to be turned into a Health Tax to fund the NHS:

conveniently it raises about the right amount. I have no objection to this policy. There are practical problems about revenues during economic downturns. And older people who view NI as their "contract with the state" for their pension may need some anxieties soothing. But these can probably be overcome.

But again, is this idea all that big? Labour already did this with the extra penny NI for health in this year's budget, so any thunder may already be partially stolen. This policy does not commit any extra money to the NHS - it is essentially just a book-keeping exercise.

And NI doesn't raise enough to resolve the big issue: social care, especially for elderly people.

Nor have we resolved the "penny on income tax for education" question - the one clear idea we have successfully communicated in the last three general elections. It worked well, telling people much more about us than just those six words.

So if we abandon it, and I recognise some good arguments to, let us do so reverently - and recognising a challenge to come up with something similarly powerful.

And that essentially is my point. We haven't achieved that yet, though we needn't panic - we're not half-way through the Parliament. But the sooner we finalise our lines and start rehearsing them, the better they will be known and understood come polling day.

So is our task simply to take these "new ideas" and popularise them? Or is there a greater challenge, to look for new ideas on a broader front? Probably both. I'll certainly put my shoulder to the pump to help find a popular vocabulary and human perspective to sell these policies.

But I feel we're now ready for a bold restatement of liberal principles in a 21st century context. Labour attacks on civil liberties provide one opening. The condition of communities - rural and urban - another.

A renaissance of liberal economics is overdue. Empowering individuals should be our firm objective on public services. Our internationalism equips us well in responding to globalisation.

In this game, some trade in high principle, others in low politics.

Let us charge the former with this task of wider rumination. And when great thoughts have been thought, let us discharge them (totally!) and ask the latter to distil some clear messages to sell to disillusioned voters by spring 2005.

# THE TILLEY SEASON

## John Tilley looks back at the summer's news

This message appeared amongst my emails early in July

*Hope you are thriving! I am writing to ask whether you would be willing to write an article for the Conference edition of Liberator, to be published in September.*

*Your article should be no more than 1600 words in length for a two-page article, or no more than 800 words for a one-page article. Please type your copy in Word, WordPerfect or ASCII text format, and email it to <collective@liberator.org.uk>, to arrive no later than Wednesday 4th September.*

Like a fool I agreed to write something. But I did so on the condition that what I wrote would be a series of "snippets" rather than one essay. Two reasons for this: I often get bored with the one or two pages of A4 style of writing which has become traditional in Liberator, New Statesman etc; and secondly my attention span is shortening by the day.

Those terribly nice people at Liberator came back and said - "No problem with a 'snippets' style - but would there be any unifying theme?"

I'm not sure about the answer to this question. If they do publish this in Liberator you could let them know if you think there was a 'unifying theme'. To do so, just e-mail them at the above address.

First snippet is to say how delighted I was to hear on the radio that Charles Kennedy had called on Blair to say that UK troops would not be sent to Iraq. Charles Kennedy is not Paddy Ashdown.

It is now 5 years since Lord Ashdown when he was still Mr Ashdown was plotting with the then leader of the opposition Labour Party Tony Blair to merge their parties in one government coalition. How things have changed.

It is also five years since the death of a member of the Royal Family in a car accident in Paris. This caused much media fuss at the time. People die in car accidents all the time. And your children are much more likely to be killed by a car driver than by a random abduction by some pervert. Interestingly the media love to work themselves up into a lather not about road accidents but about sex, crime and children. They seldom even bother to report road deaths any more. Train deaths are different because they offer much greater opportunities for dramatic pictures and hours of free footage of twisted metal and burning carriages followed by months of enquiries and all sorts of impenetrable technical engineering jargon about which 'experts' can be grilled. Cheap TV which fills lots of hours for a minimum of outlay. So although train deaths are much more rare they make better television than road deaths.

At the time of writing (August) the latest media lather over children being abducted and killed centres on Soham in Cambridgeshire. If I had been writing in March the centre of media attention was Walton on Thames where a teenage girl had disappeared. How

many children died on the roads between March and August - who cares ?

Perhaps the most cynical element of all the fuss in Cambridgeshire was the media production of a 'service' at Ely Cathedral. One has to ask the question - if the BBC did not exist would this service ever have taken place? If it were not for the lowest common denominator, gutter press approach of BBC info-tainment would Ely Cathedral really have hosted such an event ?

The echoes of what had been done after the road death of Prince Charles' estranged wife five years earlier were there for all to see. The media (and in particular the BBC) went into an ecstasy of public 'grieving' and in doing so was able to take many ordinary people with it.

This has been a 'good year' for the BBC and its obsession with public funerals and hysteria. First the Queen's sister, then the Queen's mother and then having run out of likely royal funerals it moved its circus into Cambridgeshire like vultures.

Is it not an extraordinary feature of modern life that people from all over the UK and beyond should bury a churchyard in flowers in a place that they have never visited to 'commemorate' two dead children that they never met? What this does and will continue to do to the parents and families of these children one can only guess. I cannot believe it will do anything but harm to them.

I can think of nothing worse than to have your child disappear and then to know that they were killed. How staggeringly appalling that this has now become part of the BBC 'library footage' and that those parents will never be able to switch on a radio or TV without the possibility of some low level 'news' programme or phone-in raking over the most appalling aspects of what might have happened to their child. How staggeringly appalling that they will have to put up with this BBC intrusion for the rest of their own lives.

It is said that it is such media intrusion that killed the wife of Prince Charles by producing the events that resulted in the car crash and her death. Her two children have to live with the BBC and other media constantly raking over the minutest details of her life. What does it do to them to repeatedly see reports of their mother revealing in a TV interview how their father and his mistress constantly connived and made a fool of her even during the much publicised 'Fairy Tale Wedding' and the birth of her children. What does it do to Prince Harry to have worldwide speculation about who his father really is ? Is he the son of James Hewitt rather than Charles Windsor ? The book 'God save the Queen?' by Johann Hari touches on this. It is an excellent book, highly readable and thought provoking. It is certainly not a predictable book about royals nor is it a predictable republican tract. I recommend it. If you read no other book in the next 12 months read this one.

# WHAT KIND OF EUROPE DO WE REALLY WANT?

We need a more sophisticated debate about Europe instead of characterising everyone as 'pro' or 'anti', argues Nick Clegg MEP

Eurosceptic. Europhile. Anti European. Pro European. Europhobe. Eurofanatic. EUenemy. EUfriend. Eurohater. Eurolover.

I can't stand it any longer. The polarization of the debate in the UK about the European Union has now drained the debate of any useful meaning.

"Anti European" has come to describe a swivel-eyed hostility to any pooling of decision-making authority at European level. Yet, the vast bulk of Eurosceptics I meet cheerfully subscribe to a huge swathe of EU, federal decision making in the implementation of the EU's Single Market. To call them "anti European", when they happily agree to EU decision making on everything from consumer rights to product specific norms and standards, is clearly inaccurate.

"Pro European" has come to describe a hopelessly uncritical, passive belief in the righteousness of everything that is decided by the EU institutions. Yet, the vast bulk of Europhiles I meet rant and rail against the inefficiency of Brussels decision making and the excessive technicality of much EU legislation. To call them "pro European" when they would dearly like to strip the EU of much of its technocracy, and subject EU institutions to greater scrutiny, is equally misleading.

Yet, the debate allows for no alternative. You are either for, or you are against. Pity anyone who should attempt to introduce even the slightest nuance into the argument. This is not a debate for the subtle and the sophisticated amongst us. This is an argument for zealots, ideologues and fundamentalists. This is the territory of black and white, of sharp differences and great divisions that rip through the body politic. Such arguments do not tolerate the "either or", the "yes but", the "on the one hand and on the other" which infuse all other objective discourse. Make up your mind; you must jump one way or the other. There is no other choice.

Well, enough is enough. Liberals, especially, have suffered from being type cast as feeble, limp minded Eurozealots who have translated their political failure to secure power in the UK into a miserable belief that the EU should run everything. We are, or so the stereotype dictates, a curious clique of federalists who would happily dismantle the British nation state in favour of rule by an unaccountable, arrogant cabal of technocrats

in Brussels. We have no critical faculties. We are blind to all flaws or failings in the EU. We bow to all that is supranational and despise all that is national.

This is absurd, and politically damaging. We must insist on creating the space in British politics to reposition ourselves as creative, hardheaded Europeans determined to shape the EU in the image of our Liberal principles. And those principles oblige us to confront and solve the deep-seated failings in EU governance.

First, Liberals must lead the attack on EU centralism, on the occasional tendency for EU institutions towards unnecessarily interventionist policy making. In some areas, for instance in EU social policy, there has been an inclination for EU institutions to usurp national choice and diversity in favour of a uniform application of a particular vision of social and economic organisation.

In those areas where uniformity is indispensable to the economic freedom and dynamism of the EU Single Market, this is understandable. In those areas where uniformity is the result of an excessively rigid, condescending attitude by EU decision makers to the vagaries and failings of national traditions, it is politically unacceptable.

Liberals must not overlook that all political institutions are inclined to arrogate as much authority to themselves as possible. Voluntary self-restraint is not in the genetic blueprint of political organisations, especially not in bodies such as the European Commission, which consider themselves to have a mission to construct a new economic and political union. It is, surely, a fundamentally Liberal task to ensure that authority within the EU should be restrained and as widely dispersed as possible.

Second, Liberals must aggressively champion accountability. Much has been said and written about the need to strengthen the role and prerogatives of the European Parliament. But it is fanciful to suggest that MEPs on their own can render the EU accountable and legitimate.

The European Commission should be unsettling to Liberals. It is a body that was deliberately exempt from normal constraints of democratic accountability to allow it the freedom of manoeuvre to force through the changes necessary to "construct" a European community from the 1950s onwards. (Contd..p17)



# SHOUT OUT FOR PEACE

## Jonathan Fryer argues that Britain must not be America's poodle

The end of the Cold War was meant to usher in a new era of peace and light, in which conflicts would be defused by the United Nations, before things turned nasty. You don't need me to tell you that, unfortunately, that hasn't happened. Instead, we have what has been described euphemistically as a Pax Americana, in which the United States is the only big kid on the block - and far from bringing peace, Washington seems hell-bent on waging war. Iraq's Saddam Hussein is in the gun-sights at present. God knows who might be next.

Given the experience of the Empire, one would think Britain would know better than any other country that gunboat diplomacy by one country isn't a legitimate option in the modern world, quite apart from being inconsistent with the principles of liberal democracy. Moreover, the attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon a year ago ought to have been a warning signal to the Bush administration that it cannot behave exactly as it likes around the world, just because it believes its values and priorities are correct. It might have the military might to pummel any country it likes into the ground. But that is guaranteed to win it not new friends, but millions of new enemies.

Which brings me to the 'Special Relationship'. Like many Liberal-minded people, I could come to terms relatively easily with the Blair-Clinton partnership, but seeing the British Prime Minister cuddling up to Bush makes me want to puke. Foreign Office mandarins may tell us that through Tony Blair, Britain can exert a restraining influence on Bush. Balls. The message coming across loud and clear is that the Prime Minister is prepared to give a US operation against Iraq the cloak of respectability of 'international support', with very few concessions on Washington's part. I used to think that the Steve Bell cartoons in the Guardian, depicting TB as Bush's poodle, were unfair. Now, I know they are unfair. To poodles.

The Americans have made it perfectly clear that they will do whatever they feel is right, no matter what the rest of the world thinks. Of course, Bush would prefer acquiescence, or at least silence, from other major countries, which is why he has been sounding out London, Paris, Moscow and Beijing. But don't be fooled into believing that the administration in Washington - with noble exceptions such as Colin Powell - cares a fig about opinion overseas.

We see the contempt in which Mr Bush holds the international community - including the United Nations - by the way the US has shown two fingers to the putative International Criminal Court, as well as opting out of the Kyoto deal on climate change and other

crucial building blocks for a peaceful world. If things come up at the UN that it doesn't like, then Washington vetoes them. Its hypocrisy is moreover breath-taking. One only has to see the line that the US government has taken over Israel/Palestine. Saddam Hussein is berated for ignoring UN resolutions, but what about Ariel Sharon?

There are always howls of protest from some quarters when one mentions the Israel/Palestine question in the same breath as Iraq or indeed as terrorism. But as anyone who travels widely throughout the Muslim world, as I do, knows, for a significant proportion of the world's population, these issues cannot be de-linked. The fact that Washington likes to ignore that reality is yet further evidence of an unwillingness to listen to other people's point of view.

So where does this leave Liberal Democrats, given Tony Blair's abject failure (publicly, at least) to point out to our cousins across the Atlantic the dangers of their foreign policy? To his credit, Ming Campbell has consistently sounded the bell of caution, with regard to a possible war against Iraq. He has done this in his customary statesmanlike manner. Moreover, Charles Kennedy at the beginning of September pressed for a recall of Parliament. This was not a call Tony Blair was prepared to heed, despite the gravity of the situation, and the fact that we are meant to live in a democracy. He obviously didn't relish having confirmed what we already know, that he doesn't even have the support of many of his own MPs.

But where is the clear voice of principle in all this, from the LibDems? Why has no-one of substance stood up and said, categorically, that subjecting the people of Iraq to a US-led invasion would be morally wrong, as well as potentially counter-productive? Why has the party not come out clearly in condemnation of aspects of American foreign policy that reflect not only the attitudes of a bully, but also jeopardise world peace? Maybe the Brighton Conference will be an opportunity for that - or at least, for airing criticisms. I certainly hope so.

I know I will be accused of anti-Americanism, but I am used to that. I cut my journalistic teeth during the Vietnam War, seeing at first hand the horrors that were perpetrated there in the name of freedom and democracy. Britain - then as now under a Labour government - supported the US war in Vietnam, until it became unsustainable, and the American people - God bless them - made it obvious that they were no longer prepared to endorse what was being done in their name. (Continued on Page 21)

# CITY SLICK

## The City of London is a parasite which adds no real value to the economy argues Colin Darracott

If a company buys back its own shares, who would own it if all the shares were bought back? When hundreds of billions of pounds are wiped off the value of stocks and shares in a single day, where does all the money go? Is hedging a zero-sum game, and if so, who pays for the dealing costs and commissions?

There are things that go on in the world of capitalism and markets that seem as counter-intuitive as quantum mechanics.

Within the retail complex built over Victoria Station in London, there is a room the size of a football pitch, crammed with desks and VDU screens, with hundreds of dealers pecking away at these like so many battery hens. There are scores of such places in the City of London. Why? How do they contribute to mankind's well-being? Should we care?

The hundred years war between the two monolithic "-isms" is a simplistic concept, but Capitalism has clearly beaten Socialism, and thus good has prevailed over evil. As with quantum mechanics, we can trust market forces and the predictive precision of economics, and lie back and enjoy our wealth, just as we enjoy our electronic luxuries that depend on that other strange science. We've won.

Or have we?

Have some of us felt a pleasant shiver of *schadenfreude* over the tribulations of Enron, WorldCom and Vivendi? Do you have a with-profits endowment policy you wish you didn't have? How's your money-purchase pension likely to do at today's annuity rates? Are we angry about fat cat salaries? Ever tried to claim more than a token amount from an insurance company?

The City of London portrays itself as a noble institution upon which the super-structures of our society can now faithfully depend. The Square Mile is a totemic shrine to the religion that worships Mammon, who in return for our faith rewards us with liquidity. The Corporation of London is the High Priesthood dedicated to the protection of this Holy Site against such heathen concerns as the poor, politicians or the health of the planet.

What is so alarming about the system which the City represents is the amount of faith we have in it and the power this gives it. It is, after all, a rather strange and nasty place.

Years ago, when I had daily dealings with City people, there were several features which I found

alarming. Of the people I worked with, very few seemed to have social consciences, or any interest outside their arcane, and frequently narrow, remits. If they thought about politics at all they were right-wing, selfish and ill-informed. There was also a worrying level of ignorance about world affairs. There was something disturbing about all these ghastly people being so well-paid for their own conscience-less benefits. This was not true of everyone, but the exceptions were rare. I did not find this to be the case within some of the companies outside the City, where one frequently came across moderate lefties, and charitable and fairly decent people.

Another aspect of life in the City I found dismaying was the almost mystic respect given to spurious information. For example, traders and brokers trying to

fix deals depended on charts tracking prices over time for evidence to back a proposal. These charts were not used to explain price trends based on "fundamentals" such as clues to the likely balance between the supply and demand of a commodity. What was important was their shape. You had lines described like "Cat's Shoulder" or "Double Dips", which were meant to indicate the direction in which a price must now move. Astrology would have been as useful.

Although I was interested in trading, and therefore pricing oil, I was bombarded, all day,

with City traders telling me the price of gold, sugar futures or currency put options. For years these numerous, highly paid people could not understand why I wasn't particularly interested. To them it was a market and I should be shopping around for anything in it, and the sugar prices should help me decide what to pay for oil.

Then there is the all-pervasive propensity to encourage hedging. The theory is that if you have a commodity priced in the future and you want to protect yourself against changes in prices then you can hedge by doing an opposite transaction and closing each out at the time of delivery, (or better still buying options to do these and exercising them or not). Frequently you are encouraged to hedge in something slightly different, and the trading of options, arbitrages and "swaps", eventually linking a oil purchase in Norway through a huge chain of transactions ending in an interest rate put-option in Singapore.



Each stage requires margin financing, transaction and commissions costs. Each is still risky and the volumes of deals, all nothing to do with the original commodity, is vast. Trillions and trillions of dollars of derivative transactions take place daily, with no obvious connection to anything real. And these deals drive all markets.

Such anecdotes (and there are thousands more) illustrate for me some unwholesome aspects of capitalism. Recent stock market woes have received a huge press compared to the vast area of other dealing that goes on. We can read how hedging is facilitated by insurance companies lending shares for dealers to sell short in falling markets, thereby artificially deflating share prices. Another alarming factor about the stock markets is the herd nature of them.

One piece of (irrelevant) news in the USA can cause Wall Street to tumble, which the City dealers inevitably track. Despite having thousands of highly rewarded analysts of its own, the City nearly always takes its lead from Wall Street. The value of shares no longer depends on the performance of a company or even an economy. We put our life savings at the mercy of these things.

The City is also partly responsible for nasty trends such as Private Finance Initiatives. Tax-payers are doomed for years to pay huge sums of money back to City-based institutions simply because the City people don't like the public sector. How come? Because those ignorant, overpaid money dealers sell foreign currency with a vengeance if the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement is thought, by them, to be too large. Governments are seduced by City slickers into financing public works with expensive private money, and into the bargain they can also ask the tax-payers to fund vast audit fees to the big accountancy firms and the consultants to set up these deals that in reality transfer not one jot of real risk. It is licensed fraud on a large scale.

The looming pensions scandal is also a direct consequence of City greed and attitudes. Vast companies pay huge fees for acquisitions and mergers (few of which enhance shareholder value), and play in highly complex derivatives markets, all requiring expensive, (and arguably, in my experience) unskilled intermediaries. Huge slices come off your contributions to fund completely unnecessary activities and to feather nests of millions of unproductive parasites.



In fact, the City is a putrid place emanating a foetid miasma typically given off during the advanced stages of corruption. But rather than being an isolated swamp, it pollutes everything. How many times do we see City dealers called upon to comment on news programmes. Listen to them. I shall never forget the authoritative way a City dealer confidently told the nation, on BBC news, that Saddam Hussein would not invade Kuwait, the day before he did. Why was the idiot asked? How much was he paid? It is also the obscene salaries paid to all these leeches that drive up housing prices, with horrible effects on the rest of the economy and public services.

Finally, if a government suggests the mildest of regulation of all this nonsense, the City mobilises its mystical powers with dire warnings of selling everything (you have given it) and decamping, just as it dictates to governments what it will and will not accept in the Queen's Speech or European negotiations.

If you agree with any of the sentiment herein expressed, is there anything that can be done to clean out the stables? Arguably there is a quite a long list: a Financial Services Agency with some real teeth and staff who are not of the City; new, legal forms of company that are neither private, charity trust or public corporation; alternative ways of creating nest-eggs; reforming of government accounting procedures and devolution of public risk and money markets; a fair trading regime for accountancy and legal services... There are heaps of things.

If the City runs screaming for cover elsewhere, good riddance, so long as we first secure all the money we have given it so far.

# SECRET SERVICE

## John Hemming explains why he has launched a legal battle to stop all-postal voting and keep ballots secret

Politicians in this country are very much focussed on elections. The media similarly view things from that perspective. That is because whoever “wins” the elections ends up in a position where they are in control of something. Perhaps one of the reasons why many people are turned off politics is the focus on elections rather than policy. The general public are very interested in policy issues - at least as they are affected by them.

We have opinion poll after opinion poll which get massive coverage in the media. The polls at best are only a guide to how people actually vote. What has been ignored for many years is electoral abuse. Politicians, however, are very interested in electoral abuse. That is because they can see what impact it has. Varying electoral tactics for “getting our vote out” are used. These range from the legitimate to real gangster tactics.

In the days of machine politics in Chicago one of the tactics used was for someone to be sent into a polling station to bring out a blank ballot paper. People then during the day had to go in and collect another blank paper and vote with the one which was filled in by the gangsters.

In Northern Ireland historically the approach of voting early and voting often (normally with a change of clothes to pretend to be someone else) has resulted in a tightening up of the electoral procedures to the extent that now a photographic ID will be required for people to vote.

The closeness of the American presidential election turned the US media’s attention onto the electoral process. The presence of “vote whores” who obtained absentee ballots (postal votes) for \$20 each was reported. No wonder candidates need to raise substantial sums if they are going to have to buy a certain number of votes directly.

There has, however, been an assumption that in the mainland UK the electoral process is basically honest. Yes, there is a considerable element of overspending, but the people voting are actually those people who are supposed to vote (apart from in nursing homes where it is generally known that the owner fills in the vote).

The Government (probably egged on by Millbank) have set as an objective increasing the number of votes cast. Sounds quite fair until you ask the question as to who is casting the votes. Imagine an all-postal ballot where a pile of ballot papers is sent to a student’s residence during the holidays. If they run it the same way as Chorley, where there are no statements of identity, then it is straightforward for someone to go in, fill in the lot for one candidate and send them off.

There are two main problems with the current system:

Firstly, it is too easy to pretend to vote in person as someone else. This means that substantial numbers of

votes are cast by people other than the voter. This problem has been recognised in Northern Ireland. In NI identification is needed for someone to cast a vote. They are gradually tightening up on the system.

We have witnesses in Birmingham to groups of people hurtling around different polling stations between 8pm and 9pm voting in each. We even have a witness to someone who is now a Labour MP voting in a polling station in which he was not registered.

Personation is actually easier to organise and more reliable than fiddling postal votes (unless you use the Pendle system of having them sent to a central address). Working out how much personation goes on is difficult, but if you look at the results in Hackney in 1998 compared to 2002 you find that turnout went down by about 10%. The 2002 result was an all-postal result so it could be said that Hackney may have had about 10% personation in 1998. We know Hackney had quite a bit of electoral fraud as both a Tory and a Lib Dem in Hackney were found guilty of some abuses.

Not only that but it is quite easy for someone to end up on the electoral roll on a number of occasions and also for a vote to be cast for each one of these.

Secondly, the postal vote system has two flaws.

One flaw is that it is possible for someone to request postal votes fraudulently. The second flaw is that the vote when cast is not a secret ballot. That means a supporter of one of the candidates can be standing over the voter making sure that they vote.

What happens with postal votes is a combination of the following:

Political activists encourage people to fill in postal vote forms - not in itself a problem. Sometimes (eg Pendle) they are sent to addresses other than those of the voters. Then the vote is either filled in for the voter without the voter seeing it. Alternatively it is taken to the voter and they fill it in in front of the political activist. Sometimes political activists follow the postman as he/she delivers the postal votes. Then they either take the postal vote off that person (eg Sandwell), or stand there whilst the voter completes the vote and take it away from them.

All in all this replaces the concept of a secret ballot with intimidation and vote theft. In areas of the country where politics involves gangsters and terrorist sympathisers the results of elections are skewed by how much a group of activists is willing to abuse the law.

The abandonment of the secret ballot and prevalence of other electoral frauds are a clear contravention of the third article of the first protocol of the Convention for Human Rights. Britain no longer has free and fair elections with a secret ballot across the country.

The Human Rights Act 1998 requires that UK legislation be in line with the Convention of Human Rights.

Article 3 of Protocol I of the European Convention of Human Rights says: RIGHT TO FREE ELECTIONS The High Contracting Parties undertake to hold free elections at reasonable intervals by secret ballot, under conditions which will ensure the free expression of the opinion of the people in the choice of the legislature.

My plan is to ensure that UK Law falls into line with the ECHR by taking action under the 1998 act to have UK Elections Legislation declared incompatible with the ECHR.

The point about our electoral system is that individual elections are often determined by very few votes. One ward in Birmingham with about 18,000 electors was won Labour by a majority of 3. I looked at the postal votes and found four that had been counted that should not have been counted and at least four that looked questionable.

It takes very little effort to fiddle a sufficient number of votes to affect the outcome of an election. That applies both in terms of the number of seats won, but also in terms of who controls the council.

Furthermore having a system that rewards the most dishonest and unprincipled politicians (normally the Labour Party, but not always) is dangerous.

Clearly the system needs to be changed. The question is how. There are two key principles:

There must be a secret ballot.

We are not worried about the fact that the high court can search back and identify the way in which someone

has voted. That is a good mechanism for finding out what has really happened in some circumstances.

This means that postal votes need to be stopped. Even the old system had some fraud, as frequently the postal votes for a nursing home were completed by the people running the home. The system in the Republic of Ireland where a ballot box is taken to the housebound handles this quite well for those people who cannot get to a ballot box. For those people who have difficulty voting on the day a central ballot box covering a number of wards is a good scheme. This could be open for two weeks before the election day. I am aware that this is not "convenient". However, the easy convenient systems are those which end up with corrupted results.

Secondly, we need some ID for when people vote. Frankly the lessons learnt in Northern Ireland are good. We need to introduce the same approach in the mainland UK.

Tony Greaves, various people from other parties and I are working together to raise this issue in the public domain. A key part of this campaign will be a legal case under the 1998 Human Rights Act. There will be pressure from Millbank to keep the current system as it helps Labour. It needs to be recognised publicly, however, that the current system is dishonest and undemocratic.

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# A THOUGHT FOR YOUR PENNIES

Chris Huhne MEP looks at the options for public services

The Liberal Democrats have been linked, over the last three general elections of the 'penny on income tax', with the case for more spending on public services. That was right at the time, and is still right now. But it is so right that even the Government has finally been persuaded. If Gordon Brown delivers the belated rises in public spending announced in the budget - and we must hold him to that - the case for a general rise in spending on education and health will be much less convincing at the general election of 2005. We are likely to pass the European average health spending in 2003-4; we will catch up even with France in 2007-8. And overall public spending will have caught up with Italian levels, nestling squarely in the middle of the EU crop.

Will more spending work on its own? I don't think so. More spending was always a necessary but not a sufficient condition of genuine improvement, as will sadly become clear. In addition to more money, we need a radical reshaping of political control to decentralise - localise - public services. There is simply far too much undemocratic, meddling and counter-productive Whitehall control. Indeed, the very proliferation of ridiculous targets - there is even a target for local authorities to reduce the conception rate of teenagers - tells us that the system is out of control. Failure breeds more targets, less responsibility for those who deliver and less trust in those who work for the services. The spiral will continue until even the Treasury recognises the need for change. We are living with a system that was not only set up centrally in the 1940s, but has had layer on layer of central control added to it ever since.

The ever more rigid set of objectives set by the centre cannot deliver in a system which is simply far too big and complex to respond. The levers are no longer connected. The NHS, for example, employs nearly a million people. This is as many as the top seven private companies in the United Kingdom put together. The only parallel is with the old Gosplan in the Soviet Union, whose planners were famously responsible for the failure to match the number of left and right shoes. At the centre of this centralised system sits Gordon Brown, seeking to control every penny of public money, ever more clearly the heir of the Webbs' pernicious belief in the beneficence of a centralising state.

No other country in Europe delivers public services in such a top down way, not even the French. Denmark is a particularly interesting case because it has the most popular health service in Europe, and also a system like ours: it is both tax-funded and free at the point of need. True, it currently spends about a percentage point of GDP more than ours, but on Mr Brown's plans we will

spend about 1.5 per cent of GDP more than Denmark by 2007-8. Then the real difference will become apparent. The NHS in England serves 49 million people with no level of political accountability between the old lady left to fester on the trolley in casualty and the Secretary of State. In Denmark, the NHS caters to just 5.3 million people and even then is broken down into 14 counties and two cities. What are the economies of scale in health? Once research, procurement and unusual specialisms are allowed for - easily done cooperatively - there are precious few. There is every economic reason - as well as the democratic one - for decentralisation.

The plan which the public services commission is putting to conference is, as the Guardian editorial on 31st July put it, 'the most radical, detailed and imaginative programme of localism offered by a major party in modern British politics ... The LibDem position is an intelligent one.' There are three main themes to the proposals.

Let me start with the least radical. We need to provide stable funding so that the bust and boom of public spending never occurs again. Health spending rises more rapidly than other types of spending in every developed country: that is as much a part of our preferences as foreign holidays or luxury goods. But the disadvantage of a tax-funded system is that health tends to be squeezed along with the rest. Our solution is to convert National Insurance contributions into an NHS contribution. Everybody will know that every penny of the NHS contribution will go on health care, and that earmarking will help to generate a consensus behind a high level of provision. As the most progressive tax at low income levels, NICs is a good candidate.

Our most radical proposals, though, concern the application of old-fashioned liberal values to modern problems. The public services paper argues that there should be much greater diversity of provision, and offers mutuals and cooperatives as the way forward. The debate between whether the public or the private sector should provide public services has become a stagnant and dispiriting one: we make no proposals for change in the party's existing concerns about Public Finance Initiative/Public Private Partnership schemes. There will always be traditional public and private procurement by the public sector. We have rightly pointed out the problems with PFI schemes that freeze options for thirty years, and that exclude competitive bidders - the key advantage of the private sector - because of their complexity. But anybody saying 'never private' or 'never public' is allowing prejudice to triumph over practicality.

However, the real option that is far too often ignored is mutuals and cooperatives. Providing that the initiative comes from users and employees - a key difference with Alan Milburn's proposed Foundation Hospitals - services run by what we call a public benefit organisation (PBO) can combine the best of both worlds. They are non-profit distributing, so they can harness the public service ethos that is an important feature of many who work in the public sector. Services depend so crucially on the motivation and commitment of those who provide them - whether private restaurants or public health - PBOs could be the key to a dramatic improvement. They are also smaller and more responsive than the giantist units of the traditional public sector. Like regions and local authorities, they should be able to run their own finances, including their own borrowing. We set out a PBO status that will offer a new gateway out of the traditional public sector, while avoiding carpet-bagging demutualisation.

Our third liberal theme is choice. There must be far more individual choice exercised by users: why not, for example, travel a hundred miles to have an operation more quickly than at your local general hospital if that is what you want (and you can know it by checking the waiting times website)? There must be far more democratic choice for users in different areas to vary provision to fit what they want: we need to push the funding decisions and the power to set the NHS contribution down to regional government and ensure that education authorities have a local income tax to replace the grants that are the outward sign of their dependence on Whitehall.

At the same time, there needs to be a ruthless pruning of Westminster functions and spending. The proper role of central government is as analyst and reporter about best practice in a decentralised world that is more innovative and entrepreneurial.

On public services, the Tories cannot be trusted. Look at their refusal after the budget to accept the planned spending increases or their eighteen year record of centralisation every bit as corrosive as Mr Brown's. But Labour is so obsessed with its big state traditions that it will prove incapable of giving local people and professionals the freedom they need. When Labour talks about decentralisation, it simply means decentralising management but keeping the target-setting and political control in Whitehall. It is therefore up to the Liberal Democrats to champion the reform of public services. With luck, our proposals will also help to resolve one of the most curious paradoxes in British politics. Nearly a third of the electorate vote Liberal Democrat for council elections, because they trust us to deliver services well. But fewer than a fifth of the electorate voted for us in the general election even though the same voters said that they rated public services delivery as their top issue. Our job now is to show the electorate that radical decentralisation is both a democratic imperative and a necessary step towards better public services.

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Chris Huhne MEP is chair of the policy commission on public services that reports to the Brighton conference

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# THE TRUTH ABOUT HAROLD SHIPMAN?

Power corrupts, writes David Boyle, and professionals are as vulnerable as any

“The King’s life is drawing peacefully to its close,” said a bulletin put out by King George V’s doctor, in a different and possibly more brutal age. That was what Lord Dawson, the royal physician believed, and people accepted his word. Those were the days before Dr Harold Shipman, after all.

But in the hours that followed, a series of events took place - revealed only in the past few years - which ought perhaps to shed some light on the mysterious motivations of Shipman, who is now officially Britain’s most prolific serial killer.

Lord Dawson was concerned that the King should die in time to meet the morning editions of *The Times*, rather than hanging on long enough for the afternoon papers, those undignified tabloids in the days before tabloids. Like, heaven forbid, the *Evening News*.

He therefore ordered the nurse at the King’s bedside to administer a lethal injection of cocaine and morphine. She refused so Dawson did it himself, and George V dutifully died at 2355 on Monday, 20 January 1936 - just in time for propriety.

“The King, who had renamed the royal family, now lost his life to meet a newspaper deadline,” wrote Kitty Kelley, the notorious American biographer six decades later. “Such was the legacy of the House of Windsor, which would eventually rise and fall as a puppet show for the media.”

I make the connection now between Dawson and Shipman, not because I believe that Shipman was somehow acting as any doctor should - he clearly wasn’t. But because he clearly isn’t mad. And for any Liberal who is suspicious of the legal system, Shipman’s continued protestations of innocence are disturbing.

So is his complete lack of motive. What possessed him to hasten the deaths, Dawson-fashion - and far worse than that - of 215 patients? We haven’t really got a clue.

The first thing to say is that our whole view of the Shipman case has been coloured by our double standards about doctoring. On the one hand, we as a society these days seem to believe they should be omniscient and all-powerful. Their failures require legal inquiries.

On the other hand, we trust them less, complain about them more, try to break down their jobs into easily measurable components and measure them - as if we could somehow all be doctors ourselves.

Neither of these stand up to examination. But you can’t help wondering, if Dame Janet Smith was set lose on the unexplained deaths in most doctor’s practices, chosen at random, whether society might suddenly

discover that Shipman killed them too. He’s a convenient explanation for the unexplained, the random and the senseless, just as we try to rid ourselves of all three.

But don’t let’s pretend that Shipman is just the victim of a statistical blip. The unexpected visits, the syringe, the injections and the faked medical certificates were all too real. You can’t explain them away.

What Lord Dawson’s behaviour with the Queen’s grandfather does tell us, though, is not so much the way that courtiers can compromise their principles, but that professionals - when they are given unquestioned power - will abuse it.

That’s the lesson for Liberals in the whole affair. It’s the reason it might be of interest to policy makers, because there are all too many instances of the same thing. When one class, one professional, one sex or one race is given a privileged and unquestioned position - then history shows that it will be abused. And the abuse will be carried out by ordinary people.

The lynchings, Jim Crow separate railway carriages, separate drinking fountains for blacks in the American South until the 1960s, are proof enough of this. The whites were given a privileged position - that was all. Yet, it was enough in 1918 to lynch black American officers off the street, just for wearing a uniform.

When the Children of God cult - at its height in the 1970s - gave men the privilege of being allowed to ask for sex from any female cult-member any time, they tended to become tyrants.

When scientists were given the privilege to experiment sometimes painfully on animals at the laboratories of Huntingdon Life Science more recently, hidden Channel 4 cameras were able to catch lab assistants actually torturing them too.

In the same way, reports from the Netherlands suggest that doctors given new privileges of death under the euthanasia laws, sometimes have a new arrogance about them that wasn’t there before.

It’s a peculiar phenomenon, and should warn any society against giving unquestioned privileges to any group. And the past two decades has been a continual story where every profession has been forced to accept that ordinary people have a right to involvement in what they do.

That’s true of doctors, social workers, planners, psychiatrists and many others - all professions that believed they had special knowledge that gave the special privileges and unquestioned power. Architects alone still seem to believe themselves beyond question,



but who knows - maybe the controversy about Mayor Livingstone's skyscrapers will change that too.

Let's be honest about this. Some of that questioning has been disastrous. Sometimes we have tried to audit the work of professionals by reproducing what they do, as if they were some kind of expert system that could be broken down and analysed like software. We should never forget that doctors, for example, actually have an intuition born of experience that can never be reproduced by technology - and we should respect it.

We also have to defend that professionalism against the bureaucracies that try to reduce it, the giant hospitals that believe any doctor is inter-changeable with any other - and let the poor patients see a different one every morning.

But we also have to be vigilant against the old professional arrogance, that always knew best, that could humiliate patients behind a professional smile, and that could hasten death just because they felt it was proper or more 'dignified' than later.

Or the new professional arrogance which society seems intent on vesting on a new generation of bureaucrats. Like those we have tasked with checking the backgrounds of every teacher in the country - even school bus drivers, for goodness sake - and who will make mistakes because people dare not challenge them, and will ruin lives because we let them.

It's still there, if you look. In the notices at the end of the hospital bed saying 'do not resuscitate' of anyone over 70 - regardless of faculties. Or in the sedatives doled out to old people because it's more convenient.

And maybe - in a perverted and exaggerated way - it was there in the practice of Harold Shipman. He was a sole practitioner, after all. He was trained at a time when doctors were unquestioned. He had the 'right' - maybe it seemed - to know when it was 'best' to hasten a death he 'knew' was coming.

These are awkward areas. They can be tragic, but - as anyone who has sat through the old English comedy *Arsenic and Old Lace* will know - they are also sometimes comic.

The lesson for Liberals is in our attitude to professionals. The answer isn't so much in control which undermines professional knowledge. It is in a rigorous insistence on partnership. Because, we know now that doctors who are not equal partners with patients will be less effective making people well.

The same is true of the police, teachers, social workers and all the rest. It's a key Liberal insight: the vital importance of equal partnership, and pushing forward the boundaries of what those partnerships can achieve.

One thing we know of Dr Shipman: he wasn't exactly a partner of his patients.

## **(WHAT KIND OF EUROPE DO WE REALLY WANT? Continued from - Page 8)**

This elicits ambivalence in Liberals: positive about the innovative efficiency of such a supranational body, uneasy about its uncertain legitimacy. But for Liberals the need for legitimacy must always prevail over an admiration for efficiency.

The real challenge to instil accountability in the EU does not depend on endless finessing of the inter-institutional deck chairs in Brussels between the Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers, but a complete reinvention of the role that our national and local political institutions play in the EU.

National Parliaments, fashioned by 19th century nationalism, must be reorganised to act effectively on a supranational footing. MPs and MEPs should work interchangeably. The introverted British media must begin to cover the EU as if it was a domestic concern. Parliaments must reinvent the way in which they hold the executive to account in its dealings in the Council of Ministers.

Third, and finally, Liberals must press aggressively for the definition of a political vocation for the EU. The working assumption amongst EU elites in the past that the EU was like a bicycle - it must keep moving, regardless of destination, in order to remain upright - was a recipe for unjustified policy activism and confusion amongst Europe's electorate.

The present debate about a possible "constitution" for the EU is encouraging. Whilst some see the constitution as a harbinger for EU policy expansion, and others as a boundary fence against EU ambitions, the emerging consensus that the purpose and objectives of the EU must become clearer is to be welcomed. In truth, a profound reflection on the legitimate purpose of the EU might lead to a bit of both. Radical expansion, say, in the defence and foreign policy identity of the EU, and radical withdrawal of EU power in, say, agriculture or social policy. Liberals must be clear where they wish to encourage or inhibit EU action.

All three of these tasks depend on each other. Decentralisation is not possible without accountability and accountability is not possible without a clearer idea what the EU is for. All three also entirely escape the notion of being "pro" or "anti" European. It has become simply meaningless to suggest one can be "for" or "against" an inescapable layer of modern governance. The only valid question is what kind of Europe Liberals aspire to. At present, in my view, the European Union is liberal in many ways - especially its commitment to economic freedom and the defence of extensive human and civil rights - but illiberal in some others, such as its protectionism towards the developing world and some unnecessary legislative interventionism.

That is why we must fight to escape the false simplicities of the British European debate. We must explain the real parameters of the argument taking place within the EU, and place ourselves firmly on the liberal wing of the argument. Now that would be something worthwhile fighting for.

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David Boyle is a member of the Liberal Democrats' Federal Policy Committee. He is the author of *The Tyranny of Numbers*, and his new book *The Money Changers* is published in November by Earthscan.

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# AFRICA VOTES

## Michael Meadowcroft reports on flawed elections in Zimbabwe and Zambia

Belief in the nation state has always seemed to require the abandonment of rationality and to fly in the face of geographic facts. National boundaries whether in Africa, or in the Balkans or in the Middle East, are the consequence of conquest and a division of the spoils rather than of any ethnic or topographical reality. And yet, particularly in Africa, we have the paradox of the post-independence countries fiercely defending their colonial boundaries whilst attacking the colonial powers that foisted those selfsame boundaries on them. Now, we appear to have a deliberate policy of playing the colonial card to try and cover up flawed elections.

The two adjacent countries of Zambia and Zimbabwe recently had elections within a few months of each other. Both were highly flawed and both had a number of similar dubious tactics, but in each case the government and the electoral commission, in the face of observer reports to the contrary, proclaimed the election as free and fair. Even though the consensus of observer reports - including local teams - was highly critical, and often drew attention to the same flaws, the European based team was singled out and attacked for being "*neo-colonialist*" and its report therefore unacceptable. This was done in the knowledge that the announced result would stand and that development aid would recommence within a short time.

How did they know? Well, look at the Zambian election of 1996 when, through a clever change in the constitution requiring presidential candidates' parents to have been born in Zambia, Kenneth Kaunda was prevented from contesting the election. This in itself was regarded as rendering the process so illegitimate that international observers did not monitor the election. And yet President Chiluba remained in power for a further full five year term and international aid flowed in. The lesson was well learnt.

All the published statements, and much other material, on the Zambian elections of 27 December 2001 are available on the EUEU website ([www.eueu-zambia.org](http://www.eueu-zambia.org)). The details of what went on in Zambia and in Zimbabwe are by now less important than what can and should be done to assist democracy in such countries in the future. The international concentration has been too much on the few months before polling day and not enough on the years afterwards. Indeed, without long term involvement in enhancing democracy, elections may well make the situation worse. If, as is often the case, political parties are based on tribes, then an election may simply legitimise tribal domination. As the late Professor Claude Ake of Port Harcourt University, Nigeria, said, "Elections, specifically free and fair elections, are the effect rather than the cause of democracy."

The Organisation of African Unity has now changed its name to the African Union in the hope that this will

give a powerful indication that it wishes to go down the European supranational path of building an effective and incremental union across country boundaries. This should be encouraged as a means of diminishing the emphasis on sovereignty and the nation state.

There needs to be assistance to the development of civil society and to the encouragement of voluntary organisations in every sphere. Democracy is enhanced with every NGO, large or small, that gets involved in the provision of services, in lobbying for government action, or in working together to strengthen community ties. Crucially, when such organisations have elected management committees, they help to build a democratic culture. In Western Europe we probably vote most weeks - for the trade union, the housing association, the PTA Committee, or whatever - so that public elections are not a strange and occasional event. In new democracies the presidential or parliamentary election may be the only election, meaning that citizens only vote every five years or so.

Political party development is also vital. The lack of an ideological basis to parties leaves the party structure vulnerable to being based on tribes, or areas, or religion, or party leaders - all of which are dangerous and unhealthy. In addition a liberation movement is not a political party as such and, when liberation is achieved, the wide coalition that such a movement required for success makes alternance difficult to achieve and makes the task of consistent and coherent government impossible in the long term. The main international political groupings, such as Liberal International, have a key role to play in building contacts with parties and individuals with whom they are in principle in sympathy.

These are big tasks which can be underpinned by practical help such as assistance to the newly elected legislature, by working with local government to provide a devolved focus on politics and a training ground for future national politicians, by aid to women's organisations, and by working alongside the civil service, the security forces and the media to build neutral public authorities.

In all of this work it is crucial to avoid giving any impression that one believes that Western European democracies - let alone the USA - are inherently healthier or more stable. Democracy is a tender plant that needs constant nurturing everywhere. Our own problems of increasing superficiality and declining participation need to be acknowledged and discussed with those facing democratic problems in Africa and in new democracies worldwide.

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Michael Meadowcroft was the EU Chief Observer at the 2001 Zambian elections. The views expressed here are personal.

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# DIRTY MONEY - CLEAN MONEY

## Peter Facey proposes a novel means of reforming the way politics is funded

If a businessman gives £100,000 to charity, he is praised for putting something back into the community. If he gives the same sum to a political party, the question asked is “What’s he getting out of it?”

In most cases the answer is “nothing”. New rules requiring publication of donations make corruption unlikely. But anyone with the wherewithal to make a large donation will have financial interests that are affected by government decisions. It will always be possible to find a change in policy that benefits them and can be portrayed as a quid pro quo.

People are cynical about big donors, but hold politics in such low esteem that they don’t want to contribute themselves, either as donors or taxpayers. A BBC poll found that 82% felt the present system of paying for political parties made people suspicious of politics and politicians. But when asked if the taxpayer should fund parties, only 26% agreed.

Nor can the parties look to their members for support. Six multi-millionaire donors provided more funding to the parties in 2001 than all their members combined.

Left alone, the situation will only get worse. Reform should have two objectives, to encourage political parties to engage with the electorate and to remove the corrupting influence of money on politics.

The first step is to reduce the amount each party can spend on a general election campaign, from £20 million to £10 million. The evidence is that, except in very close elections, the amount of money parties spend has little effect.

Next, we need a cap on the amount of money an individual, company or organisation can give. I would suggest the figure of £5000 - an amount small enough that nobody could be accused of buying influence.

The most controversial question is how public funds should make up the shortfall created by a cap on donations. Current state funding for political parties comes in the form of block grants: Short money, Cranborne money and the new £2 million policy development fund.

Together these now top £10 million a year. These could be extended, but it would hardly be a way of reconnecting with the public and would threaten to make parties a branch of the state.

Another solution would be tax relief: allow political parties, like charities, to reclaim tax at source on gifts they receive. While this would be an improvement over the current system, it would only include the small number of people who already donate to parties and

would benefit parties that draw support from richer sections of society more than others.

The New Politics Network has launched a website [cleanpolitix.com](http://cleanpolitix.com) to explain party funding, to make information about Who’s Funding Who more accessible and to campaign for reform to put public participation at the heart of party funding and activities. Called “Clean Money” to denote that it is not contaminated by the perception of corruption.

It would involve creating a new tier of participation in between just voting for a party and full membership. These “registered supporters” would not have to pay to register, but would be a “warm market” to which parties could market full memberships and greater involvement.

Supporters might be given the right to vote for local candidates and perhaps for the leader of the party. Recruitment of registered supporters would be the basis for allocation of public funds in a system that met these three principles:

**Engagement:** Parties should have to engage the public in order to obtain Clean Money. Only when a voter registers as a supporter of a party and personally requests that a contribution is made on their behalf should it be paid over.

**Equality:** The same contribution, say £25, should be available to everyone. Clean money for parties should be based on the breadth of their support, not the depth of their supporters’ pockets.

**Openness to change:** If parties must pass a threshold of votes, seats or members in order to qualify, this should be set as low as possible so new parties can come through. Clean Money must not create a closed shop for existing parties.

With a price on the head of every voter, parties would have a real incentive to reach out to new supporters even in safe seats, rolling back the tendency for political activity to be more and more concentrated in marginal seats.

This is an opportunity to not only remove the damaging influence of money in politics, but to help revitalise political parties. If nothing is done, or if there is a half-hearted solution that voters perceive as giving the political parties taxpayers money without the public getting anything in return, esteem for politics will sink even lower.

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Visit [www.cleanpolitix.com](http://www.cleanpolitix.com) to find out more or to join our campaign.

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## SPOOKY

*Dear Liberator,*

Spooky! In the same Liberator that I write of the delights of celebrating a universal human culture (eg international food recipes, world music, bright clothing), and not tolerating man-made religious differences which lead to hatred and murder, Simon Titley (again!) blames “vacuous cosmopolitanism” for the rise in fascism in Europe.

Speaking as a “jet-setting intellectual executive”, and one of the middle managers who Simon rightly states have just been downsized (if any of you know of any career openings please do call me!), I would like to suggest that it was a global economy which created my job in the first place. If there were only local economies, what jobs would there be for women, apart from caring roles such as teaching or nursing, or perhaps working in shops?

I still believe that the best way to stop ignorance, fear, and people turning to far right parties, is educating people and encouraging science and invention. The more people are encouraged to travel the world, the less they will fear outsiders. Supporting “local good, world bad” (and how many Parliamentary seats are fought on that “we’re the local candidate” campaign?) is just encouraging parochialism, and the far right will always do that much better than we will.

*Hilary Leighter  
London*

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## ECONOMIC MIGRATION

*Dear Liberator,*

I share Simon Titley’s concerns about the growth in support of the far right and would agree to some extent with his proposed solutions. I would certainly support advocating an immigration policy. However he fails to acknowledge that one of the reasons for the concern about immigration is a general feeling that discussion on immigration was largely suppressed

We welcome letters by post, or  
by email to  
[collective@liberator.org.uk](mailto:collective@liberator.org.uk)

# LETTERS

thus fueling conspiracy theories and adding to the feeling of powerlessness. To some extent, Simon’s article displays a certain degree of evasion as both immigration and asylum seekers and mentioned in it but the term “economic migrant” is avoided which effectively allows the right to use the term as an expression of abuse. Economic migrants invariably contribute to the economy as they on the whole work hard to better themselves and their families. Bill Morris rightly refers to himself as “an economic migrant and proud of it”. One of the biggest problems facing Britain in the near future will be the increasing proportion of retired people. One of the best ways of tackling it would be to encourage immigration to increase the size of the working population. The National Front once used the slogan “Pensioners before immigrants”. By arguing for immigration on economic grounds, it can be thrown back at them. I would be surprised if people’s prejudices are strong enough to prefer poverty in old age to immigration. Or should we continue with the current consensus that supports the abolition of the retirement age supposedly on the grounds of empowerment when in practice it means that most people will have to work longer. Simon Titley is incorrect to claim that few people object to the recruitment of teachers and nurses abroad ; there are objections to the active recruitment of public service professionals from countries where there skills are needed even more than in Britain.

Simon also raises globalization, however it hasn’t resulted in a loss of identity so much as it has been a source of powerlessness. The problem lies with the growing power of the multinationals which are now seeking to control public utilities in the third world and public services such as health and

education in the West effectively usurping the role of governments. Effectively the elector is reduced to being a consumer of public services. This may seem like a good idea until it is realized that the consumer has a purely passive role being a user rather than a participant. This increasing powerlessness is demonstrated by the Greater London authority wasting time discussing the antics of Ken Livingstone at a private party rather than tackling the bog standard bus service in the capital and the amount of parliamentary time spent discussing who said what or e-mailed whom in Stephen Byers’s office rather than the real problems of the railways. When politics is reduced to celebrities and personalities, it is hardly surprising that people are becoming increasingly disengaged and vote for monkey men or don’t vote at all. As Mark Smulian correctly points out, gimmicky voting methods will not stop the decline in turnout.

What is needed is a clear radical alternative to the consensus politics that the declining supporters of the project once advocated. We can however use consumer power to bring about change. Not in public service provision but to challenge the multinationals globally by using consumer boycotts to do the job that the WTO has so far failed to do in enforcing codes of practical on labour and environmental standards.

*Andrew Hudson  
Walthamstow*

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## A HEADING

*Dear Liberator*

Reading the letters in Liberator 282 by Nick Aleksander and Hilary Leighter, I got the impression they wanted an argument with a fully paid-up member of Islamic Jihad. Unfortunately, all they had to go on was Simon Titley’s reasoned call (in

Liberator 281) for a negotiated and just settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Undeterred, they ploughed on regardless.

Nick's demand for even-handedness was dealt with in Simon's article: "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." Israel is the occupier, the Palestinians the occupied, and to suggest any sort of moral equivalence between these two positions is absurd.

When it comes to Hilary's letter, it's hard to know where to start. First, she accuses Simon of arguing for the destruction of Israel (in fact, he argued for Israel to be recognised within its pre-1967 borders). To arrive at this bizarre conclusion, she interprets his use of the term "Occupied Territories" to include all of Israel, even though

this term is widely recognised as meaning the West Bank and Gaza Strip, i.e. the territories seized by Israel in 1967. It is clearly defined in international law, it is not an ambivalent phrase and to suggest that he implied the whole of Israel is therefore untrue. Once Hilary's false assumption is removed, her basic argument collapses.

Hilary's letter includes some bizarre contradictions. How can Hilary claim on the one hand to support the Israeli Army refuseniks and peace movement (who oppose the continued occupation of the West Bank and Gaza) while on the other hand endorse Sharon's military strategy? How can she claim to see "all people as worthy of care", then describe the Palestinians as the group "which only wants more deaths"? How can she oppose any form of recompense for Palestinians displaced over 50 years ago, on the grounds that "none of us can turn back time", when (one presumes) she supports the current

(and thoroughly justifiable) efforts to restore to Jewish families those art works, bank deposits and insurance policies that were stolen during the Second World War?

Then there is Hilary's unfounded claim that the "Palestinian Peace Movement" no longer exists because it has been "shot by their brothers as traitors". It exists in plain view, and takes the form of secular political leaders (such as Hanan Ashwari and Saeb Erekat) who have repeatedly sought a negotiated settlement. The problem these leaders face is that their credibility is undermined by successive Israeli governments that have continued to build illegal settlements, and employ various forms of oppression and humiliation, after peace agreements have supposedly been made. Ariel Sharon is the best recruiting sergeant that Hamas could have.

*Lucy Brennan  
Tower Hamlets*

## **SHOUT OUT FOR PEACE (Continued from Page 9)**

I believe we are once again approaching a situation in which the voice of reason, the voice of the common man and woman, needs to be heard before Washington once more gets involved in something that history will in future condemn. Given the aftershock of September 11, it is likely to take a long time before opposition expresses itself strongly in the United States itself. So to begin with, it will need to come from outside.

In Britain, it won't come from Labour, so long as Tony Blair is in charge. And as for the Tories - well, Iain Duncan-Smith would personally drive one of the first tanks into Iraq, if he could. That leaves us. And we, with our principles and traditions, are the obvious ones to stand up and shout for peace, and to make our criticisms of many aspects of current American foreign policy crystal clear. We should distance ourselves forcefully from Tony Blair's sycophantic position in relation to George W. Bush. The Daily Telegraph and The Times will, of course, scream abuse at us, if that is what we do. But opinion polls, interestingly, show clearly that for once, such a principled stand would actually have majority public support.



**Ernest Bevin, a  
biography  
by Alan Bullock  
abridged edition  
Politicos 2002 £30.00**

Bullock's biography of Ernest Bevin appeared in three volumes - Trades Union leader 1881-1940 (1960), Minister of Labour 1940-45 (1967) and Foreign Secretary 1945-51 (1983). Not surprisingly, around half of this abridgement draws from the third volume.

It is timely, and provides the groundwork for much needed revision. Hennessey, who undoubtedly knows more, points this out in his preface. Materials on the Cold War are gradually being declassified, and those the Blairites destroy might leak out from a former Communist archive. Bevin's anti-Communism, dating from his TU days, coloured Britain's response to events as Soviet imperialism revealed itself. The more amazing that Bevin should betray Tibet to the Red Chinese, though the panic to leave India may have informed him.

Bullock says nothing of Gruzenkou, the Russian spy-defector, or the traitor Nunn-May directly in this volume. Perhaps this is hidden in Bevin's

# REVIEWS

struggles with the Labour left? But it is a turning point in western security attitudes, and serves to underline the need for revision.

Liberals hardly feature - not even Chris Mayhew, who in his earlier Labour career had a Foreign Office profile.

Bevin aimed to cast a 'Gladstonian shadow' in his work. As Minister of Labour it can be said that his works endured, through changes of government, until Thatcher swept them away. In foreign policy he set a tone which has underscored things ever since. In this he is clearly one of the most important Labour politicians of the last century. It will be interesting to see which of the current lot leaves such a legacy, but don't hold your breath.

*Stewart Rayment*

**Spitfire into Battle  
by WGG Duncan Smith  
John Murray 2002  
(1981) £8.99**

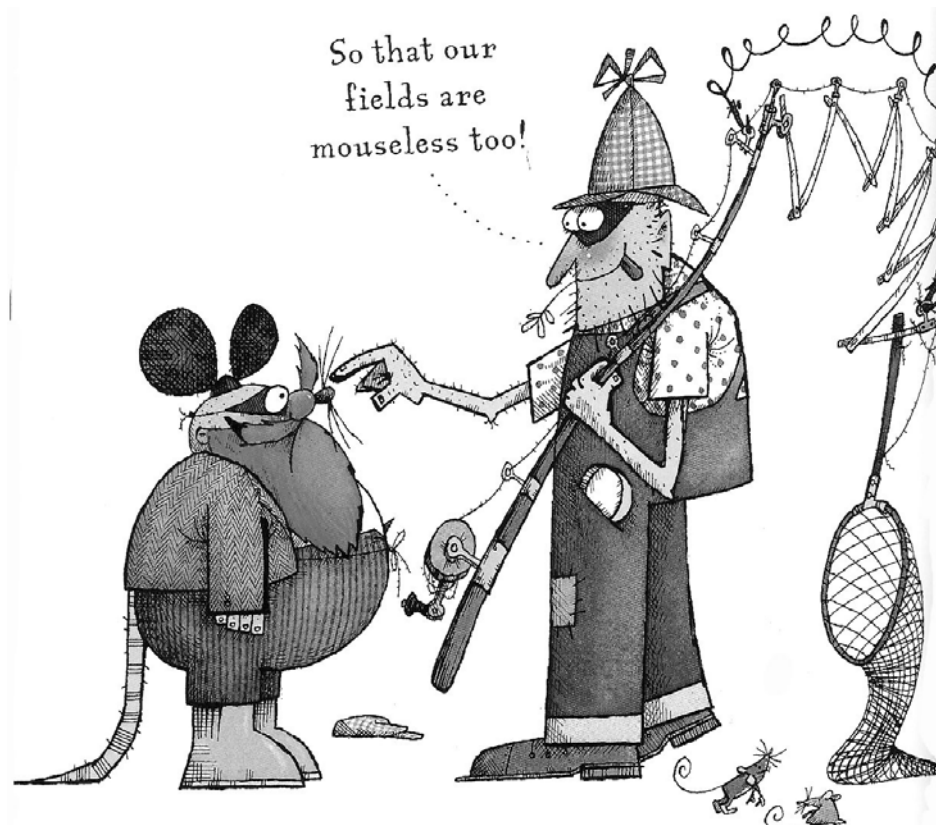
I hope that it wasn't merely Iain's rise to mediocrity that prompted the return of this book to the shelves, because it is a damn good read. IDS adds little in his preface, but is rightly proud of his father.

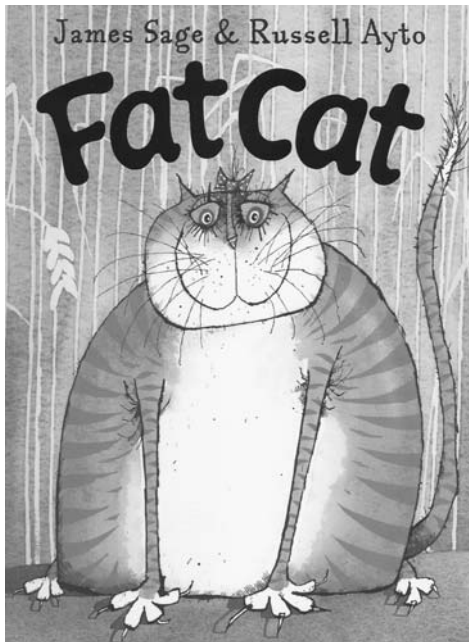
As a personal history, there are things we now know about the air war that jar with some of WDS's views, but ignore those and treat this as primary source material, which it is. We are told that the young men who chose to become fighter pilots were largely apolitical, but steeped in the view that politicians had got it wrong, and there was going to be war. We mourn the fate of Polish airmen who were encouraged to return to their own country after the war and to Russian gaols.

Otherwise the book seldom strays into politics, unless in the sense of questioning the value of 'rhubarb raids' in the aftermath of the Battle of Britain. Death stalks the book throughout. But this is accepted in the context of cabbage crates over the briny and wizard prangs.

You are probably aware that HM Government has decided not to replace the Harrier, leaving us without a fighter bomber (let alone a strategy, as one sees taking shape in this book) before the Euro-fighter even rolls out of the political arena. Some mistake there I think; as John Alderdyce pointed out at the Liberal International British Group AGM, Europe has to seriously consider how it is going to defend itself. At the moment this role falls to Uncle Sam.

*Stewart Rayment*





**Fat Cat by James Sage  
illustrated by Russell  
Ayto Collins 2002 £9.99**

This book has cattitude; another feline in the manner of Six Dinner Sid... and the yokels' antics will make you fall off of a gate antics.

*Stewart Rayment*

**OLD MEN'S TALES:  
Bitter Eden  
by Tatamkhulu Afrika  
Arcadia 2002 £11.99**

**Waiting Period  
by Hubert Selby Jr  
Marion Boyars 2002  
£14.95**

The Bible tells us that Man's natural span on earth is three score years and ten. Thank God for literature, Heaven changed its mind.

Though most writers reach their peak much earlier, occasionally books appear to remind us of the glories of old age. Tatamkhulu Afrika's astonishing novel Bitter Eden is a case in point. Based largely on his own experiences as a prisoner of war in Italy and Germany in the final stages of the Second World War, the book is a stunning evocation of what Boyd Tonkin, Literary Editor of the Independent, has rightly described on the book's jacket as 'ordinary male relationships in extraordinary circumstances.'

Born in Egypt of an Arab father and a Turkish mother, Afrika grew up in South Africa, where he was largely raised by Christian foster parents. A militant with the ANC, he abandoned writing - having written a book at aged 17 - for half a century. Retirement has given him the time and calm to resurrect his memories of how men behave without women and under the constant shadow of death. The result is quite astounding.

Drawn from imagination, rather than direct experience, Hubert Selby Jr's Waiting Period is in its different way also shocking. Selby hit the jackpot in the 1960s with his first book, Last Exit to Brooklyn - a seminal work that still packs a powerful punch. Since then, he has produced a series of startling novels, including one that was made into a powerful film, Requiem for a Dream.

Though it starts off slowly, his latest book subtly builds up an atmosphere of horror and moral distortion, through which the reader is gradually absorbed into a murderer's mind. By two-thirds of the way through, one is almost cheering his killings, and on the last pages, is relieved that he gets off scot-free.

*Jonathan Fryer*

**In The Name of Social  
Democracy by  
Gerassimos Moschonas  
Verso 2002 £17.00**

Not the SDP, still less Social and Liberal Democrats, this weighty tome deals with the mainstream social democratic parties of Western Europe and Greece, from 1945 to the end of the last century more or less. Moschonas ends on an up-beat note, new Labour (always an oddity in the social democratic family), the SPD in Germany, and Mitterand in France - a new dawn to recreate the glory days of the Keynesian experiment. We of course know better, social democracy in retreat in France and other EU member states, may hold on in Germany, whilst in the UK it remains essentially a new Toryism and the sooner the old one is put out of its misery the better. Liberals had the chance to kill Labour in the 80s and 90s, let us not fluff the chance to bury the Conservative

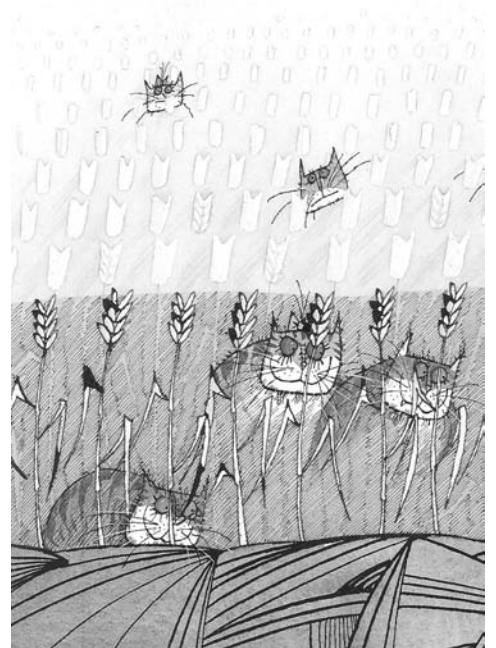
party... that requires the leadership that Ashdown didn't provide.

Moschonas tells us that Keynesianism and the Welfare State gave social democracy an ideology, which they had lacked before 1940. This transformed them into a party of government. What he does not say is that social democrats ossified the thinking of Keynes and Beveridge, and that their interpretation of it lead to bureaucratisation, and all the faults of, say, the NHS despite the attempted reforms of Thatcher. Social Democrats became the political voice of public sector employment, with all the faults first analysed in the SPD at the turn of the twentieth century.

Faced with loss of power in the neo-liberal revival of the 80s and 90s, particularly after glasnost, European social democratic parties trimmed their sails to the new winds. But Third Ways and the like are a rehash of ideas that have been around for some considerable time, and Moschonas is unsure whether this constitutes a sustainable ideology or rather, that they have become the machine which elects the other party of government.

Make no mistake; this is a heavy piece of political sociology. I have happy visions of Chris Rennard lounging on some far-off beach in New Brighton elucidating its wisdom for the next round of the struggle. There is a lot to be learnt from it.

*Stewart Rayment*



## Saturday

In Town for the nuptials of Charles Kennedy and Miss Sarah Gurling. The bride looks radiant, and I note that she is a tall girl; I doubt, however, that she would win quite as much line-out ball as the first Lady Bonkers. The service goes splendidly: I give a reading from L. T. Hobhouse, the Reverend Hughes is able to announce a council by-election gain in Lancashire during the taking of vows, and Alan Beith plays Mendelssohn's Wedding March on his euphonium as the newlyweds leave the church. All in all, it is the finest Liberal wedding since Phil Willis married Nigel De Gruchy. At the reception I find myself seated next to Jeremy Paxman of moving television fame. Knowing his views on drink, I am careful to keep his glass filled with nothing stronger than orange juice. Yet perhaps I have the wrong fellow in mind, for he repeatedly asks for something stronger. Indeed, by my calculation he asks me the same question 14 times.

## Sunday

The Kennedys have left for a honeymoon at a secret destination in the Far East. (I happen to know that it is Southwold, but my lips are sealed). I, by contrast, find myself at St Asquith's, listening to another of the Reverend Hughes' sermons. This religion business is all very well, but you can take it too far. Take this morning's lesson, which is all about it being easier for a camel to thread a needle than for a rich man to get into heaven, or some such rot. Leaving aside the fact that there are parts of Arabia where camels' embroidery is greatly prized - so much so that D. H. Lawrence once sent me a sampler for my birthday - I wonder how the poor would fare if better off fellows didn't have cash to spend. There is, as my old friend John Milton Keynes often remarked, more to this economics lark than meets the eye. At least we finish off by singing The Land, so everyone goes home in good spirits.

## Monday

Did you watch that television programme about Jeremy Thorpe? I thought it in very poor taste. Why do people constantly have to drag these things up? Is it not better to let sleeping dogs lie? Can you believe that, even now, I receive impertinent enquiries about my Marconi shares? For what it is worth, I have it on good authority that, while Mr Thorpe enjoyed a close friendship with Sir Peter Scott, no impropriety of any sort took place. Perhaps Sir Peter showed him his widgeon, but it certainly went no further than that.

## Tuesday

I was sorry to read that our own Ross Finnie is in the soup for calling the Director General of the CBI an "English prat", because I have known him for many years. We first met when, as Ron Finnie - a young man with a pronounced West Midlands accent - he came to the Hall to seek my counsel. He was intent upon a political career yet, despite issuing a regular Focus newsletter in his ward of Dudley, he was making little progress. Devolution was in the air even then, so I advised him to look north. With my help he arranged a berth on the night sleeper, vocal coaching from the late John Laurie and an internship with the Miss Peggy Inverarity Pipe Majorettes. So successful was our plan that he

# Lord Bonkers' Diary

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became Minister for Rural Affairs in the Scottish Parliament, but now he has taken it too far. It may be that the fellow is a prat - certainly, no man who expects to be taken seriously calls himself "Digby" - but it is not the best form to make light a chap's nationality (particularly if he has the good fortune to be English).

## Wednesday

The footer season begins, as is traditional, with the annual Lords vs Commons match at Wembley Stadium. The old place is not at its best, and the head-high grass does not lend itself to a passing game.

Captaining the peers' XI from my accustomed berth as an attacking centre half, I am engaged in a vigorous but fair tussle for the ball with my opposite number Bob Russell in the course of which the Member for Colchester has the

misfortune to suffer a superficial machete wound. Imagine my chagrin at reading in the Evening News that Russell wants to see me prosecuted on the grounds that "footballers should not be exempt from the law". What nonsense! We see more robust play than this every week in the Rutland Combination - and from the tea ladies at that. Is it any wonder that, his big band notwithstanding, I prefer the company of the man's brother Earl?

## Thursday

It has been drawn to my attention that President Kenny W. Bunkport III Jnr is going around comparing himself to Winston Churchill. I knew Churchill; I worked for Churchill (at least I would have done if he had had the sense to give me a job); Churchill was a friend of mine: and Bunkport is no Churchill. Yet his immortal crust has had the happy effect of reminding me of an amusing change between Winston and the first Lady Bonkers. "If I were married to you, I should put poison in your glass," said my lady wife. "If I were married to you, my dear," replied Churchill, "I should drink it." At which, always one to have the last word, the first Lady B. took up the soda siphon and whacked him over the head. Everyone agreed it was the wittiest thing, and Winston dined out on the story for months.

## Friday

To my tailor's to purchase a stoating cap and some thornproof underpants. Who should I meet there but little Steel, and very chipper he looks too. "Restored to rude health, what?" I venture amicably. "It's not just that, your lordship," he replies. "Look around you." I do, and the place is simply packed with coloured shirts with white collars. "They laughed at me in the eighties, but I knew I was ahead of my time. It's the same in politics: only the other day I was telling Bill Newton Dunn that he should set up a new..." The room swims, horrible phantoms from the Alliance years rear up in front of me and I stagger into the street for air. Unfortunately, I have a cummerbund in my hand at the time, and the store detective take a stern view of proceedings; thus I am writing this entry in the cells of a London police station. If I am up before the beak tomorrow, I shall certainly plead Sir Ian Wrigglesworth in mitigation.

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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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