

# liberator



**My Butler  
and I...**

Her Majesty visits the Liberal Revue (see Page 12..13)

## ***In this issue***

- 💣 ***Why Cornwall needs an assembly - Andrew George***
- 💣 ***Last chance for Ken - Adrian Slade***

- 💣 ***All You Need is Stealth - Terri Dowty***
- 💣 ***Liberalism and conservatism, the difference - Steven Rhodes***

# CONTENTS

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

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**Commentary** . . . . . 3

• **Radical Bulletin** . . . . . 4..5

**LIVINGSTONE'S LAST CHANCE SALOON** . . . . . 6..7

Former GLC Alliance group leader Adrian Slade assesses the first two years of London's Mayor

**HOVE TO IN BRIGHTON** . . . . . 8..9

The Liberal Democrats had a conference with no rows about strategy and unity on Iraq. Mark Smulian doubts it can last

**FREE NOT TO CHOOSE** . . . . . 10..11

What distinguishes today's Liberals from Conservatives and nineteenth century Liberals, asks Steven Rhodes

**THE LIBERAL REVUE 2002** . . . . . 12..13

The Liberal Revue staged a comeback at this year's Liberal Democrat conference in Brighton, after a break of six years. John Tilley was there

**PROTECTION FOR WHOM?** . . . . . 14..15

Alex Macfie explains how new trends in copyright laws are threatening freedom, knowledge and learning

**ALL YOU NEED IS STEALTH** . . . . . 16..17

New government databases are invading privacy from the age of five, warns Terri Dowty of ARCH (Action on Rights for Children in Education)

**FROM THE BOTTOM LEFT HAND CORNER** . . . . . 18..19

Devolution will only work if power is devolved to recognisable regions that people care about. That means a Cornish Assembly, argues Andrew George, Liberal Democrat MP for St Ives

**WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE** . . . . . 20..21

The 'Britain in Europe' pressure group has been hijacked by Blairites and risks losing a Euro referendum campaign, warns Andy Mayer

**Reviews** . . . . . 22..23

**Lord Bonkers' Diary** . . . . . 24

**Cover Stewart Rayment**

# COMMENTARY

## BLAIR'S SUEZ

What Liberal would not want to see the end of a dictatorship? The removal of many dictatorships in Eastern Europe, South America and Africa was the best event of recent years. For the first time in history, a majority of the human race lives under some form of democracy.

Extending this idea to Iraq is not such a bad idea. Saddam Hussein is not just any old dictator, but a man who started ruinous wars with Iran and Kuwait, and who has slaughtered large numbers of his own people. We do not actually know whether he still possesses any weapons of mass destruction, but he has used them in the past.

The world would be a better place without Saddam. But that's not the question we now face. The issue is whether a pre-emptive American attack is the best way to deal with him.

Any military officer will tell you that the biggest problem with politicians is that they send the military into battle without clearly defined objectives. What, precisely, is the objective of a war against Iraq? We keep getting different answers.

The most commonly cited objective is the removal of weapons of mass destruction. But the USA does not apply this principle consistently. There are other countries that pose a more immediate danger, notably India and Pakistan, which came close to using nuclear missiles against one another earlier this year.

Another objective is 'regime change'. Again, opposition to dictatorship is not a policy the USA has applied consistently. The world is littered with unpleasant dictatorships, which the West often not only tolerates but also actively supports.

The question with regime change is: what new regime do you want? There seems little point in overthrowing Saddam only to replace him with a clone from among the Iraqi army's generals. It would take many years of patient 'nation building' for a tolerable democracy to evolve - an honourable project, but one that will require the enthusiastic co-operation of the Iraqi people. It won't be achieved overnight with bombs, no matter how 'smart' they are.

Another objective is the 'war on terrorism'. Iraq has been accused of involvement in the September 11th terrorist attacks, even though no one has produced any proof. It seems unlikely, as Al Qaeda's goal is an extreme theocracy whereas, whatever else you may think about Saddam, his regime is about as secular as they come in the Middle East.

Terrorism is undoubtedly the catalyst for this proposed war. It is unconceivable the USA would even be considering war were it not for September 11th.

Having been attacked, the Americans have an understandable psychological need to personify their enemy. Unfortunately, 'Al Qaeda' was always a nebulous concept and, one year on, the Americans have not only failed to capture its leaders but do not even know whether they are still alive. Saddam and Iraq, on the other hand, are obligingly tangible.

The USA should remind itself of the law of unintended consequences. America's demons started life as America's clients. Al Qaeda and the Taliban were products of the CIA's aid to the Mujahadeen during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Saddam survived and prospered because of copious western military aid during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s. Other 'enemies', such as General Noriega, were spawned by ill-conceived American foreign policy.

If the key threat is from militant theocracy, the overriding strategic objective should be to isolate Al Qaeda, not whip up more support for it. In a war against Iraq, overthrowing Saddam is the easy part. The risk is the destabilisation of the region, a new wave of hostility throughout the third world and a multiplication of terrorist attacks.

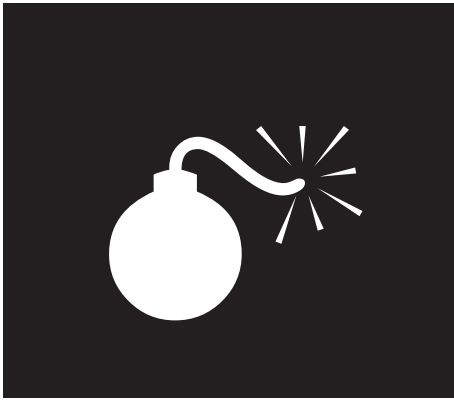
The Bush administration likes to portray multilateralism as some form of weakness. Yet it is only through the patient creation of an international consensus that Saddam can be removed without opening the gates of hell. A multilateral solution requires not only the sanction of the UN and the observation of international law, but also the recognition that a comprehensive settlement is required for the Middle East. In the eyes of most of the world, it is hypocritical to berate Iraq for defying UN resolutions when Israel is allowed to get off scot-free.

Let us be honest, the real objective in this war is oil. America has decided that it can no longer trust the Saudi regime and so, instead, needs to secure the country with the second biggest reserves of oil, which is Iraq.

If the West wants a clue as to why there is so much anger in the Arab and Muslim worlds, it should ask why Saddam still enjoys so much popular support. The answer is that, despite his corruption and brutality, he offers his people a valuable commodity the west has denied them, their dignity. Unless you recognise that elemental human need, you can never even begin to achieve a solution.

Tony Blair, however, has decided to share America's view that the Middle East is nothing more than a petrol pump. This war will be his Suez.





# RADICAL BULLETIN

## CHATTERING CLASSES

The Conference Committee enjoyed a more interesting than usual debrief after the Brighton conference. A highlight was a communication from chief whip Andrew Stunell, who proclaimed the conference a resounding success, but on rather surprising grounds.

More surprising than his highlight (Iraq) was his reasoning. In unusually direct terms, Stunell said that “it allowed CK to shine in and out of the conference - and it closed down a lot of silly chatter that would have happened without it.”

By “silly chatter”, Stunell was presumably referring to the stage whispers from some of the more senior MPs, that Kennedy has been a failure, invisible as leader and has made zero impact. This was summed up by the ‘masterly inactivity’ phrase that appeared on the eve of Conference.

“Conference was in a mood to flock to the flag (or leadership). Another day, another conference and I think it would have been a different story,” he observed.

Stunell was pleasantly surprised by the public services debate, pointing out that, although there was a major and hotly disputed policy change, the paper was carried by at least a 4 to 1 majority, and more like 8 or 10 to 1 on some points. “Would more punchy amendments have changed it?” he wondered.

Almost certainly but, as chief whip, surely he realises that the point of the policy working group system is to produce immense policy motions that the great unwashed cannot easily amend, this leaving the experts in charge.

“One issue that we constantly struggle with is the fact that a tough yes/no debate is hard to engineer on a three-page, 1,000-word motion,” Stunell noted. Quite.

## GENETIC POLICY MODIFICATION

If you had been asked to predict the biggest row at the Brighton Liberal Democrat conference, you would probably have guessed the debate on public services, which exposed the ideological fault line running through the parliamentary party. But the policy paper was circulated so late that there was insufficient time for most people to submit amendments, and the few that were received were dire. In the event, the policy sailed through with little opposition.

Instead, the big row erupted during a debate on rural affairs. Tucked away inside the policy paper were two rival options on field trials of genetically modified

crops, the first calling for a moratorium, the second endorsing the status quo.

The problems started when the working group that drafted the policy paper nominated that well-known countryman Donnachadh McCarthy (Camberwell and Peckham) to deliver the summing up speech on the whole motion. The Federal Policy Committee objected, on the grounds that McCarthy was too anti-GM. Instead they roped in Colin Breed MP, who was not a member of the working group.

In what might you might call a political field trial, the two GM options were discussed in a specially roped-off section of the debate. Things began to go wrong when Sue Doughty MP, nominated to give the summing-up speech on option 1 (in favour of a moratorium), gave up her right to speak because there was no-one nominated to sum-up for option 2 (status quo). Then the mover of option 1, Humphrey Temperley, simply stated that he supported the option without elaborating.

Things got worse when Evan Harris MP entered the fray. He approached the chair (collective member Harriet Smith) and her aide only minutes before the start of the debate, to demand that he be called to speak in favour of option 2. His request was refused, on the grounds that (a) he hadn't submitted a speaker's card until the very last minute and (b) Sue Doughty had already relinquished her right to speak and a balance had to be maintained between the two speakers already selected for each option.

Harris subsequently made a brief contribution from the floor during the ‘interventions’ section of the debate, where he made a particularly ill-tempered speech in favour of option 2. He then stormed off to sit next to Breed, who was due to sum up on the motion. Note that the FPC, having removed McCarthy for alleged bias, specifically briefed Breed to sum-up fairly and uncontroversially.

It can only be speculated as to what the two MPs discussed between their two speeches, but Breed's speech certainly sounded as if it had been genetically modified. Instead of remaining neutral between the two options, as instructed by the FPC, Breed delivered a tirade in favour of the pro-GM option. His speech was punctuated with shouts of “shame” from the floor.

The result was a counted vote between the two options. The anti-GM option was defeated by just eight votes. Smith then had to endure a series of points of order, led by Scotland's Andy Myles - and anger from Doughty, who had been trumped by her two colleagues. However, by this stage, the vote had already been taken and it was too late to overturn the verdict.

Following the debate, another collective member, Gareth Epps, submitted an emergency question to the FPC about Breed's conduct. The issue now seems to be in the hands of the Federal Appeals Panel and chief whip Andrew Stunell. The row did not receive any media coverage only because of the exodus of journalists back to London, caused by the recall of Parliament to debate Iraq.

## FFAC'ED OFF

Former MEP Robin Teverson, chair of the Federal Finance and Administration Committee, has let it be known he is resigning, presumably to follow ambitions to resume his Parliamentary career. In the bars of Brighton, among those who cared, there seemed to be no obvious candidate for the post.

This might have something to do with the pending retirement of several other members of the committee, some citing technical reasons such as not being given the financial information they needed to take decisions.

Perhaps readers of *Liberator* would care to put themselves forward for this prestigious position, the main task of which would seem to consist of arguing with senior party figures over figures.

## ZIP UNDONE

A contentious debate on European Parliament candidates happened at a special English Council meeting, where standing orders had been suspended to debate a proposal that instead of one of the top three candidates on each list being a woman and one a man, this should apply to the top two.

The motion - heavily and publicly supported by Charles Kennedy and Shirley Williams - had not been submitted in time, but was still debated and heavily defeated. Strange, then, that the report of the debate in *Liberal Democrat News* featured only the speakers on the losing side, together with a snide comment to the effect that the wrong side lost.

## IN-TOKSVIGATION

Conference must have gone to the head of new Lib Dem celebrity Sandi Toksvig, who did the rounds of hosting a number of fringe events.

How else could the otherwise witty Toksvig mix up the names of two eminent parliamentarians by introducing 'Baroness Susan Ludford'?

## THE WRONG BAIT

A group of LDYS members found an open forum on the web hosted by members of the satirically named 'Conservative Future'. Not content with watching and noting some of the more bizarre and bigoted comments, they decided to join in and wind up the Tories.

Essex councillor Gary Scott noted the result of the recent Swedish election, with a swing away from Swedish Tories in favour of the Liberal Party. Scott had, however, not noted that the Swedish Liberals had campaigned on an outspoken anti-immigration platform. The xenophobic Tories took time out from ripping each other to shreds to congratulate the Swedish Liberals, and laugh at LDYS' expense.

No doubt these charming Swedish 'Liberals' will have been present at the ELDR Congress in Bath in October, along with the Danish Venstre Party, which is in coalition with the neo-fascist Danish Peoples Party. Should the Liberal Democrats remain in a political grouping that is prepared to have the Swedish Liberals, let alone Venstre, in membership?

## VOICES FROM THE FLOOR

The emergency debate on Iraq at the Liberal Democrat conference naturally featured foreign affairs spokesperson Menzies Campbell but, with few exceptions, the rest of the speakers were obscure delegates with nothing special to say. But surely this was one of those debates where all sides would want and deserve to have their best speakers and best-known proponents on the rostrum?

One omission was Shrewsbury MP Paul Marsden, who defected from Labour partly over its use of the 'war on terrorism' as an excuse for a war on civil liberty. Marsden withstood pressure from Donnachadh McCarthy to withdraw his card in his favour, but in the event neither was called.

## SIGNS OF LIFE

There are two contrasting tests of the Liberal Democrats' health available - food and participation.

The party passed the food test with flying colours at Brighton, on the basis that, if it is doing well, the number of fringe meetings with free refreshments rises significantly. The food indicator rose in the mid-1990s but then fell after the 1997 general election produced a huge Labour majority for the lobbyists to get stuck into.

This year, food was sharply on the rise again, with the money perhaps most evidently on show at the Bloomberg reception. The portions may have been small, but there were an awful lot of them, and all ostentatiously expensive, from the Jerusalem artichoke soup to the monkfish risotto.

Star of the conference stalls area, though, was the 'vibrating pussy' available from the RSPCA stall. These were black and white cat key rings. At the touch of a button, the cat vibrated violently and purred.

Rather less healthy though is the trend in nominations to party committees. The number received was unusually low. Worst affected is likely to be the Federal Policy Committee, which had barely more nominations than vacancies.

This does have worrying effects - especially for those who want to see MPs decide all the policy, only for it to be rubber-stamped at conference.

## SMALL RESHUFFLE, FEW MOVED

Charles Kennedy went to the trouble of writing to all the Liberal Democrat MPs last summer to ask them to apply for their own jobs. They must be wondering why he bothered. At the end of the reshuffle most are in the same jobs. Although some of the 1997 intake have been given second tier jobs, the old guard remains in place.

The main exception is the promotion of free marketer David Laws to shadow chief secretary, despite his having been on the losing side over public services. Mark Oaten is once again chair of the parliamentary party, which calls into question whether this post should be held by such a partisan figure.

# LIVINGSTONE'S LAST CHANCE SALOON

## Former GLC Alliance group leader Adrian Slade assesses the first two years of London's Mayor

Running the gauntlet of the 'Save the Pigeons' placards, in July the Queen opened London's City Hall, the new home for the Greater London Authority and the Mayor. The last time she met Ken Livingstone was nearly twenty years ago when he was GLC leader and she opened the Thames barrier. In twenty years' time the barrier and the impressive City Hall will probably still be with us, but will the Mayor and the Authority?

Liberal Democrats may still love him but generally Livingstone's first two years have not been seen as a sparkling success. To what extent is that down to him? This instinctively centralist Labour government chose to set up the new London Authority in a way that paid only lip service to genuine devolution. It gave the Mayor no real power beyond the organisation of traffic and transport and a nominal responsibility for policing. As for the Assembly, that was to be toothless other than as a scrutinising body for the Mayor and his budget.

To compound this impotence, only now, after three years of wrangling over PPP, is the London Underground anywhere near to being handed over to the Mayor to run.

So it has not been easy for Livingstone to make an effective mark, and any lesser self-publicist would probably have sunk without trace by now. But Livingstone knows a lot about maintaining profiles and he has done so in three ways - by hiring an equally high profile transport chief, Bob Kiley; by continuing to take on the government at every turn over PPP; and by going ahead, despite government disapproval, and well before public transport has improved, with his plans for congestion charges.

The Labour Party, particularly Blair, Prescott and Brown, hates him for this defiance and is still hell bent on continuing its war against him. Hence the recent flurry of candidates lining up to take him on. He will not mind that. He never seriously expected his application to re-join the party to succeed. That is probably why he attempted it. He knows he will gain more electorally from remaining independent. Most Londoners agree with him about PPP, even if nothing more can now be done to prevent it. Nor are Londoners as averse to congestion charges as the Evening Standard would have us believe. If they work, they may even prove to be popular.

The Evening Standard, of course, has been responsible for Livingstone's most potentially damaging publicity. Under Max Hastings' editorship, the paper campaigned for a Mayor and a new London Authority, only to be horrified when the Mayor turned out to be Livingstone rather than some 'non-political' figure. The

paper was also in favour of 'road-pricing' until he proposed his congestion charges.

Hastings broadly accepted the election result but, under its new editor, the paper has decided to go for Livingstone, not only over congestion charges but also for his personal life. Surprisingly, the GLA Lib Dem group has instigated an inquiry into claims of his 'drunkenness' and pushing of a Standard journalist over a wall, although the claims seem already to have been effectively refuted. Nevertheless they may have done him some long-term damage, as may his apparently unqualified support for Bob Crow and his rail union.

So the overall impression of the first two years of London mayoralty has been one of conflict and controversy without much achievement. Shades of the past or an unfair picture?

One under-publicised Livingstone success has been to bring about a genuine improvement in bus services. In two years he has introduced new services and new bus lanes, negotiated better contracts and cut many fares by up to 40%. The result has been an 8.5% increase in bus usage in London, while usage in other UK cities has continued to fall.

Although the benefits in terms of fighting crime are, so far, less tangible, he is also entitled to some credit for meeting his target of recruiting 1000 extra police a year.

In most other respects he has had to depend for impact on rhetoric and the production of strategic planning papers because, without new government legislation, he has even less power than the old GLC to put his plans into practice. For example, calls from the Daily Mail or Evening Standard for him to 'clean up' London are pretty meaningless, and better addressed to the Home Office, the Department of Environment or the boroughs. Apart from waste disposal, he has no direct power to act on rubbish, pollution, vagrancy or drugs.

Despite these limitations he has led the way in highlighting the need for more 'affordable housing' if public services in London are to be improved, a theme now echoed by John Prescott. Although he has only limited powers to intervene in planning applications, the noises have been the right ones, as they have, mostly, on the environment, tourism and the difficulties facing ethnic minorities.



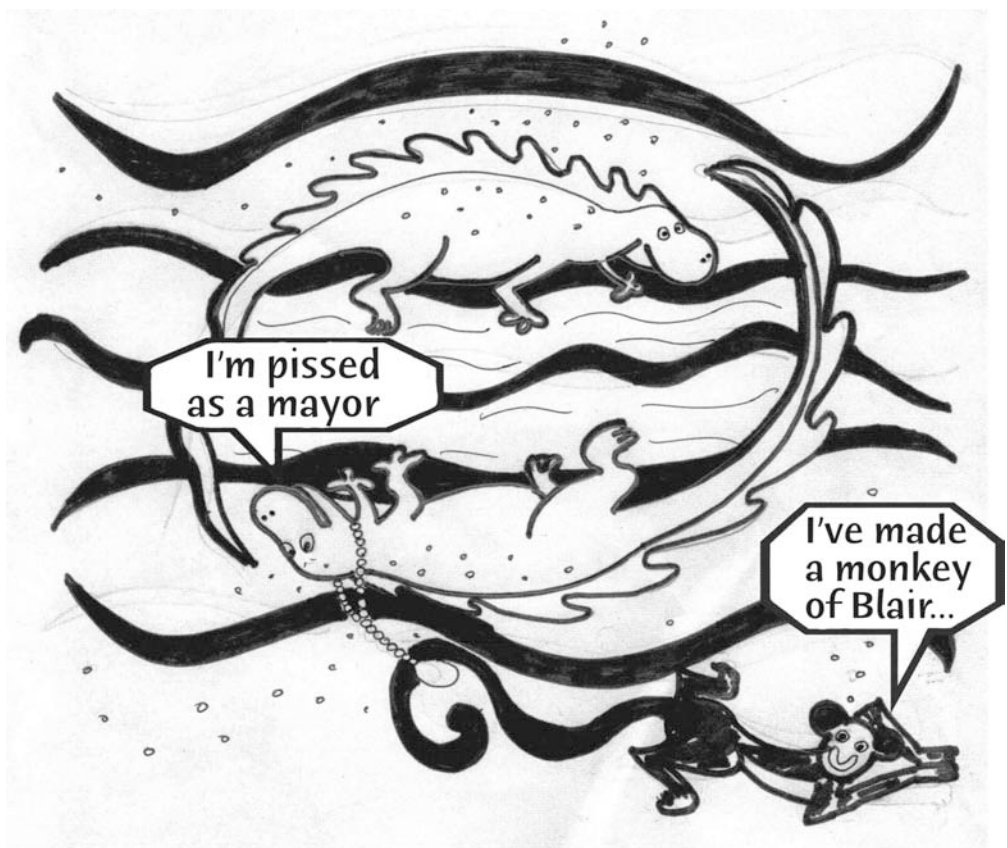
Nevertheless, an air of frustration surrounds London's first Mayor. Livingstone is a politically impatient man who wants to go down as having made a real difference to London, but the limited powers of his job, the attitude of the government and even the attitude of the Greater London Assembly are not making life easy for him.

The Assembly is dominated by a Labour group strongly resentful of his UDI of two years ago. Because the Mayor has no power to raise revenue directly from taxpayers, money for such schemes as he has introduced has had to come from the council tax supplement levied on boroughs. He has had to battle with the Assembly over his budgets and has lost on a number of occasions. When an otherwise impotent political body has only one chance a year to bare its teeth, this is inevitable, but it means that relations between the two have become distinctly edgy.

The danger of all this frustration is that, without more obvious 'results', an already sceptical London public will be even less inclined to bother to vote next time.

Livingstone's best hope still lies with traffic and transport. Having, rightly, won his court battle with Westminster Council over congestion charges, his first big task will be to make them work. The second, having had to accept PPP and, hopefully, taken responsibility for the Underground as soon as possible, will be to keep Bob Kiley and do something very quickly to improve life on the Underground.

If the Assembly wishes to be seen as constructive and useful, it should back Livingstone fully on congestion charges. After all, the GLA majority favours limiting the use of cars and these are the only proposals on offer. If they do not work, it will be because they are too firmly rooted in drivers' ability to pay, and the boundaries do not extend far enough. When there is no other way of



raising extra money, the temptation to go for charges rather than blanket restriction at peak hours is great, but London is an affluent city and, quite apart from the inequity of the scheme, the risk is that well heeled business drivers will kill it before it gets off the ground. That said, charges are still a great deal better than doing nothing, if London is to avoid gridlock.

Equally, Livingstone must now forget his past differences with central government, live with the new LT structure and just get on with doing what he is meant to do. If he does it well, he will deserve a second term, with perhaps a chance that the Mayor and the GLA will one day be turned into a genuine regional body.

If he fails, the GLA, like the GLC, could soon wither on the vine.

# HOVE TO IN BRIGHTON

## The Liberal Democrats had a conference with no rows about strategy and unity on Iraq. Mark Smulian doubts it can last

It is difficult after more than 20 years of conference going to decide what has been the most staggeringly ignorant remark I has ever heard uttered from the rostrum. But one contender emerged as the Liberal Democrats debated identity cards in Brighton. Sadly, I did not catch the name of the delegate who brandished his conference security pass aloft and asked, “if identity cards are so awful, why are we all wearing these?”

As far as I know, not even David Blunkett has suggested that the whole population would have to wear identity cards round their necks at all times, though I suppose that might come when he next needs a populist headline in the Daily Mail. This delegate would, it seems, be happy to wear one.

His staggering ignorance lay in his inability to grasp a simple point: people freely choose to come to the Liberal Democrat conference or not, one condition of which is wearing a security tag for the specific purpose of checking that one is entitled to be present at a private event.

Likewise, people may freely choose whether to have a credit card, and if they do, whether to carry it at all times. People who have driving licences are under no obligation to carry them when they are not driving. Those who wish to have a passport need only carry it when they wish to travel abroad. Those who need a card to enter their place of work need carry no other personal information on that card.

There is a vital difference between carrying a piece of identification because one chooses to take part in an activity which requires it, and being obliged to carry around identification merely to establish one’s right to be acting lawfully in a public place.

What the government may call ‘entitlement cards’ is the thin end of wedge, which will lead to their possession being compulsory. If voluntary entitlement cards are conceded, a combination of continued pressure to ‘get tough’, bureaucratic convenience and state intrusiveness will assuredly bring about compulsion.

Those who favour identity cards might profit from a visit to the smoking room of the National Liberal Club, and admire the plaque commemorating Harry Willcock, whose refusal to show his identity card to a police officer in 1952 sparked off the legal case which resulted in their demise. That case happened seven years after the end of the war for which the cards were introduced. It is a pretty safe bet they would have remained in force without this sort of resistance.

Voluntary identity cards will lead inevitably to stop and search, police harassment and bureaucratic intrusion. All things, one might have thought, that Liberal Democrats would deplore. Unless, of course, they happen to belong to the Brussels and Luxembourg branch, which seems to be run by people who have been in Brussels for so long that the bureaucratic culture has entered their souls.

Brussels and Luxembourg’s wrecking amendment, which was soundly defeated, would have required the party, as part of an anti-identity cards motion, to also explore their ‘benefits’. This was the surviving bit of the branch’s full-blooded pro-ID cards motion, which the conference committee wisely decided not to take.

I recall once visiting Brussels and asking a friend if it was necessary to carry my passport around with me. “Officially yes, but seeing as you’re white you won’t get stopped,” was the response. Is this the approach the Brussels and Luxembourg branch so admires?

The branch also seems an extraordinarily poor advertisement for European integration, since it was also behind a deplorable amendment to the Gibraltar motion, which made the extraordinary argument that the final say on the rock’s future should lie not with a vote of its inhabitants, as the motion said, but with the Gibraltar government alone. When did one last see “delete ‘people’, insert ‘government’” in a Liberal Democrat motion over future sovereignty changes?

Brighton was a fairly quiet conference, not least because of the recall of parliament in the middle of it, and the Iraq crisis, which hung over it.

Menzies Campbell was moved in the Iraq debate to admonish the conference against “crude anti-Americanism”, refined anti-Americanism evidently being acceptable.

Campbell’s description of himself as “child of the sixties” and the owner of “Bob Dylan records” seemed utterly incongruous with his views and persona. It was as if, say, Shirley Williams had sought credibility by announcing her devotion to the Sex Pistols, or if Alan Beith had revealed a hidden past as a leather-jacketed greaser.

It was not clear to what Campbell was referring. All the public references I heard to Iraq at the conference were serious and considered, and critical of the present American government’s strategy and behaviour, not of Americans in general.



Surely he was not referring to Charles Kennedy's speech to the Trades Union Congress? There, Kennedy denounced America's hire and fire, low job security, short leave, long hours working culture and drew applause for contrasting this to European attitudes. He also pointed out that Labour, on which the assembled unions still waste their money, supports the American working model.

His comment went to the heart of American business culture and its export here, a culture supported far beyond the ranks of Bush's admirers. I think Kennedy may be onto something.

It does not mean that he or his party has any animosity for Americans, rather that, despite globalisation, other countries need not model their business and working life on America. Other, more appealing, models are to hand in Europe, he suggested, and American firms that do business in Europe will have to accept them.

Putting this argument forward would have been a valid political initiative anyway. As it happened to overlap with Iraq, where the Liberal Democrats managed the feat of articulating the clear majority view in the country, the party had better be ready to answer half-witted charges of anti-Americanism, but not be afraid to stick to both positions. Attitudes are changing.

I cannot readily think of any other remark of Richard Holme's that has ever given me pause for serious thought, but he succeeded in this when interviewed in the Guardian last summer by the American journalist Joe Klein, who was writing a series on relations between America and Europe. Holme, who has lived in America and has visited frequently, said sadly that since the election [sic] of George W Bush "America has never seemed so far away".

Under Bush, an ugly America has presented itself to the world; rooted in parts of that country and its culture that most Europeans rarely see. This is an America of far-right religious fundamentalism, unrestricted gun ownership, an uncritical approach to the interests of business, and an aggressive ignorance of the rest of the world, which leads to the assessment of complex international problems from the perspective of a sheriff in nineteenth century Dodge City.

For this presidential term at least, the lunatics have taken over the asylum. Every poll taken in Britain over Iraq has shown Bush as the object of a profound mistrust that did not exist towards the Oval Office in Bill Clinton's time, or for that matter during the term of George Bush senior.

With Tony Blair busy turning the UK into a fifty-first US state, and Iain Duncan Smith lamely tagging along with him, the Liberal Democrats could enjoy the happy coincidence of articulating a line that is both pro-European and popular when they denounce both Bush's disregard of international laws and treaties, and the importation of American working culture.

In the Iraq debate in parliament, Kennedy's contribution resembled his emergency statement to conference the previous day, in which he called not merely for UN backing as a prerequisite for any action, but also for a positive parliamentary vote before any British troops are committed. He also managed to ask Blair a lethal question, which the prime minister could not answer.

He asked, I paraphrase a little: "If the object of ousting Saddam Hussein is regime change, where is

your new regime?" Blair was reduced to mumbling about Afghanistan, omitting to say that it had had an ousted government conveniently still in power in part of the country. The more Kennedy spotlights the confusion over aims of those backing an attack on Iraq, and the mendacity of at least some, the better he is likely to do in the coming months.

His end of conference speech, though, boasted merely one soundbite that lodged: the intention to overtake the Tories in parliament.

Ten years ago, anyone who predicted there would be 53 Lib Dem MPs would have been assumed to be well intentioned but mad. Second place is not now inconceivable. It was a good soundbite, and good in itself as a medium-term objective. It will have sowed the possibility in some minds, even if the speech contained nothing else memorable. How the Liberal Democrats get from here to there is going to be a matter of lively dispute.

Having 53 MPs means that, for the first time, the party has enough backbenchers for factions to form. As Simon Titley noted at the Liberator fringe meeting, it is a pity that one, Liberalfuture, wants the party to be more like the Tories, while the other, the Beveridge Group, wants it to be more like Old Labour. Why is no faction arguing the party should be more liberal?

Evan Harris gave an insight into these disputes at a health fringe meeting, where he explained what had gone on in the public services working group. He had argued that there was little point in introducing choice into health unless access was sorted out. Those in urgent need of treatment do not want to choose between rival ambulance providers, and those seeking hospital treatment have no reliable information on which they can make an informed choice, he said.

'Choice', he predicted, would benefit the middle classes who know how to work the system, and mean even worse provision for the more vulnerable. The party's free marketers had failed in their bid to make this sort of 'choice' the cornerstone of policy, he declared.

Instead we got decentralisation. Fine as far as it goes, but as Nick Harvey pointed out (Liberator 283), not much of a rallying cry.

These same 'choice' supporters tend to be the people who make the superficial assumption that, to win more Tory seats, the Liberal Democrats should sound more like Tories. In fact, Tory seats are usually won by squeezing Labour votes, not by so alienating Labour supporters that they still vote for their third-placed candidate.

While nothing happened to show disunity at Brighton, below the surface there were forces at work that want the Liberal Democrats to pursue contradictory strategies for the next general election. The next few conferences may not be so trouble-free.

# FREE NOT TO CHOOSE

## What distinguishes today's Liberals from Conservatives and nineteenth century Liberals, asks Steven Rhodes

"I'm a Nineteenth Century Liberal" Sir Rhodes Boyson used to say, flashing his mutton chop whiskers under the studio lights to demonstrate his Manchester School credentials. And doubtless, in the manner of many a Thatcherite, he was. A belief in free trade, Whiggish suspicion of historically derived public power and an encouragement of rugged individualism all added to the case.

Indeed, for much of the eighties and early nineties, Margaret Thatcher could have said to have 'dished the Whigs' with an unprecedented era of economic liberalisation that would have left Bagehot dizzy (small 'd') with pleasure.

Such a pity about the political liberalism; there was Clause 28, much opposition to marriage reform and routine talk of 'family values' (i.e. values of a very particular type of family) and then, to cap it all, we had John Major's 'back to basics', campaign, and small wonder. Being Liberals, we like to think that you can't be an economic liberal without being a social liberal. We are used to holding these two concepts in balance - because we always have. We lose sight, therefore, that this ideological tension is a condition peculiar to us. For the modern right, economic liberalism goes hand in hand with social control and for the left (not, therefore, Blair) economic control goes hand in hand with social radicalism. To them it is 'the muddle in the middle' that seems odd.

Equally, it's difficult for Liberals and especially Liberal Democrats to find one single point of philosophy on which we can claim clear ground from Conservatives. We know the policy distinctions, of course, on matters from uncosted PPP, to immigration and asylum, to classic 'harm to others' issues such as gay rights, to attitudes to Europe and internationalism and on to the environment. But increasingly, the Tories are presenting themselves as a touchy-feely party; tough, industrial, David Davies has been replaced by matronly Theresa May and Alan Duncan has emerged from the closet to the sort of delighted reception previously reserved for the children of Hampstead thinkers. Is there any way the Liberal Democrats can show a clear difference from the Tories? Yes, there is, and this single principle works across the board from pensions to education to law and order and to responses to September 11. It is, I believe, the defining feature of the thinking of the right.

A few years ago, John Major famously remarked that it was time for society "to condemn more and

understand a little less." He was pilloried somewhat by the liberal press but this statement was, in fact, a very neat description of the difference in attitudes between Conservatives and Liberals. When framing criminal legislation, Conservatives see the issues as moral, and only moral. Attempts to explain patterns of criminal activity are seen by Conservatives not merely as wishy-washy but, worse, morally offensive. They appear to let wrongdoers off the hook by providing them with an 'excuse' - "It wasn't me, it was society."

Liberals are equipped to tackle this argument, and our heritage goes back 260 years to David Hume's 'Treatise of Human Nature', where Hume sought to tackle the principle of Natural Law, which - broadly - states that the patterns found in nature are the patterns which should be adopted by human beings in their affairs. That idea of Natural Law is still very much around; Conservative arguments on abortion, gay rights and the role of women nearly always devolve, at some point, to the plaintive cry "It's not natural."

Hume doubted that there was any such divinely ordained pattern in nature and he went on to show that, just because something occurs in nature, does not mean that we are bound to follow it; human beings are not animals, we can make moral choices, which involve rational thinking and considering the purposes of our deeds, rather than acting on animal instincts. Famously, he is summarised as declaring that "you cannot derive an 'ought' from an 'is'."

It is because Tories are uncomfortable with the implications of this statement that they are not - generally - good reformers on crime. Liberals, discerning a sudden rise in crime - particularly a specific crime or class of crimes - ask themselves "what is the cause of this rise, and how can it be tackled at root?" This approach tends to be troubling for Tories of the right. For them, the appropriate response to crime is punishment, and only punishment. It is unimportant that comparatively poorer people are more likely to steal; the point is that they ought not to steal. I'm sure every liberal has encountered this insistence.

In reality, there is no way to resolve this issue of whether the appropriate response to crime is condemnation or understanding. Why? Because 'ought' and 'is' are different ideas that do not mix. But what Liberals can do is to draw distinctions between the likelihood of criminal activity on the one hand and instances of crimes on the other.

If you are socially excluded, you are more likely to steal, and policies can be enacted to reduce that likelihood. But if you have stolen, then the criminal litigation process takes over, and sentencing will be the appropriate response. What I have a problem with - why, in short, I cannot be a Conservative - is their prevalent attitude that making appropriate social provision to avoid exclusion is tantamount to excusing criminal activity. They seem unable to distinguish between law and social policy: 'law is order'.

This attitude has been sharpened by the events of 11 September. I have many American friends aware of the way in which foreign policy has isolated the US, but I have many who are not. For them, any argument for modification of foreign policy as a response to the attack is "giving it to terrorism." This attitude shows, I believe, the US to be an essentially conservative society (one which is, accordingly, keen on punishment). It is also this attitude - do not accede to an aim, no matter how just, if force is brought to bear on you - which shows that the Good Friday Agreement would have been unworkable under a Tory government.

But the politics of moral responsibility is not merely restricted to reactions to crime - or any other social phenomenon. Nor is it restricted to the 1980s and high Thatcherism. For once you have embarked upon these politics, you are not content with the fact that people should be confronted with the consequences of choices they make, you want to give them the opportunity to make as many choices as possible - you wish to bolster the importance of free will by introducing as much free will as you can. It is for this reason that one of the great trumpeting cries of Thatcherism was 'choice', not because it necessarily led to more efficient markets but because - as I think Conrad Russell was the first to notice - a choosing human being is, to Tories, more of a human being than one who is not making a choice, no matter how bad those choices may be.

Thus, the Radio 4 'Today' programme recently broadcast the Conservative spokesman on pensions asserting that the party was against the idea of compulsory pensions requirements, not because he did not believe they would lead to better provision for old age, but because he wanted a Britain with people making these choices for themselves and compulsory pensions led to "a sort of Britain we do not want to see" (sic). Small wonder we have a hideous pensions gap; when planning for old age, we should be looking to see what works, and that takes account of people's

unwillingness to save; but it is difficult to argue that our old age will be more dignified if we end our days poor but we can at least say "I deserved it."

If, reading this, you sense that what is proposed is the diminution of choice, and if you think - correctly - that's not very Liberal, please bear in mind that all that is proposed is that public policy take account of human nature without wishing to change it wholesale. Liberals of today owe quite a debt to LT Hobhouse, Beveridge and others who kept the flame of Liberalism burning at its lowest ebb - and did not Beveridge propose a system to relieve poverty based on compulsory provision? We have become wise, we hope, to the fact that there are human foibles we are given as a matter of fact, that they can be changed, but that does not mean those foibles can be eliminated by compelling us to make more and more decisions. And, when dealing with terrorism and crime or even pension provision, Liberals seek to understand the causes of problems first and then formulate the solutions. Yes, Sir Rhodes, you are a nineteenth century Liberal, but we are twenty-first century Liberals and, as society has become increasingly complex, we hope to develop a politics that is neither paternalistic nor pious.

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# THE LIBERAL REVUE 2002

**The Liberal Revue staged a comeback at this year's Liberal Democrat conference in Brighton, after a break of six years. John Tilley was there**

The media and those at the top of the party continually try to turn conferences into obedient fundraising rallies where the role of ordinary Liberals is, in the words of Jo Grimond, to "turn up and pay up". Thankfully, over the years, ordinary conference reps in the Liberal Democrats have resisted these attempts. One example of this resistance is the Liberal Revue. It is not just one of the real joys of the Conference, it is not just an entertainment, and it is not just a safety valve for anger with the leadership, although it has been all of these things over the years.

This year it was introduced by the Noble Baroness who chairs the Conference Committee, with a reference to the fact that there had not been a full revue for six years and that the cast were "no spring chickens" the last time they put on a full show. This marked up one of the changes this year, a slimmed down cast; the Noble Baroness herself had sometimes in the past been involved. Similarly a number of other faces were missing this time and it might be argued that the show suffered as a result.

Although it is doubtful that one would say this in the case of the former contributor to the Revue who has now become the Labour Party prospective candidate for the Rhonda for the Welsh Assembly. It is an extreme method of avoiding donning an orange anorak and doing old jokes about delivering Focus but that is apparently what Leighton Andrews has done. Fortunately others have not been attracted by perks of the South Wales Taffia or the Upper House and continue to provide a witty counterpoint to the pomposity and the claptrap of conference. Sometimes laughter has a far more powerful political impact than all the trappings of political careerism.

The organisation this year was much better than on some previous occasions, the room was plenty big enough, the sound quality and lighting were fine and the privilege of being shown to my seat by an 'usherette' such as the excellent Vera Head was the theatrical equivalent of being served hors d'oeuvres by one of the Roux brothers. The starter on these

occasions is always the excellently produced programme and this year's was not a disappointment - the back page was a list of spoof plays 'Coming Soon to this Theatre' which included surreal references to the politics of the NHS in 'Carry on Waiting' starring "Kenneth Williams as Alan Milburn, Sid James as Sir Sidney Grabbit the PFI boss, Charles Hawtrey as Peter Mandelson, and Jim Dale as the one shagging a nurse



on a trolley." There is enough packed into the programme to keep you smiling and perhaps also thinking for long after the laughter from the revue has died away.

There was certainly plenty of laughter this year and that was by far the strongest point. Directed by Catherine Furlong and Simon Titley, written by Harriet Smith, Simon Titley and Mark Smulian, this year's revue was an outstanding success. Mark Smulian also did his usual brilliant double act with Stewart Rayment as the scene shifters moving furniture and props between sets on the darkened stage looking for all the world like scene of crime officers who have slept in their white overalls - these occasions also provide an opportunity for wags in the audience to practise their skills at heckling or at least to demonstrate that they need all the practice they can get. A special mention should go to Janice Turner on piano, although regulars in the



audience surely hoped that at some point she would step out in front of the piano as in previous years.

Some of the songs that interspersed the sketches were a bit weak. It takes a good voice and unusually good delivery to get across the better points of the words. The songs were successful when there was a number of singers but the solos fell short and left the audience puzzled as to what they might have enjoyed if only they had been able to make out the words. 'Three Seats on my Council' was a brilliant number combining good singing and a familiar tune with a combination of in jokes and political insights that hit the target. The songs are an important element in the show if only because they allow us to dry our eyes and recover from the barrage of jokes in sketches such as 'Mr Richard Desmond'. The concept of the king of porn entering into discussions for the takeover of Liberal Democrat News was a good one and the script was brilliant. However, nothing could have prepared us for the amazing performances in this sketch. Catherine Furlong



managed the impossible by being the only person out of the hundreds present not to be laughing uncontrollably at slavering delight of Nick Winch's enthusiastic pornographer; it was a performance that had to be seen to be believed and the jokes came so thick and fast that more than a few people were in danger of bursting more than blood vessels. The sketch built up to a climax (if that is not too unwise a word to describe it) with Nick completely in character becoming more and more

outrageous in his suggestions for telephone porn lines to be advertised in the revamped version of the party's newspaper. Amongst my favourites were "Let me sit on your ward executive" and "You can lick my envelope" - if I remember them correctly from what seemed like the dozens of double entendres to burst forth in rapid fire from the ever more excited proprietor of The Express.

Not all the sketches were of this show stopping quality but they were all good if not excellent. Peter Johnson was a much better Queen than the present head of the Windsor Family Firm and, unlike her, he can not only deliver a speech that is witty and a delight but can also understand it and his audience to be able to time some of the more barbed comments with aplomb. Peter also took in major parts in the 'Fawlty Towers' finale and the inspired 'Loya Jurga', where he was the only character on stage whose 'traditional' dress was



modified by a yellow anorak as befits a member of the Kabul Focus Team. This sketch also brought out one of a number of excellent performances from David Grace; David popped up all over the place both in the sketches and in the songs and he proved a mainstay of the revue. He has a talent for a particular 'old buffer' type of role but he showed that he could do a great deal more than that. Similarly Ralph Bancroft managed a whole range of characters and songs but the words "Like in Harrow" in the sketch 'Nominations' were perfectly timed and perfectly scripted and as such remind us that the Revue is more than just an entertainment.

There are a lot of unsung people who make the Revue a success; listed in the programme under "With Thanks to" they include the leader of my local council. The proceeds go to Liberator and The National Liberal Club Staff Fund and both are deserving causes. It is interesting to imagine how much better the funds of both would be if, instead, they benefited from the advertising initiatives suggested by Nick Winch's lewder lines.

This was a brilliant revue in the best traditions of earlier years. It proved that once again those "clad in the orange cagoule of heresy" have prevailed over the latter day embodiments of the Liberal Finder General. I'm looking forward to the next one and hope I don't have to wait six years for it to come.

# PROTECTION FOR WHOM?

## Alex Macfie explains how new trends in copyright laws are threatening freedom, knowledge and learning

Imagine that you could not lend to a friend a book that you'd bought, buy a book from a second-hand bookstore, or borrow it from a library. Imagine a world in which the only way to access literature or music is on a pay-per-use basis, in which every access to a work is monitored by the copyright-holder, and any unauthorized access is either impossible or illegal. This Orwellian scenario is exactly what would happen if present trends in copyright law are allowed to continue.

Copyright law has generally been an issue discussed by academics and lawyers, and as interesting to the wider political classes as electoral reform is to most people outside the Liberal Democrat and Liberal parties. However, recent technological and legal developments mean that copyright may now have a direct effect on most people's everyday lives. In particular, the arrival of computers and the internet have made it very easy to make near-perfect copies of music and films and distribute them worldwide.

The recording and movie industries, in response, have taken the file-sharing networks to court and lobbied for tighter copyright laws. They have also experimented with technology that prevents casual copying of CDs. Use of such technology usually means that such CDs do not play at all in computers.

The US has led the way in the new copyright law by passing the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA). This law criminalizes the act of bypassing (circumventing) any copy-protection measure, and the production of any device intended for that purpose. It also encroaches on free speech by forbidding the discussion of and research into flaws in copy-protection systems.

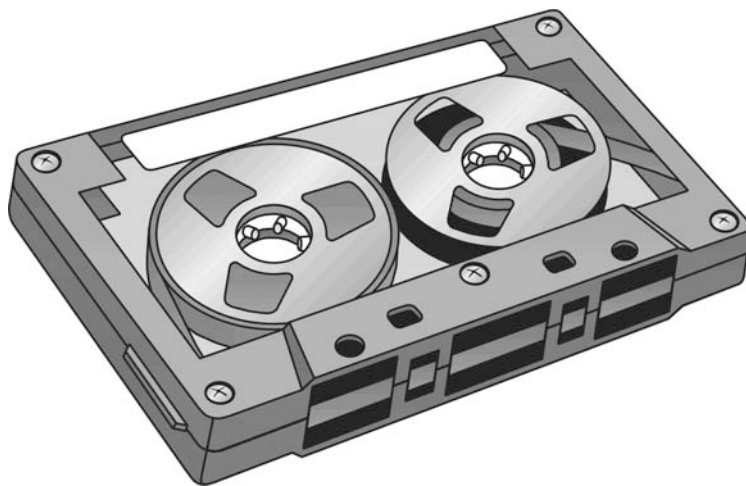
The EU has followed suit by passing the European Union Copyright Directive (EUCD), which will potentially mimic most of the worst features of the DMCA. This directive has to be implemented into EU countries' national law by 22 December 2002. It allows EU states to implement a number of exceptions to

protect rights to access work and what are traditionally considered to be 'fair use' rights. However, the UK has not chosen to implement any of these exceptions. Therefore, after 22 December 2002, unless the law is reconsidered, it will become illegal to:

- use a region-free DVD player or 'unauthorized' DVD-playback software (such as any DVD software for Linux), or chip a DVD player to remove the region coding;
- attempt to play a copy-protected CD in your computer;
- attempt to copy a protected work for research, study of archiving;
- transcribe a protected eBook into braille or audio.

Such draconian measures are frequently justified on the basis that it is a reasonable way for copyright holders to

protect their 'intellectual property'. The very term 'intellectual property' is a product of the common misconception that authors have property-like rights over their work. The language of property crime is frequently used in relation to copyright infringement: unlawful copying and file sharing is commonly characterised as 'theft'. This analogy, however, is overstretched. Ideas and creative works are, unlike land or material possessions, ephemeral. If someone squats in my home, I cannot live in it. If someone takes



away my computer, I cannot use it. However, if someone quotes or copies this article, it does not change the fact that I am its author: I do not 'possess' it any less. Copying a work without permission potentially causes a loss of commercial viability for the copyright holder; however, this is not certain.

In fact, giving copyright-holders such sweeping powers would violate many of the fundamentals of civil society. The original purpose of copyright law is not, in fact, to give anyone 'ownership' over work, but simply to encourage creativity. This is achieved by ensuring that authors are rewarded for works they create, but equally, copyright protection has strict limits.



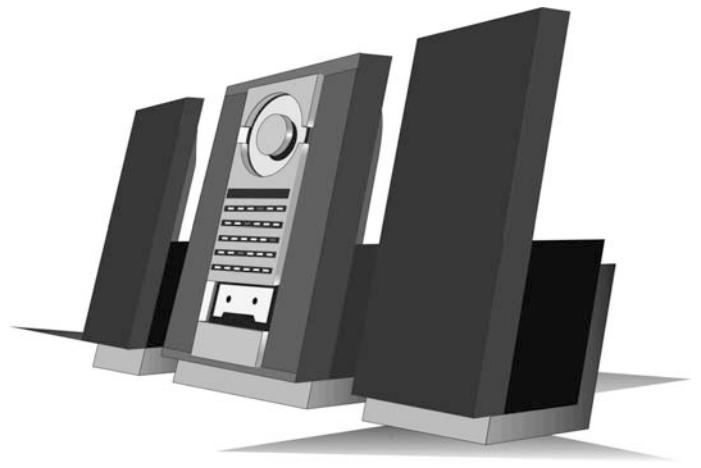
- Copyright expires after a fixed period of time. Anyone may republish the works of Dickens or Shakespeare, as they are long out of copyright.
- Public distribution of a work is controlled by the copyright-holder, but public 'access' to it is not: a copyright-holder may not stop anyone from lending, reselling or exchanging a book, a CD or video (regardless of what it may say on the copyright warning at the beginning of the cassette or on the packaging) that they had previously bought. Without this proviso, freedom of information would be seriously curtailed.
- Copying of parts of works in certain circumstances, for example, for research or review, does not require permission from the copyright holder. This concept, known as 'fair use', is necessary to ensure that copyright protection does not infringe on free speech. It allows such activities as photocopying part of a book for study, or quoting part of it in an essay. Strictly, it is never legal in the UK to make a copy of an entire CD, for example for the car or for an MP3 player. However, no serious attempt is made to enforce this aspect of copyright law, and to do so would be impossible without intolerable invasion of personal privacy. Anyway, would anyone buy a second copy of an album for their in-car cassette player instead of taping the CD they already have? It seems unlikely, and equally it seems unreasonable that that should be the expectation.

Copy-protecting CDs may keep the music off the file-sharing networks for a while (until the protection is hacked, legally or otherwise). But technology cannot respect the limitations placed on copyright law. It does not, for example, expire when copyright expires. Technology is inherently incapable of determining whether a copy is being made for 'fair use' or to infringe copyright. In fact, 'copy' protection is being used by copyright holders to give themselves rights over works that they plainly do not have under traditional copyright law. For example, electronic books (eBooks) are often designed so that they only work on the first computer that they are downloaded onto. This means that by replacing or reformatting one's computer, one will lose access to any eBooks one has bought. It also makes it impossible to lend the eBook to a friend. It is usually impossible to print eBooks, or to use 'text-to-speech' converters to read them aloud, or access them on Linux. Some eBooks expire after a certain time period or number of times accessed. Even eBooks of works in the



public domain, such as Shakespeare plays, are sold with such restrictions.

DVDs are also full of egregious protection features. One, already mentioned, is region locking. This arrangement, designed to allow the movie companies to



segment markets and therefore artificially inflate DVD prices, is nothing short of protectionism. DVDs are encrypted using a Content Scrambling System (CSS), which is ostensibly to protect from copying. However, DVDs can be copied without being decrypted. What CSS does do is make it impossible to play DVDs on 'unauthorised' players, for example, those that use Linux.

All these restrictions on legitimately purchased media seem unfair, and are so. But bypassing them will become illegal even if the purpose of doing so is legitimate. The first prosecution under the anti-circumvention provision of the DMCA was that of Dmitry Sklyarov, a programmer for a Russian software company (Elcomsoft) that makes software which removes copy protection from legitimately purchased eBooks. Mr Sklyarov had come to the US to give a talk at a cryptography conference. The software is legal in his home country. It is ironic that a Russian citizen should be arrested on American soil for the 'crime' of opening access to information, in a way that is legal in Russia. The CSS algorithm for encrypting DVDs was decrypted by hobbyist programmers in 1999. The DMCA has been used, in an obvious violation of free speech, to stop people from even linking to sites that include the decryption program (called DeCSS).

It is easy to blame the power and money of the copyright lobby, for example, the recording and movie industry, for the current anti-consumer and pro-corporate trends in copyright law. But there is probably another reason. Legislators, unused to the new significance that intellectual property law has gained, simply do not understand the implications of the laws that they are passing. Some of the implications are not immediately obvious, and have only manifested themselves as a result of enforcement of the DMCA.

In the short term, the UK implementation of the EUCD must, insofar as this is permitted, be formulated so that it allows circumvention of copy-protection systems for the purpose of public access and fair-use copying. In the long term, politicians of all political slants must be made to understand the bad effects that over-reaching intellectual property protection may have over civil rights and creativity. The EUCD needs to be rewritten to remove the legal protection given to copy-protection measures, or at least make sure that it only applies where the protection is consistent with the limitations of copyright law. And it is important to stop thinking of copyright as a form of 'property', and remember its original intent: to promote the progress of knowledge and learning.

# ALL YOU NEED IS STEALTH

## New government databases are invading privacy from the age of five, warns Terri Dowty of ARCH (Action on Rights for Children in Education)

Back in the 70s, admission to the rocket ship 'Revolution' depended on a bit more than brandishing Rizla papers and Led Zeppelin LPs. It was also de rigueur to own well-thumbed copies of 'Brave New World' and '1984'. Thirty years later, I strongly suspect that a handful of people mistook these books for some kind of Utopian social policy blueprint, blithely sailing on to a career in politics without ever having their misapprehension corrected.

Before you accuse me of 'Crimethink', or even simple paranoia, I can only urge you to take a long, hard look at the fast-growing network of databases designed to measure, supervise and track every aspect of the rising generation's lives, all ingeniously concealed behind apparently innocuous and well-meaning schemes, and ask: "What is this about?"

To begin at the beginning: assuming that a five-year-old has successfully evaded any 'naughty' databases for toddlers displaying criminal tendencies, her first serious database encounter will be with the Pupil Level Annual Schools Census (or PLASC). Actually, that's not strictly accurate: she won't know anything about it, and nor will her parents.

Following one of those increasingly familiar constitutional changes wrought by secondary legislation, the DfES this year began collecting individualised, detailed records of every state-school pupil in England and Wales, courtesy of Capita, whose technology can now simply lift pupil information straight off each school's computer system. The PLASC database will never be deleted. In fact, it will be minced up for feeding to its monster older brother - the Connexions 13-19 database.

To research Connexions is truly to travel the labyrinth. An interlinking network of databases stores information on every conceivable aspect of a teenager's life. Consumer preferences? Sexual experience? Immunisation history? State of parents' marriage? Political views or whether breakfast gets eaten? Look no further: the answers are a mouse-click away.

In the words of the DfES, the 'Connexions Customer Information Service', for the running of which Capita has been given over £100m, is "a comprehensive information system... to support the Connexions Service by monitoring the status and needs of all 13-19 year olds... The key components of the proposed system are a local system to underpin each Connexions Partnership, the feeding of information from Personal Advisers and from local agencies into the CCIS and the

joining-up of the local systems into a national system. "So, in the crow's nest, we have a national database holding 'background information' about every young person in England plus sufficient detail to ensure that she can be properly 'tracked'. This information is gleaned from other government databases and supplemented by each local 'Connexions Partnership' - a plethora of government agencies and commercial interests, overseen by the Learning and Skills Council.

At this local 'Connexions Partnership' level, a more detailed, personal record is held. Each young person is allocated a 'Personal Adviser' (or PA) whose job is to sit at the centre of the web of agencies, 'engage' the young person in order to obtain information, and act as broker between them all.

A PA receives a total of around 17 days training, mainly learning to apply the 'APIR process' - no, not a new colonic irrigation routine, but a way of evaluating a young person's life in 18 specific areas and recording the results on a database accessible to the whole 'partnership'.

PAs are told to obtain written consent for this data sharing, but it does not have to be from parents, who are apparently irrelevant to the consent process. In fact, the PA will be assessing whether they are a 'blockage' or not, but more of that later. Any legal notion that parents have parental responsibility for their under-16s is dispensed with in the blink of an eye. Apparently PAs can rely upon a teenager's 'informed consent', a concept that regularly exercises the minds of doctors, lawyers and social workers, but is seemingly a simple issue for the DfES.

Once obtained, the consent gives blanket permission for all agencies listed in section 120 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 to access the information that the young person gives to the PA. These agencies include the local authority, health authority, Learning and Skills Council, police, probation service, youth offending team and primary care trust. In other words, a young person cannot say to her PA, "Well, OK, you can talk to my social worker about this, but not the LEA."

The basic premise behind the APIR is that a young person's problems are 'barriers to learning' that must be dealt with if she is to function in the 'knowledge economy'. One probably has to read the APIR document to appreciate the full horror of what is actually going on, and I only have space here to offer some edited highlights.

Nevertheless, I would still advise anyone of a gasping disposition to remember the importance of occasional out-breaths.

The first few sections begin predictably enough with 'suggested issues to explore' around a young person's education, skills and ambitions, but gradually the APIR moves into slightly uncomfortable territory. Against what standards of 'personal hygiene' is a young person measured? Who is to say whether a friendship is 'age-inappropriate'? What does 'attitude to authority' really mean? Whose authority?

These pale into insignificance, though, beside sections such as 'emotional well-being', which recommends that the PA, fortified by three weeks of training and a mini-book on cognitive behavioural psychology, 'explores' whether a young person has suicidal thoughts, has been abused, self-harms or has eating disorders. One child psychiatrist to whom I have spoken describes this section as 'trampling over landmines'. It is painful, dangerous territory that should be reserved for those who truly understand just what they are unwrapping, and who have the skills and experience to wrap it back up before the young person ventures out to face the world again.

The PA must also assess the 'capacity of parents/carers' by finding out whether the parents are 'role models' or substance abusers, whether they provide a hygienic, stimulating and encouraging environment coupled with an 'appropriate' diet, 'have aspirations' for their child' and set 'sufficient guidelines and boundaries'. The entire section brings to mind the squeaky-clean family of the 'Mothercare' catalogue, viewed twelve years on.

A journalist was told by a DfES spokesperson that the idea behind the questions is to remove the 'subjectivity'. What can they mean? Are they suggesting that there is an objective standard? Did I blink and miss the introduction of the National Parenting Curriculum?

Putting inappropriate flippancy aside, it is easy to miss a very serious issue tucked away in here. Whether the 'consent' of a young person could be deemed 'informed' or not - in itself a moot point - nobody is asking her parents for their consent to the second-hand gathering of their personal information.

The questions about parents continue in the next section: 'family history and functioning', which suggests that parents' health, education and life experiences are also fair game for the database. All trace of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights - the right to privacy - seems to have vanished.

Before my blood pressure rises so sharply that my son feels forced to bring it to the attention of the Connexions service, I shall move on swiftly to Connexions database number three. Yes, really. There is still the Connexions Card to explain.

At present, the Connexions Card is only for over-16s; presumably the notion of informed consent could not be stretched this far, even by Connexions.

The idea is that every time a student does something 'good', like handing in an essay on time - or turning up at all - he is rewarded with 'points', a kind of electronic doggy-chocolate drop. These points are then traded on the Connexions Card website for 'rewards' such as cinema tickets or a pair of trainers. Pat, pat. Good Boy.

How does a student receive a Connexions Card? Well, he can apply, but as only 175,000 students have done so, falling somewhat short of the 2 million target, it's pretty clear that asking students to opt in isn't working. Instead, Capita offers schools and colleges £1 for each student's name, address and photograph - suggesting it could be part of the enrolment process - and then they will do the rest. 'Incentivise your students and get paid!' chirrups the letter sent to college staff. 'If you have 4,000 students, we will pay you £4,000!' Only when the student receives his card can he choose to just say no.

Tucked in with the card will be a shiny leaflet that boasts: "The Connexions Card is only the first stage of the largest smartcard project in Europe. There is potential to add many other applications and online services." Something like an 'entitlement card', then.

The leaflet also contains the privacy policy, in print so small as to be virtually illegible to anyone but a bluebottle. This mentions in passing that every time the cardholder visits the Connexions Card website, his consumer preferences will be noted from the pages he visits and the resulting consumer profile, together with information about his views and interests gleaned from questionnaires, will be passed on to Capita's commercial partners. The breathtakingly tiny print does assure him, however, that he can opt out of such monitoring.

One young man contacted the DfES to ask if it was true that Capita passed on consumer profiles to other companies, and received a hurt reply informing him that they were only trying to help by making sure that young people were told about goods and services that might interest them. Connexions had 'no intention of passing personal or usage information to commercial companies for their purposes'. Perish the thought!

Although I could go on, that's probably quite enough databases for one article, and certainly enough to explain my gnawing worry that those of us occupied in yelling over the ramparts about e-government, data-sharing and identity cards made one dreadful mistake: we forgot to turn around and notice what was slithering up the back stairs to the nursery.

A few years ago, privacy expert Andre Bacard warned: "If I wanted to create a surveillance society, I would start by creating dossiers on kindergarten children so that the next generation could not comprehend a world without surveillance."

It seems that a politician or two was listening intently.



# FROM THE BOTTOM LEFT HAND CORNER

**Devolution will only work if power is devolved to recognisable regions that people care about. That means a Cornish Assembly, argues Andrew George, Liberal Democrat MP for St Ives**

As a rule, I do not normally seek to take on causes that are assumed to be either hopeless or impossible - particularly where you know very well that you start with the balance of political opinion weighing heavily against you, even amongst the minority who believe that it could be realistic. However, I feel that I have taken on more than my fair share of these, not a wise move for someone who should be seeking to be an upwardly mobile politician.

When I took up the campaign for a Cornish Assembly, this was assumed to be so unrealistic and unachievable that opponents felt that they needed to do little more than respond with a benign smile and a private snigger to dismiss the idea. But, in a recent Parliamentary Written Answer to me, Regions Minister, Nick Raynsford MP, had to admit that the Government had received more responses to the White Paper on Regional Government supporting the case for a Cornish Assembly than had responded from the whole of the rest of the country put together - for or against.

The campaign is certainly rolling. Earlier this year, my Cornish Liberal Democrat Parliamentary colleagues (Matthew Taylor, Paul Tyler, Colin Breed) and I delivered over 50,000 signed sheet declarations in support of a Cornish Assembly - this represents more than 10 per cent of the population of Cornwall and a far higher demonstration of popular support than in any of the Government zones.

Contrary to what many may believe, neither my colleagues nor I are getting involved in this campaign merely because we enjoy every opportunity to challenge the kind of tiresome metropolitan prejudices places like Cornwall too often have to endure, though, I have to admit, it is the cause of some private pleasure.

However, what does not give me pleasure is to witness the now routine, resounding lack of interest and apathy with which the general populace in the remainder of the Government's South West zone respond to the prospect of regional devolution. But, perhaps it is because people see a non-existent and synthetic region created for the purposes of bureaucratic convenience that no one recognises or has any enthusiasm for. And perhaps that's why, in its present form, the Government's policy is undeliverable.

Whereas in Cornwall, news about the campaign for a Cornish Assembly is regularly and prominently reported, most normal folk in the remainder of the

Government's South West zone appear to demonstrate a level of enthusiasm for that 'region' which extends to hardly being able to stifle a yawn at the mere hint of the subject being mentioned. Some are getting so carried away with this that they genuinely believe that public torpor can be interpreted as enthusiasm to set up directly elected bodies with real decision-making powers.

Let me make myself clear, I am an enthusiast for devolution, but a realist that it is unachievable unless offered to places which exist, as opposed to those created for administrative convenience. I also have to admit to being a member of the 'if we ignore them they'll probably go away' brigade, but I hadn't properly accounted for the speed at which the vacuum left by lack of interest is filled by nonsense unless, in the meantime, commonsense prevails.

Indeed, as an enthusiastic decentralist, I often take opportunities to support the Campaign for the English Regions whenever it comes to the House of Commons to promote itself. I remember attending one event to, as gently as possible, point out what was bad in an otherwise good cause. I still get the, perhaps correct, impression that my sighting at these events is as welcome as the Taliban arriving.

We know and are delighted that campaigns for directly elected regional assemblies in the North East, Yorkshire and the North West are well underway and news that others campaigns and conventions are proceeding well is very encouraging. The pressing questions on everyone's mind is usually about when the assemblies could be set up, what powers we can achieve for them and how they would relate to local government, quangos and so on. So it is rightly all very exciting stuff.

But whether the evangelists for the Government's standardised regions are fully astride their high horses on the cusp of history in the making, I have to admit that I feel like the boy who pointed out the emperor has no clothes. I often say that I don't intend to be churlish, but... "What do we do if the Region doesn't actually exist?" The question is usually met with stunned incomprehension. To some zealots it is like asking whether we could redefine the boundaries of God.

I have to acknowledge that the good people of Yorkshire are lucky. The Government defined region happens to more or less coincide with a region with its

own recognisable identity and so it is for others - some to a lesser or possibly greater extent. We do have to ask ourselves whether it is appropriate to destroy a region with a unifying identity (like Cornwall) only to create a synthetic region without one.

In fact, those of us who are concerned about the gathering apathy and low turnouts at election time have a double reason not to give the creation of some of the standardised regions a simple crumb of comfort or encouragement. The pathetically low turnout at some recent elections would surely be eclipsed by reaching new heights of lethargy amongst an unimpressed electorate faced with a bland uniform and characterless region.

Matthew Arnold once said that it is "the desire of a centralised state to render its dominion homogenous" and the fear amongst liberals and democrats is that, if the Labour Government delivers regional government in the same obsessive control-freak style it does in so many other policy areas, it will do little more than replace the bland uniformity of a centralised state with another form of bland uniformity in those regions which have been created out of Government zones. If we are to decentralise some powers away from an over-centralised state, we should do so to places and regions that actually exist, to territories about which people actually give a damn.

The main challenge against proposals like that coming from Cornwall is that it is "too small". Cornwall's population is half a million. The Government's optimum standardised region is supposed to have a population of about ten times that size. Perhaps Britain is becoming too insular in its outlook. If we lift our sights above the (sometimes) narrow horizons of the UK, we only need to look at regions both within Europe and elsewhere to see that regions and provinces vary in size. In Liberal Canada, provinces like Prince Edward Island (pop. 138,000) and Newfoundland (pop. 541,000) all have the same powers as Ontario (pop. 11.5 million).

Where service delivery (such as specialist medical services) requires economies of scale or a large critical mass, then these are easily overcome by sensible and mature co-operation between provinces. Indeed, a recently published academic study ('The Cornish Question: Devolution for the South-West Region' by Mark Sandford) produced by the Constitution Unit of the University College of London confirmed that a Cornish Regional Assembly was "administratively feasible", it also queried the oft repeated claim that Cornwall would not have sufficient "clout" in the corridors of power.

There are some in Cornwall as well as outside who appear to imply that the campaign for a Cornish Assembly is merely a 'Trojan Horse' for narrow separatists and ethnic cleansers. It's a bit tiresome having to continually emphasise that devolution has a clearly liberal democratic as well as disturbingly nationalist potential edge to it.

It is quite true that Cornwall has a distinct Celtic heritage, separate language and a unique constitutional relationship with the Crown, but I and the rest of the supporters both within the Party and the campaign in Cornwall have always emphasised that it is not about seeking to cut Cornwall off - quite the opposite - it's about seeking to cut Cornwall into the celebration of diversity.

Cornwall has much to offer if its distinctiveness were to be recognised. It would open up new horizons rather than shut them down. In fact, the concern many have is that by denying to support Cornwall's case, we will provide fertile ground for nationalist and separatist causes in Cornwall who are eager for the project to fail in order that they can claim that it's all part of an Anglo Saxon conspiracy to deny Cornwall its rights!

The latest claim by Ministers is that, by giving Cornwall the powers of a Regional Assembly, we would "lose the benefits of joining up policies that affect a far wider region - such as economic development - under a directly elected body. As the White Paper says, there will be scope for regional assemblies to organise their activities sub-regionally where they think this would be desirable."

But this presupposes that the creation of a wider zone would add rather than lose the benefits in joining up policies. The example of economic development is interesting, because attempts by the SW Regional Development Agency to discourage Cornwall from establishing its own strong and distinctive brand image and to put its weight behind the more diluted and uncertain image of 'the South West of England' is a classic example of how the inevitable blandness of a policy of administrative convenience results in worse rather than better outcomes.

The creation of a wider area would lose the benefits of the economic development advantages of Cornwall trading on its distinctiveness - part of which would be its unique size! Indeed we could ask what strictly strategic benefit the RDA - indeed any RDA - has achieved so far.

There is also an assumption in the Government's approach that suggests its own defined boundaries present no or little cross-boundary or border issues with regard to strategic transport and other policies. In order to improve strategic transport links into Cornwall, we don't just need to negotiate co-operative arrangements with our neighbours in the Government's South West zone, but in other parts of the country as well. Road, rail, air and sea links don't begin and end in an area bordered by Bournemouth, Swindon and Gloucester.

It is inevitable that these issues would need to be addressed through processes of cross border co-operation and pan-regional strategic dialogue. Further, we would have to question whether proposed sub-regional arrangements would result in greater rather than less internal conflict.

If, as a country, we really do want to devolve decision-making powers to regional tiers of government, then those who seek to do it must not find themselves hooked on the Government's rather intolerant control-freak agenda and recognise that if devolution can only happen where there is clear public support, then it is best for the Government not to resist this.

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Andrew George recently published a book entitled 'A View from the Bottom Left-Hand Corner' - Impressions of a raw recruit through selected Parliamentary Sketches and Essays 1997-2002. Copies of the book are available from Andrew George MP, 1st Floor, Knights' Yard, Belgravia Street, Penzance, TR18 2EL, at a cost of £10.50 including postage & packing.

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# WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE...

## The 'Britain in Europe' pressure group has been hijacked by Blairites and risks losing a Euro referendum campaign, warns Andy Mayer

In the last issue of *Liberator* (283), Nick Clegg MEP asked the question "What sort of Europe do we want?" His answer - a brilliant and cogent case for a Liberal Europe.

Charles Kennedy has meanwhile increased his pre and post-conference attacks on Blair as 'pathetic' and 'contradictory' on British membership of the euro.

Together these themes add to a general strategic thrust to highlight differences between ourselves and Labour in approach to European policy. More nails in the coffin of Ashdown's 'project' and more chance of defining ourselves as a serious party of effective opposition.

However, having praised Nick and Charles to the rafters for their vision, it's about time both began to practise what they preached in relation to the 'project' vehicle for winning over the public to Europe - Britain in Europe.

Britain in Europe is supposed to be just the euro campaign, however it so dominates the landscape, and that issue so dominates the European debate, that it is effectively the pro-European campaign full stop.

The theory of Britain in Europe is good. Given the euro is a cross-party issue and our side tends to contain the saner ends of the three main parties and other key 'opinion formers', why not agree a common position, work together and build a 'historic coalition' to sweep all before us in well organised campaign?

The practice is rather different.

When Ashdown opened his mind to 'the project', he sincerely believed Tony Blair's expressed conviction to unite the centre left. When Lib Dems at a senior level have engaged with Britain in Europe, they appear to have sincerely believed it was something to do with getting Britain into the single currency.

It wasn't. Or rather, that was a rather less important issue for the Blairites in the coalition than removing the European question as a potential source of embarrassment from the 2001 election.

Britain in Europe in 1975 was set up to win a referendum. In 1999 it was set up to get a referendum called, then hijacked to get one postponed. Labour was less likely to win in 2001, it reasoned, if pro-Europeans of integrity were going around accusing the PM of indecision. Telling the truth and hurting Tony's feelings were apparently clear and present dangers in the way that spinning and doing nothing were not.

Indeed, when the former regional campaigns director of the European Movement resigned in late 1999 - then

attacked the PM in the *Spectator* for precisely these reasons - it sparked an extraordinary round of internal Stalinism and blood-letting that was somewhat similar to the New Labour approach to any form of dissent in its own party.

Dozens of documents were leaked to the press and the campaign director was caught out in a BBC documentary about a claim that 8 million jobs were at risk. My particular favourites however were, firstly, when the HQ staff 'lost' literature from the youth wing that dangerously suggested we should 'Join the euro', then a sequence of events accumulated £30,000 in legal fees to expel one activist, who is now a highly successful protagonist for civil liberties.

Most recently, Blairite militants on the executive of the dying embers of the Young European Movement (YEM) attempted a UKIP style unilateral withdrawal from the network of pro-European youth movements (JEF). You just couldn't make it up.

Many people who were involved in the campaign because they happened to think Europe was a pretty good thing, or even more dangerously had 'federal' tendencies, were either excluded, bullied or generally made to feel so worthless that they got bored and left. This pattern should be deeply familiar to anyone who once suffered membership of the Labour party for reasons of principle rather than career.

For my own part, I set up the Euro Information Network (EIN) and yes-campaign.com so that, whatever else the Millbank tendency got up to, it wouldn't have a monopoly on information and communication. We still get one depressing horror story a month from well-meaning activists who just can't believe the control-freakery until they experience it first hand. It is a fairly open secret that the grassroots Liberal Democrats for Europe Group (LDEG) and BiE do not get on. Can you spot LDEG in BiE's latest mailing title "Party groups step up the fight"?

It is therefore quite bizarre that senior Lib Dems like Nick, Charles and even Mark Oaten are quite as supportive of BiE as they are. None are cheerleaders of the Blair project yet all appear to have left their scepticism outside the church door when it comes to what is essentially a Blair project, majority run by Blairites on behalf of Blairites, for the purpose of keeping the euro campaign as under the Blair thumb as possible.



Sure, we have a couple of staff in HQ, we have seats on the Executive and a handful on the Council. But what has this actually achieved? The answer in terms of the only figures that matter, public opinion, is a move backwards. A move backwards, despite spending millions, despite the launch of notes and coins and despite the 'No' campaign being run by people whom BiE regularly decries for being unknowns and extremists.

We are very unlikely win a referendum this parliament and, if we try, we will most probably exclude Britain from the euro for considerably longer than that. Doing this means that, rather than focus on visions for a liberal Europe in the next ten years, it's going to be euro, euro, euro until we bore the British people into voting yes.

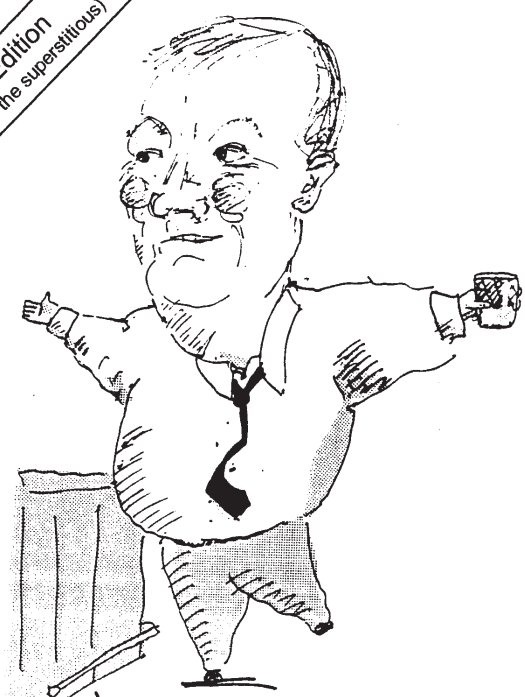
The solution is simple. We need a (small-'l') liberal Britain in Europe. We need to restructure the control freaks, diversify the campaign into many strands and empower the individuals involved rather than hobble them with spin. Our liberal BiE should be led by a non-party figure and focus on winning over the public rather than courting Tony Blair. It should be outward looking, decentralised, democratic and optimistic, like everything positive about Europe. Not introverted, centralised, secretive and defensive, like everything bad.

We should, as Nick suggests, learn from our opponents. Some of the Eurosceptic criticisms are legitimate and Eurosceptic organisation in the campaign makes us look like an oil tanker fending off speedboats. Money will come, when there is a plan that isn't simply an extension of Alistair Campbell's campaign to re-elect the Prime Minister.

We've wasted five years building a campaign around a person rather than a cause. Now the Lib Dems have got into the swing of exposing that person for the vain puffball he is, it's about time we did the same with the machinery he built to fan his ego. Britain in Europe is part of that machinery and propping it up with the diplomatic support of our senior figures is not helping.

You can't truly have a campaign for a liberal Europe when the only vehicle available is a failing parody of the opposite point of view. Will Nick Clegg seize the challenge of changing that organisation?

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than singing

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**The No-Nonsense  
Guide to Democracy  
by Richard Swift  
New  
Internationalist/Verso  
2002 £7.00**

As the title suggests, there is a lot of nonsense in this book, and I suspect the series. But if you want a snapshot of current Trot thinking on a subject, they are probably for you.

The proposition is 'If... with the demise of socialism, democracy is all there is, then fine, lets get down to it'. Swift hales from Canada I think, and Canada features heavily in his book. I think of him chiefly in terms of Green and Third World issues.

The argument is that a political class, largely devoid of ideology, has seized the machinery of government to do the will of their commercial paymasters. There is some justification in that, and Swift isn't fully aware of just how bad Labour is in the UK. Swift sees the problem as stemming from weak democracy, which is bolstered by (and bolsters) property rights, and therefore has progressively abdicated political power to the market - vis globalisation, the WTO etc.

The trouble is, Swift likes strong democracy but realises that it tends to be ephemeral. He doesn't really provide answers in that respect, falling back on the hope that old radicals - the Communist Party in Kerala, India, for example, will see the light and come through. Some hope, and one I'd rather not chance. Swift recognises that local initiatives are most likely to breed success, but seems unaware of the community politics of British Liberals and experiments like that in Tower Hamlets.

Indeed, being on the other side of the pond, Swift shares his continent's ambivalence about Liberals; they can be nice cuddly things to do with human rights, there is even the Radical Party in Italy, but they have this obsession with the market, and that awful 'neo' prefix tends to creep in. Thatcher, essentially a neo-Liberal with a large dose of Conservatism, did not deny the existence of society, she simply pointed out that it is nothing more than the sum total of its individuals. Swift is right, Liberals are not democrats per se.

However, we have not found a machinery of government that is

# REVIEWS

better than democracy, and direct democracy in particular needs the corrective of Liberalism. As to the market, there has never been any doubt that it is the only effective means of determining human wishes, and if you don't like what they wish for, or how they are manipulated, educate them, as Mr Gladstone instructed.

So we have a bit of a curate's egg here. Democracy is not enough, it is only the machinery. It has been tweaked progressively - say to the 1960s in the UK, perhaps regressively since. As Conrad Russell has said, as soon as the Blairites are out, the next government will have to unravel the constitutional mess they'll leave behind them. May it be a Liberal government with a strong agenda and the will to carry it out. Within Swift's book there are one or two gems that might help with that, chiefly in his case studies.

**Stewart Rayment**

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**Private Planet  
by David Cromwell  
Jon Carpenter Books  
Charlbury Oxford OX7  
3PH £12.99**

Independent Green bookseller Jon Carpenter has been based in Charlbury for some time, publishing a fascinating mixture of political tracts with an environmental focus and long out-of-print tomes on the history of West Oxfordshire. Private Planet falls into the former category, in a similar area to No Logo and the George Monbiot book about the effective privatisation of much of the UK.

Written from a green-socialist perspective, we hear detailed once more the many woes of the WTO and other global economic structures, mixed with a digest of the failure of the Blair Government to speak up for individuals,

nationally or internationally. We have seen much of this recently, and the ongoing tension among Liberals on world trade issues gives books in this field added spice.

All well and good - and the first two-thirds of the book makes for an interesting read. The analysis - marginalisation in pursuit of the wrong objectives, such as (topically now, a little after publication) oil in Iraq - is great. The need to transfer political and economic power from the big to the small is a sentiment few Liberals could object to. In terms of a reason to carry on campaigning, indeed, there is little to fault it.

However, Cromwell lacks much in inspiration and answers that could not have otherwise come from existing political solutions or the more imaginative forms of campaigning outlined by Naomi Klein. Also lacking is the mixture of Soros and Schumacher that could lead to a freshly challenging perspective on global trade issues. The constant bombardment of non-conformism that is needed on these issues is welcome - but little is genuine new thinking.

Instead we get a lot of rhetoric and calls to recreate Seattle and Genoa. I hear there are interesting approaches to local municipal service provision in the birthplace of Nirvana, but I doubt that is quite what he meant.

**Gareth Epps**

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**The Natural: the  
misunderstood  
presidency of Bill  
Clinton.**

**by Joe Klein  
Coronet 2002 £7.99**

The arrival in the White House of George W Bush has already cast such a rosy glow over the Clinton

era that, for those of us outside America, the low-key nature of Clinton's record gets overlooked.

Klein makes a persuasive case that Clinton was president at the wrong time. He was a man of outstanding campaigning gifts who could also out-wonk any specialist on the most arcane policy details of any issue, yet his presidency was hampered by scandals arising from his inability to keep his trousers on.

Coming to office as an economic recovery was just starting, he presided over eight years of peace and prosperity during which relatively little happened in the world to disturb or impinge on America.

Clinton, Klein argues, has a substantial and important record, but was never tested. A president with his brains and gifts would have been a good one in a crisis. But the greatest crisis to hit American in modern times came eight months after he left office, and nothing much happened on Clinton's watch.

He came to the White House in 1992 with health care as the one big policy reform on his agenda. Yet he entrusted this to his wife Hilary, who had no obvious track record in the matter and no experience at all of the manoeuvring needed to get this past Congress.



Health reform vanished and, before long, the Democrats lost control of Congress, consigning the rest of Clinton's term to trench warfare with Newt Gingrich's followers. He was helped by Republican ineptitude, which led to the unpopular government shutdown.

This forced Clinton to do something that, according to Klein, he had often talked about on his road to power – to 'win in inches'. From 1994 onwards, the Clinton presidency was a tale of wheeler dealing on Capitol Hill to get small measures through. Important those many of these were, it left his presidency without large achievements to point to as its legacy. The scandals led to a loss of respect, though Clinton remained popular, leaving a presidency that promised much but left little behind.

Klein was a semi-participant and semi-observer at the think tanks around Clinton's wing of the Democratic Party, where the Third Way had its shadowy genesis.

It came from the centre-right of the party, which concluded that it had lost every election since Carter because it had scared away Middle America, but that an agenda that appealed to the middle classes could still be progressive through a raft of small reforms. Collectively, these would make a beneficial impact on the lives of millions of poorer people, without frightening richer ones.

One can easily enough see where Tony Blair got the idea. Klein notes: "In England, Tony Blair successfully



pursued policies quite similar to Clinton's but without the scandals. He was elected prime minister twice, by overwhelming majorities, and yet he was not well loved by the public. His re-election campaign was marked by widespread apathy."

The message is that if politicians are happy to fight and win in inches, they get support in inches too.

There was not enough support to save Clinton's vice-president Al Gore, who fought a wretched campaign in 2000. As Klein points out, Gore's hopelessness as a campaigner is summed up by his failure ever to ask Bush in a televised debate: "Could you remind me governor, just what is it about peace and prosperity that you don't like?"

Peace and prosperity is a record with which most politicians would be happy. Yet it is difficult to disagree with Klein's conclusion that Clinton could and should have had even more substantial achievements to his name.

**Mark Smulian**

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**Does Anybody Love Me?**  
**by Gillian Lobel**  
**illustrated by Rosalind Beardshaw**  
**Lion 2002 £4.99**

Of course they do, not least Rosalind Beardshaw, the illustrator. A handy little book to have around for crisis moments.

**Stewart Rayment**



## Monday

Human memory is a remarkable thing. Many years ago a considerable amount of my property was found in the possession of a chap who had briefly been my butler. Naturally, I resolved to press charges. When the case came to trial, an inventory of the property in question was passed to me, and it included the following: some Marconi share certificates; correspondence between your diarist and Miss Clara Honeybow, the noted actress of the electric cinema; a photograph of said diarist with Violent Bonham-Carter, the East End gangster. After reading it, I suddenly recalled saying to the accused: "I say, old chap, why don't you take some of my papers for safekeeping, what?" and informed the judge that there was therefore no need for this schedule to be read out in open court. Sadly, this thoroughly Liberal concern with justice and fair play was mocked in the following day's newspapers. People can be so unfair.

## Tuesday

I expect that, like me, you were impressed by Menzies Campbell's speech at Brighton – there are few retail newsagents who can play the role of international statesman with such conviction. Perhaps my younger readers were surprised to hear Ming the Merciless (as he is affectionately known by his many friends) refer to himself as "a child of the sixties", but I was not. Attired in headband and velvet loon pants, "Wild Ming Campbell" was a well-known session musician in those days and can be heard playing on many 78s by the leading "beat combos" of the decade. He worked particularly closely with Alan Price – one thinks of the prescient "Simon Hughes and his Amazing Dancing Bear" and of "We gotta get out of third place" – and Susan J. Kramer and the Dakotas. There was even talk of his joining the Led Zeppelin, although in the even the gig was given to John Bonham-Carter. The impressive thing was that Campbell managed to combine this music making with a career as an Olympic sprinter. Indeed, respected commentators have opined that, had he first removed his loon pants, he might well have broken the world record.

## Wednesday

It is disappointing that the public remains obsessed with certain "scandals" long after they have been explained to the satisfaction of all fair-minded observers. Would you believe that I am still the butt of pointed remarks about Marconi shares, even though that was all looked into long ago? My old friend Jeremy Thorpe is similarly afflicted: only the other day there were again stories in the Press about his perfectly innocent friendship with Sir Peter Scott. I did note, however, that these stories involved our current Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, which may solve a mystery that has long puzzled me. I was walking along the shores of Rutland Water with Thorpe and Sir Peter many years ago, when there came a loud quacking form a clump of reeds. Eventually a bespectacled figure with field glasses, notebook and home-knitted scarf was ejected and pursued across the fields by a particularly aggressive mallard. Of course, in those days Straw (if, indeed, it was Straw) was merely the Chairman of Labour Students for an Early Bedtime, but it did look suspiciously like him.

## Thursday

As the Revd Hughes and his congregation well know, I am no miser when it comes to organ donation. The current instrument at St Asquith's is widely admired as a particularly fine erection,

# Lord Bonkers' Diary

even if it does take two people to pump it. However, let me at once make it clear that Evan Harris is not having my spleen (or my pancreas either, for that matter). No doubt you saw the motion he pushed through at Brighton: the gist of it was that as soon as a chap croaks it, the doctors will be free to help themselves to any of his bits they fancy. We all know what will happen next: those bits will be shipped of to Harris's castle in the mountainous country between Oxford and Abingdon; there he will pass several thousand volts through them and attempt to build the world's first artificial research assistant. Well, it won't do. As far as I am

concerned, the sooner the local peasantry seizes flaming brands and rushes to burn his laboratory down, the better.

## Friday

It has been a quiet week at the Hall. Nancy, my elephant, has gone to Burma for a short holiday (apparently the head of the herd was calling far, far away) while Ruttie, as her intimate friends may call the Rutland Water Monster, learned of the discovery of a fossilised dinosaur on the cliffs near Lyme Regis and felt obliged to go to the funeral. Thus I have passed much of my time in the library. I was pleased to read of the result of the Irish referendum; it shows how wise we Liberals are to trust the people: ask them the same question often enough and they will invariably come up with the right answer.

## Saturday

Life is considerably enlivened by the arrival of Earl Russell for dinner – his Big Band is entertained in the servants' hall. Earl's father Bertrand was a frequent house guest in earlier days, and I always judged him Terribly Clever. I recall one dinner in particular: over a particularly fine goose, Russell senior and I discussed our concerns for our old friend Ludwig Wittgenstein (also Terribly Clever but Rather Hard Work). At this point in his career Wittgenstein, believing that he had solved all of philosophy's problems, was spending some time as a larch tree in an Austrian forest; we were rather worried that he would be cut down at Christmas and sent off to market in Linz. I could not help noticing that Russell was accepting rather more than his share of the fowl, and at the end of this conversation I said to Russell: "A short while ago the goose was full of sage. Now, the sage is full of goose." He did not speak to me for weeks afterwards.

## Sunday

Did you see in the newspapers that Saddam Hussein had achieved 100 per cent of the vote in his recent election? Some commentators cast aspersions on the conduct of the poll, but one should not rush to judgement. I used to run courses on political campaigning and the care of the moustache here at the Hall, and the aforementioned Saddam was one of my first and most attentive students. Could it not be that he learned so much from me that he was able to post this impressive score by entirely fair means? After all, I regularly receive 100 per cent of the vote in the Bonkers Hall ward, and no one would call me a tyrant.

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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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