

# *liberator*

## **Blair reveals Weapon Sites**



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Ralph Bancroft, Jonathan Calder,  
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Kiron Reid, Asher Richards,  
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Simon Titley, William Tranby,  
Alex Wilcock, Nick Winch

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# COMMENTARY

## WHERE ARE THE WEAPONS?

For nearly 10 years it has been a constant of British politics that there is no exaggeration, distortion or invention so brazen that Tony Blair will not utter it with, as the occasion demands, a straight face or a smarmy grin.

From the routine massaging of statistics through the broken promises on electoral reform to the vilification of councils for Labour's incompetence on education spending, this is a government whose instinct is to bend the facts for the sake of a good headline.

Most serious of all is the unfolding exposure, as *Liberator* went to press, of Blair's deceit over the Iraq war.

The 'dodgy' dossier was rapidly exposed as a mixture of plagiarism, speculation and fabrication. It now appears that last September's claim that Saddam Hussein could target weapons of mass destruction on the UK within 45 minutes came from the same New Labour tradition of finding a grain of truth and then manipulating it into a bogus edifice to serve its own purposes.

This is not, as some would no doubt hope, ancient history. Thousands of Iraqis were killed, and some British soldiers killed or exposed to heavens knows what long term radiation hazards, to satisfy Blair's folly.

Remember, the claim was not that Saddam happened to have a few weapons of mass destruction, but had built up such a formidable arsenal that war in March was inescapable and Hans Blix's inspection teams could be allowed no more time. This was the sole legal justification for a war unsanctioned by the UN.

No weapons of mass destruction were unleashed by Iraq during the war, and none have been found since. Even the Bush administration has suggested that it knew this and used the issue as an excuse for a war it was determined to fight.

Remember Blair's other pledges. One was that the UN would have the key role in rebuilding Iraq. This has turned out to be such a lie that Clare Short was finally forced into a fight with her conscience that the latter won.

He also pledged that Iraqi oil would be put into a trust for the country's reconstruction. So far, the proceeds available have been earmarked for trousering by firms linked to the American Republicans.

The UK was dragged into a war of highly dubious legality to disarm a regime of weapons that now appear not to exist. Meanwhile the UN has been discredited, and NATO split and the EU weakened.

Iraqis are thankful that Saddam has gone but are unlikely to be pleased that only anarchy has replaced

him as Bush and Blair neglected to think through the consequences of their actions.

The possibility that Labour deceived the country into fighting an unlawful war is about the most serious there could be.

But with this government's record, one has to assume guilt in the absence of proof of innocence.

## FIGHTING BACK

The first volume of Paddy Ashdown's diaries now seems to describe a vanished world, but one passage repays study.

He recounts Robin Cook saying: "A number of us on the moderate left of the party are becoming increasingly concerned that we are abandoning the underclass and our historic mission to work for the poor."

Ashdown warned that were Labour to do that, the excluded would turn to the extreme right.

Both Ashdown and Cook have been proved right to the extent that the BNP has 13 councillors, which is 13 too many but to put it in perspective is less than either the Liberal Party or the Greens.

Since Labour has abandoned the underclass, and hard right-wing voters see the Tories as ineffective, it was perhaps to be expected that the far right would profit.

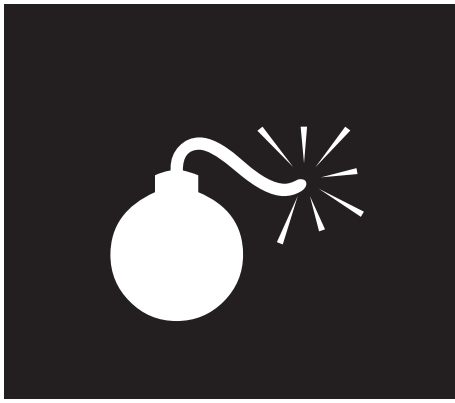
In 1978 Margaret Thatcher's 'swamping' speech drained the electoral poison from the National Front into the more politically effective and socially acceptable Tories, where it was diluted and after which the NF vanished.

That outlet is unlikely to be there this time, so the task of tackling the BNP where it exists falls to the Liberal Democrats. Unpalatable as it may be, while all hardened racists may vote BNP, not all BNP voters are hardened racists. Those that vote BNP because they loathe ethnic minorities are and should be beyond the Liberal Democrats' reach.

But there are those that vote BNP as an unfocused protest, as a 'plague on all your houses' or because 'its time for a change'. Do these reasons for casting a vote sound familiar?

This does not mean the Liberal Democrats should chase racist votes. It does mean recognising the despair in blighted urban areas and making it clear that the causes of this spring not from the presence of ethnic minorities, but from neglect by mainstream politicians who have taken their inhabitants for granted and ignored their needs.

Liberal Democrats who have started the fight back against the BNP in northern cities are to be warmly commended, and it is important that what they have learned is made available to activists elsewhere who face this new threat.



# RADICAL BULLETIN

## SOUND OF SILENCE

As sunny May turns to flaming June, gentle breezes waft across the fields, birds twitter in hedgerows, the drowsy quiet of summer starts to cover the land, and nowhere more so than in the Liberal Democrats.

It is unusual to say the least for Liberator to ask six MPs “what’s going on at the moment” and receive either the reply “nothing”, or else “nothing, in fact so little even Kennedy’s worried about it”.

The party’s strategy appears to have become to let sleeping dogs lie. Behind this seems to be the logic that the local government election results were good, the poll ratings are consistently respectable for a mid-term, so why say or do anything that might annoy anyone when everything appears to be going satisfactorily?

Coast through the fag end of this parliamentary term, shut down for August, hold a conference where nothing much is likely to frighten the horses and hope that the public’s benign attitude towards the party and lack of trust or affection for its rivals somehow carries through to the general election.

Oh, and if a Labour or Tory MP obliges and slips from this mortal coil in a promising seat, so much the better.

This strategy, if it can be called such, can be claimed to work to the extent that the local elections were good and the poll ratings are satisfactory, but there is little to keep the party in the public eye and even less to actively attract support.

The problem with this is that it depends on the Government continuing to fail and lose trust and on the Tories continuing to be useless and irrelevant. If either were to mend their ways, the Liberal Democrats would be in some difficulty.

Take as an example tuition fees. This ought to be a Liberal Democrat issue if ever there was one, with the party having campaigned against them and actually secured their removal in Scotland.

Yet the Tories were able to take it over with barely a murmur of protest from the Liberal Democrats, even though the Tory scheme involves a drastic cut in student numbers.

Or take ‘entitlement cards’ – Labour’s latest move in its project of turning the UK into a police state. The whole assault on civil liberty in progress from the government ought to be an open goal for the Liberal Democrats to put themselves on the side of the public’s liberty.

The idea of everyone being fingerprinted and photographed, put on giant database and charged £25 for the privilege ought to an easy one with which to

stir public outrage, even among the ‘if you’ve done wrong you’ve nothing to fear’ brigade.

Yet the Liberal Democrats made little impact on this, certainly less than did Norman Baker’s crusade campaign against four-wheel drive vehicles.

The problem is not just the ancient complaint about bias in the media or ineffectiveness on the part of the party’s media operations – it is that the Liberal Democrats have failed to be identified with any particular approach to issues and failed to tell any sort of story to the public about the sort of society they wish to create.

That is what has to be done by any party seeking positive support. At the moment, as so often at mid terms, the party is doing quite well out of negative feelings towards the other two parties and seems to see no reason to do anything in particular. This might work long term, but it probably won’t.

This shows in the party’s on/off stance on the Iraq war. This may have been electorally astute in the short term – speak for the anti-war movement, then shut the whole thing down by backing ‘our boys’ in the run-up to the local elections, then reawaken the issue with the row about weapons of mass destruction – but it was hardly a model of consistency. Nor did it seem to be driven by a coherent view of Britain’s place in the world, even though the party did manage to end up for most of time with both its heart and head in roughly the right place.

One small sign that things are starting to move was the flurry of press comment in late May that Charles Kennedy had ordered shadow cabinet members to come up with more concise and appealing ways of explaining party policy.

In particular, he was said to be concerned about the decentralisation policy that is to be the cornerstone of public services provision, as agreed at Brighton last September amid a surprising degree of consensus.

Since the media is rarely preoccupied with the clarity of the Liberal Democrats’ detailed policy, it seems safe to assume that this story was planted from within the party rather than written on any correspondent’s own initiative.

Often, a good way to judge from where a story has emanated is to look at who is quoted in it (except of course in RB). Step forward Vincent Cable and David Laws, the same dynamic duo quoted in stories last year which claimed that health spokesman Evan Harris supported a ‘Stalinist’ approach to the NHS (Liberator 280).

When the public services policy paper was being drawn up, these two were among supporters of a more market-based approach to health provision,

something Harris gleefully told a Brighton fringe meeting had been seen off: "There were heated discussions in the working group. The people who felt we should be more gung-ho about patient choice, rather than equity, may be less than happy with the outcome."

It would be entirely to the good if what is being launched is merely an attempt to set out complex policies in clear terms.

But The Times' version of the story quoted from a speech in favour of greater economic liberalism and use of the private sector in public services that Laws had given to an obscure fringe meeting eight months earlier – a document hardly likely to be instantly at hand in any newsroom. There must be suspicions that 'simplifying' in fact means 'trying to rewrite'.

There is indeed a need to communicate policy in a simpler way, since an inevitable effect of having detailed policy papers written by self-selecting experts is that hardly anyone else can understand the results even if they are inclined to plough through them.

But communicating a clearer message ought to be different from changing the message itself, though some might think it a step forward if the Liberal Democrats were communicating any message beyond a general amiability.

## MOTHS TO THE FLAME

The number of MPs standing down at the next general election continues to grow, as does speculation about their likely successors.

Top of the list is Richmond, where Jenny Tonge's announcement of her retirement was followed within hours by a statement from former London mayoral candidate and local resident Susan Kramer of her interest in the seat.

Down at Eastleigh, David Chidgey is also retiring and there the smart money has been on MEP Chris Huhne, who although he is seeking re-election to the European parliament could of course step aside if elected making way for whoever is next on the list.

Richard Allan's surprise announcement of his retirement, at the age of 37, clears Sheffield Hallam for a new candidate. Here, the name of Nick Clegg, the retiring East Midlands MEP has been mentioned.

Clegg wrote a piece in the Guardian last winter about how he had come to realise that it was only possible to make an impact on British politics from Westminster.

If that piece had been headed 'gizza seat' its intent could not have been much clearer. Clegg has been talked of, not entirely fancifully, as a future leader, but there is the small matter of getting into parliament first.

Down in North Cornwall a battle royal is in progress between Judith Jolley, a former agent backed by retiring MP Paul Tyler, and the former MEP Robin Teverson.

Lastly, for now, is West Devon and Torridge, where John Burnett is standing down.

## STARTING EARLY

Highly placed sources in the party claim that associates of Lembit Opik have been discreetly sounding people out to support a leadership at some indeterminate date.

This is stoutly denied, but the MP for Montgomery does appear to be taking Charles Kennedy as his example, some might think.

Opik has started doing the round of Have I Got News For You and other televisual appearances, and is understood to be thinking of running for president under Navnit Dholakia's term ends next year.

Kennedy established himself as 'chat show Charlie', and then was president in 1990/94.

At this stage the only other semi-declared presidential candidate is Joan Walmsley.

Opik, if indeed he does stand, will no doubt conduct a campaign of irreproachable pleasantness.

In March, he startled the Welsh party by announcing that the Liberal Democrats would indulge in no negative campaigning for the Welsh assembly elections.

This proved awkward in south Wales, where the party does well from laying into the Labour Taffia. Each salvo was, until they grew bored with it, greeted by journalists asking if this was a breach of 'Lembit's Charter'.

## AN ISSUE TO TACKLE

Parliament's notorious naughty words web filter must have had a nervous breakdown, as a further debate on the sexual offences bill in the Lords was e-mailed far and wide. It is reassuring to know that the upper house contains legislators who could, had they lived 800 years ago, have debated with eloquence how many angels could sit on a pinhead. For the full effect, see the parliament website. For a sample, here is what Baroness Noakes rather unfortunately described as "a probing amendment". It read: "Page 32, line 1, leave out 'genitals' and insert 'penis'."

She asked: "Will the minister say precisely what constitutes 'genitals' for the purposes of the Bill? According to my dictionary, 'genitals' means the reproductive organs of men—especially the external organs. That is straightforward, which is why the amendment would replace 'genitals' with 'penis'. I invite the Minister to say what parts of the female body the Government intend to treat as being within Clause 70."

She went on: "I hope that the noble and learned Lord will specifically refer to female breasts. When researching the matter at home I found that the mammary glands, or breasts in common parlance, were classified as reproductive organs—and they are clearly external."

Minister Baroness Blatch replied that women could and did expose themselves, referring to, "a case in my area recently of a woman who deliberately exposed herself in a large picture window overlooking a boys' playing field."

A learned discussion then followed about whether, if the amendment were accepted, a flasher could expose other parts of his genitalia but not his penis. The baroness then rather unfortunately referred to cases of flashing as "the tip of the iceberg".

## THE QUEUE QUESTION

Party members who were left queuing all morning half way round a conference centre at Torbay because of the collapse of the registration desk (Liberator 287) are still waiting for answers as to what happened, who caused it, and what will be done to put things right. A rather anodyne report went to the federal executive, and as Liberator went to press the conference committee had still to consider the matter. Surely a number of things relating to this incident must be put right for Brighton?

# FIGHTING BACK IN BURNLEY

Joan Greene explains why the BNP can only be fought by going back to the foundations of community politics

It is an unpleasant experience to be represented by a British National Party councillor. It is also corrosive when you look round your friends and neighbours and colleagues and wonder which of them went along with the BNP appeal – and why. It is profoundly worrying when you hear, bit by bit, about the prejudices which led them to vote that way.

Why did it happen? There is a tendency to say, with Trevor Phillips, the new Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality speaking to the BBC on election night, that it is not really about racism; it is more a reaction against a badly-run local council with a long record of incompetence. There has, of course, been a long history of incompetence, which has been the despair of the regional Labour Party for many years. There is also an unusual pattern of political history going back at least for 50 years.

Nevertheless, Trevor was wrong. The essential underlying reason for the BNP's vote is racism. One of the reasons why the BNP did well in the outlying villages around Burnley was the summary sentence: "It's the way to keep the Pakis out of Worsthorne.....or Cliviger.....or Briercliffe". That's not a phrase which the BNP would use with its new emphasis on respectability. It was the most important single reason why local people chose the BNP and, of course, there was no repudiation by the BNP of such views.

The BNP vote certainly did not come as a result of their competent political campaigning. Their election address was weak and traditional; they had very little overt campaign. Overwhelmingly, it was a vote against existing parties and the failure of conventional Burnley politics to address real concerns widely held amongst local people.

Part of that problem was the failure to explain the reasons for apparent large-scale investment in predominantly Pakistani areas of the town and failures to deliver comparable results in other areas. The reasons for that investment were, in the main, central Government criteria which concentrated on areas of poverty, unemployment and housing need. Unlike other towns and cities, Burnley has failed to involve local people in assessments and local strategic planning. In Robert Puttnam's phrase, there has been a failure to develop "social capital" or, in an earlier phrase, a working "civic culture".

A more contentious argument is about the comparative degree of separation among Pakistani communities which have operated within and in relation to indigenous politics, but have not become a

seamless and natural part of political and social communities.

Lord Ouseley's report on Bradford, prepared before and published after the 2001 riots spelt out the problem. The reports on Burnley and Oldham after 2001 made similar points. In these towns, Pakistanis, many of whom have felt rejected by local people, have been led by people who have used their apparent block votes to influence the political system without wholly becoming part of it. In my experience, this is more true in these three towns than in neighbouring areas.

Recent political events have not helped. The brief success of an Independent party, mainly derived from people who left Labour after a regional party inquiry into house-lettings, began the process of losing traditional working-class support for a Labour Party which had taken the town for granted.

In the longer term, Labour has had weak local leadership and has been represented by weak Labour MPs. Following the Second World War, Burnley was one of the Pennine towns which saw Liberal-Tory pacts, in this case lasting through to the late 1960s. Neither Party built structures to give them local strength and relied on their traditional votes: nor did the Labour Party ever learn the lessons of competent local campaigning. Unlike the neighbouring borough of Pendle, which has seen intensive three-party campaigns for most of the time since 1972, Burnley has had very little culture of effective political debate and conflict. It has been relatively easy for the BNP to portray itself as the alternative to the whole failed and rotten system.

There are, of course, other reasons which go a long way beyond Burnley. These are the causes of the high BNP vote in other areas, particularly on both sides of the Pennines. The growing disillusion with politics apparent throughout most of the democratic world is part of the background. Many of the BNP's voters really thought that "things would only get better" after 1997 and have not seen an easy, overnight transformation into better services for little more tax. In East Lancashire and West Yorkshire, disillusion is heightened by the presence of an easily identifiable scapegoat community.

The apparent acceptance by many, not least the Home Secretary, of the core Daily Mail argument about "asylum-seekers" is a further factor in giving credence to the worst worries of people who feel that their homes, their jobs and their communities are threatened.

Even more widely, political parties have not engaged with the real feelings among ordinary people about immigration and separate communities.

In fact, the easy answer, which is to talk simplistically about “racism” as unacceptable, has been counter-productive, because it has created frustration and anger among people who feel that they are prevented by that label from talking about issues which worry them. As any employer knows, rumour, misinformation and a willingness to believe the worst are the natural results of a failure to talk about problems.

What is to be done? The answer to the BNP will be crafted at a number of levels. In Burnley and other towns where the BNP has grown, the first answer is a “back to basics” approach to local campaigning. In one of the classic phrases of community politics, it is necessary to “start from where people are”.

It’s also a matter of telling people the facts about the work which councillors are doing and about the choices which a local authority faces, particularly given the ever-increasing constraints of central government, which make it more and more difficult for local government to demonstrate its role and power. The BNP should be shown up at every opportunity as incompetent, ineffective, opportunist and irrelevant to the real issues of the Council.

One of the other early phrases of community politics was that “votes are the result of our work; not the purpose”. The techniques of vote-winning are just that: technical approaches which only have value if they are founded in a coherent set of political principles and views which drive and motivate political action. Campaigners against the BNP need to rediscover their passion not just against the BNP but also for the ideas and ideals of liberalism which are themselves founded in everyday experience and a practical commitment to encourage and involve that which is best in people and communities. We have to fight the battle on the BNP’s ground: we will lose if we avoid or fail to engage with their beliefs and arguments including the ones which people ascribe to them but which they do not admit. We must stand firmly and passionately for our own principles.

It will also require the democratic parties to be willing to prove that democratic politics can hear and respond to people’s worries and needs. That may involve occasional agreements – in the Briercliffe ward of Burnley, there is little doubt that the absence of a no-hope Labour candidate would have enabled the sitting Liberal Democrat, Peter McCann, to hold on to the seat. More importantly, it means that the democratic parties have to show what they have to offer and how their politics can make a difference. Nationally and locally, Conservatives and too often Liberal Democrats aim to gain votes by undermining the governing party. There is a danger that undermining in a way which is too simplistic adds to the disillusion with all of democratic politics.

The BNP has to be shown up for what it is. This is not just about easy and perhaps counter-productive charges of racism. Nor is it about giving credence to the certainly counter-productive antics of the Anti-Nazi League. When I write about “the democratic parties”, I mean just that: parties which have checks and balances, political debate and differences of opinion. In the BNP, the leader, once elected, has power over everything: policy, party, etc. In German, that is the “Führerprinzip” – the leader principle”.

It also means that we should draw attention to some of the more unusual policies of the BNP: one of my favourites is the importance of encouraging British women to have more children; another is an economic policy that would destroy every job in East Lancashire which is dependent on aerospace, now the largest single group of jobs.

It will mean tackling the BNP head-on in the area which is most important for its votes: race, refugees, migration and British residents with brown skins. As a first stage, it will involve democratic parties in talking through and understanding the application of their own principles. Some continental liberal parties have shown the way: in Holland, Sweden and Denmark, liberal parties have set out clear and liberal policies. Most recently, the Swedish party set out a clear and popular manifesto which argued for an increase in immigration with much clearer and more effective policies for the integration of existing and future minority communities. Issues about separation and minimum expectations will be part of that debate. If democratic parties are deterred from that debate by easy but unfounded slurs of racism, the BNP will gain.

Above all, that process will involve a much clearer, firmer and more committed explanation of our basic principles. Apart from race, the other big issue from which the far right is set to make capital is Europe and the UK’s future involvement in the European Union.

In both cases, the political establishment has played around with the ideas while failing to confront directly the fears and worries of an atavistic electorate. Imagine the effect of a lost referendum on an EU constitution with the extreme “no” campaign led by a strident BNP. There has been a failure of political leadership across British politics as parties and leaders have been seduced by the easy blandishments of US-style issue-based campaigning.

Back in Burnley, it is clear that parties will need help. It needs a strong, continuing campaign through the local newspapers, using local radio and above all, through the letter box, in the pubs, on the street corners and on the doorsteps. Above all, it will require a refusal to duck difficult issues and a willingness to engage with the substance of the BNP’s appeal. The challenge is to stop the BNP in its tracks next June and to begin to build a civic and participatory culture which works and involves people in their daily lives. It will not be easy.

# LIB DEMS IN A FOREIGN FIELD

The Liberal Democrats' new foreign policy failed its first serious test during the Iraq war and needs a complete rethink, argues Simon Titley

Liberal Democrat foreign policy is a mess. This much can be discerned from Charles Kennedy's performance before and during the recent Iraq war. Before the war, Kennedy won plaudits both inside and outside the party for taking a clear stand against the war. Once hostilities began, he lapsed into vague waffle about the need to support our boys. Party policy crumbled when put to the test.

Kennedy's inability to sustain a credible line throughout the crisis is a symptom of a deeper malaise. The world has changed and the Liberal Democrats are unsure what to do about it. The party wants a better world but cannot decide how bad human rights abuses must become before intervention is justified.

This Liberal Democrat dilemma was skewered by long-standing Liberal Richard Moore. Writing in the *Spectator* (22 March 2003), he explained why he could not defend the Liberal Democrat party line on the Iraq war. He contrasted the party's support for the intervention in Kosovo (where there was no explicit UN resolution authorising force) with its opposition to intervening in Iraq.

Moore was writing without the benefit of hindsight. You may not agree with him, but he quoted an interesting passage from the Liberal Democrat policy document 'It's About Freedom', approved at the September 2002 party conference:

"It has been clearly if not always effectively recognised that states cannot engage in genocide without incurring intervention by the international community. It is increasingly recognised that gross human-rights abuses within a country can justify at least political and economic sanctions, and in some circumstances military action. The international community is also beginning to develop, with difficulty, the concept of a 'failed state' in which civil order and political structures have broken down, and anarchy is destroying the freedom of millions to the extent that external intervention has to be considered. Freedom, to liberals, is the birthright of individuals, not of states, dictators or warlords."

Comparing this official party policy with subsequent statements by the party leader, we can vaguely make out some sort of position. The Liberal Democrats believe there are some circumstances in which intervention in another state are justified, but Iraq isn't one of them. It isn't precisely clear, however, where any objective line of principle has been drawn.

Similar confusion extends to the other parties, because few of the protagonists either for or against the Iraq war were expressing a cogent position but were instead indulging in gut reactions or political opportunism. The split inside the Labour Party has been well documented. The Conservative position has received less scrutiny. Also in the *Spectator* (29 March 2003) was an article by right-wing commentator Peter Hitchens, in which he portrayed the Iraq war as a "left-wing conflict" and urged Conservatives to have nothing to do with it. "The idea that naked force can create human freedom is itself a left-wing idea."

Thinking about it, he has a point. The quagmires of the First World War and the Vietnam War both started out as high-minded attempts by liberals to defend freedom.

This illustrates the fundamental problem with Liberal Democrat policy. Liberals have got into the habit of grandstanding on foreign affairs issues instead of relating policy more directly to people's interests. The party frames its economic, social and educational policies with the welfare of the British people in mind. Why can't it do the same with foreign policy?

It is not as if such pragmatic considerations contradict any fundamental Liberal principles. For example, the party is quite able to frame its education policies in terms of the welfare of pupils and students, while rooting these policies in its values. It ought to be possible to do the same with foreign policy. The defining of principles and values ought not to be an abstract exercise, but should be motivated by a desire to improve people's quality of life.

Elections are won and lost on the battleground of the middle class's perceptions of its economic welfare. There is perhaps nothing more damaging to people's economic welfare than to have an enemy missile crash through their trendy patio decking. Given that few British people under the age of 65 have any real experience of war, this is nowadays a difficult concept to get across on the doorstep.

The basis of foreign policy formulation should remain long-held values about freedom and dignity. But when it comes to the detail, it is not just about putting these principles into practice, but creating a saleable proposition to which people can relate.

This is not easy. Globalisation has made the construction of a public interest case more difficult. I am old enough to remember when politicians could still employ well-worn metaphors about "being in the same



boat". Economic interdependence has dissolved national boundaries and social fragmentation has radically altered people's perceptions of common interests.

Prevention of war, defence from attack, promotion of trade and cultural exchange, are all things that can be shown to improve our quality of life. And these are shared interests. But there is no point trying to argue a communitarian case to an electorate that is increasingly atomised, individualised and consumer-oriented.

The party should support the principle of international organisations, laws and treaties, as a practical means of resolving disputes and promoting common interests. But it must now argue this case in terms of how it benefits the individual, because touchy-feely political ecumenicalism will no longer wash with an atomised electorate.

The big choice the world now faces is whether to persist with the existing network of international polity, imperfect though it is, or allow the USA to sweep it aside and establish a Pax Americana.

Actually, the choice is America's, since no other country has any choice. No other country besides the USA has the military power to go it alone, and it is in no other country's interests to allow the USA to do so. It is not even a sensible option for the USA. While its military power enables it to project its force anywhere in the world, the USA lacks the 'soft power' capabilities to rebuild failed states, as the ineptitude of the post-war occupation of Iraq rapidly demonstrated. Reliance on overwhelming military force is also ultimately self-defeating, since it tends to promote the hostility it was originally intended to defeat.

The challenge for the rest of the world is therefore how to cajole the USA into participating in international frameworks. It is this question that divides Europe. Blair and Aznar see the solution in uncritical alliance, while Chirac and Schröder believe the answer lies in building the EU into a countervailing force.

Where do the Liberal Democrats stand? My guess is that most would opt for the Chirac option. But this view tends to be coloured by a personal distaste for the Bush administration. Such views would not have been held so forcefully if Al Gore were in the White House. The question is whether the USA and Europe are set on irrevocably divergent paths or whether this is a just a phase we're going through.

While the USA and Europe share some broad objectives in terms of security and democratic culture, they have come increasingly into conflict on a variety of issues that pre-date, and are unrelated to, the Iraq war. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, there has been a string of major trade disputes. There have been serious attempts by the US to sabotage European self-reliance, such as opposition to the Galileo satellite positioning system, and attempts to undermine Airbus. The US also uses its 'Eschelon' satellite surveillance system to steal European industrial secrets for the benefit of American corporations. These US policies harm European economies, businesses and people's welfare. Why do our politicians not say so, instead of presenting these issues in abstract terms?

The big issue that will divide Europe and America is the dollar versus the euro. 70% of the world's international trade is denominated in US dollars, forcing all the world's governments and major companies to keep significant holdings in dollars. Each

dollar they own is effectively a loan of one dollar to the US government. It is this massive international interest-free loan to the US that enables America to run up a national debt of nearly four trillion dollars and sustain record levels of consumer debt.

But what if, as seems likely, increasing amounts of international trade are denominated in euros? America once supported the EU as a way of making Europe no longer dependent on the USA. Now, there is little wonder that America's conservatives are increasingly hostile to the European project.

Will relationships with America continue to deteriorate? The answer lies in demographics. Conservatism now dominates the American political scene and 'liberal' is accepted as a dirty word, but some argue this will change. Richard Florida, in his recent book 'The Rise of the Creative Class', showed how those American cities that offer a tolerant environment for ethnic minorities and gays (and thus a more attractive place to live for creative types) have more successful economies than conservative intolerant cities. A more 'liberal' culture will therefore predominate because it is more successful economically.

Set against this argument are the increasingly different age profiles of Europe and America. In Western Europe, the birth rate is in freefall and the population is becoming older. Advertising agency Young & Rubicam points out that most people's tastes are fixed by the time they are 35, therefore they are more resistant to change and impervious to marketing for new brands and products. The USA is projected to have a growing and younger population. Imagine a world in which aggressive American corporations are frustrated, because they cannot sell their innovative products in Europe, because our ageing population is more difficult to influence. America will have a problem with 'Old Europe', but not the way Donald Rumsfeld meant it. The current American campaign to force Europeans to eat GMOs may be just a taste of things to come.

Whichever scenario turns out to be true, there is much that should be done to build links with liberals in the USA and provide fraternal support. Liberal International has no significant American participation and there are not even any significant informal relationships between British Liberal Democrats and potential allies in the USA. These bridges must be built, whatever else happens.

We imagine America is difficult to influence, yet it is a society where the public sphere is often weak and a few dollars would make a lot of difference. For example, few things would benefit our interests more than to pile money into BBC America, the fledgling outpost in American cable TV and public radio.

The Liberal Democrats are an internationalist party but support for the principle of international organisations and law does not mean they must accept these uncritically. Reform is needed. For example, the UN cannot hold to the sanctity of the 'internal affairs' of each state when as many as fifty of the world's 200 states are 'failed'.

Nor is there any excuse for an uncritical attitude to the EU. You can believe the EU is a good thing, yet still recognise that it is centralised and bureaucratic. Recent ill-informed debate on the EU constitution was an opportunity for Liberals to say something distinctive,

about how this was a chance to devolve many competencies, in line with Liberal belief in devolution.

The failure to sustain popular enthusiasm within Britain for the European Union cannot be blamed entirely on the right-wing press. The quality of political discourse has been elitist and divorced from everyday concerns. There has simply not been a sustained, down-to-earth promotion of the concrete benefits brought to Britain by the EU, in terms of regional aid, infrastructure and jobs.

Liberal ideals and electoral pragmatism are not necessarily polar opposites. Those who imagine they are betray a remarkable lack of political self-confidence. When it comes to deciding foreign policy, an idealistic case and enlightened self-interested can coincide. Those who support democracy and prosperity help our interests and are our friends. Those who undermine us or harm their own people are our enemies.

Put more personally, if the actions of a foreign government affect your local constituency by causing job losses, business closures, pollution or floods of refugees, then you're looking at not just an enemy but an illiberal government.

A principled position can be pragmatic. The Liberal Democrats could do worse than adopt these basic precepts:

- Start with an assessment of real threats to our welfare and real opportunities to promote our welfare. You'd be amazed how often confronting the first and exploiting the second are in line with Liberal principles.
- Club together with other countries so far as we have shared interests, particularly when we cannot achieve goals by ourselves.
- Judge the USA by its behaviour, rather than knee-jerk support or opposition. Is it supporting us or undermining us? React accordingly.

- Accept that intervening in foreign countries is a judgement call. It's a matter of weighing up the potential benefits, disadvantages and possible consequences. It doesn't necessarily mean war.
- Oppose the cultural relativism that says it is OK for other countries to carry out human rights abuses, because it's "their culture".
- Accept that providing clean water and sanitation throughout the third world is a more cost-effective option than confronting the hostile outcomes of poverty and resentment.
- Promote cultural exchange and understanding, in particular through learning foreign languages.
- Invest heavily in promotion of British culture, through media such as the BBC World Service, BBC America and the British Council.
- Relate each of the above points to a vigorous domestic political case for defending and promoting our interests.
- Adopt a more self-confident tone. Be proud and assertive. Don't apologise for being pro-European.

A new foreign policy would retain at its heart enduring liberal values. But it would promote our internationalism in terms with which the voters can relate. And it should be rigorous enough to withstand the next international crisis. Gesture politics is fine when the only decision you have to make is whether to participate in a demonstration. It's an inadequate response by a supposedly mature party to a real crisis.

## Liberal Democrats Youth and Students will be celebrating ***100 Years of Young Liberals***

The ball will take place at the Under Globe at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre on

***Saturday, 12 July 2003, 7.30pm - 11.00pm***

***Tickets are available for £25 including a light buffet and entertainment from the LDYS Office***

**LDYS 4 Cowley Street London SW1P 3NB 020 7227 1387**

**ldysadmin@libdems.org.uk**

**We welcome all those who have been involved in the youth organisation of the party since 1903! This includes all current members.**

# MY GENERATION

## The student politicians of 25 years ago are now in power, but have they made anything better, asks Paul Nettleton

Twenty-five years on it seems right this month to drive up north from London to celebrate a homecoming at Leicester University and bring memories of my student days flooding back.

Hold on a minute, though. I'm reminded daily of those late 1970s days when everything seemed possible if only you could wear a badge to demand it. For I have reached the point where people I was a student with are, give or take a year or two, running the country and are therefore in my face (and yours) every day on TV or in the newspapers.

So has my generation made things better? No, I thought not. And if not, why not?

Well, it's hardly surprising given that our government is in the hands of the generation of Broad Left hacks who made such a success of running the National Union of Students that its travel company went bust and its insurance company had to be sold off.

The dearth of imagination that typified their defence of students' living standards is now reflected in their own attacks on today's generation of Mac-jobbed unfortunates - saddled as they are with even more crippling debt than we managed ever to run up in the union bar.

In these days of Friends Reunited let's also remember our foes of that time: stand up Charles Clarke and Jack Straw to name but two. Stand up too, those somewhat younger Blairite babes who sallied straight from higher education into the Palace of Varieties, with the occasional brief dalliance in scribbling for the broadsheets or in the voluntary sector, but checked in their independence of thought at the Westminster gates.

Do they have no memory of the sacrifices their, and my, parents made to fork out their contribution (the very first top up loans) to enable us to survive on the grant? Do they not understand the irresponsibility of saddling each succeeding generation with increasing debt at the outset of their working lives?

Is it no wonder we're all up to our eyeballs in extra borrowing in the low wage, high tax, high price, UK Financial Services plc economy that values astrophysicists when they work in the City but not when they eke out a living in our universities?

Government ministers are not alone in their hypocrisy. Just look at the groupies.

There's Sue Slipman, the Tankie turned Social Democrat turned wealthy lobbyist for Camelot. David Aaronovitch, Tankie turned BBC political editor turned Blair-groupie with a picture byline. Or take Trevor Phillips, yet another socialist hack who sends his kids to public schools.

No surprise given the state of state education in London. If the Tories had managed a four-day week for schools these people would have had a field day in

opposition: why is the present opposition letting them get away with it in office?

What choice for the ethnic minorities Phillips supposedly champions in his job at the Commission for Racial Equality? Well, they too are voting with their feet for independent schools, or faith schools, or playing the admission and selection systems for all they're worth, just like Tony's cronies. The only "bog standard" comprehensives are the ones most other kids attend.

Does the lack of a direct hit on New Labour for its abject failure in education (as in so much of the domestic agenda, please don't get me started on the Home Office) arise because liberals or Liberal Democrats feel uncertain at defending so-called privilege in education?

Well, who can suppress their smile at the memory of "sociology degrees: please take one" graffiti next to the paper rolls in the Social Science faculty toilets?

Sad fact though is that the expansion of "higher" education has arguably been at the expense of those qualities and disciplines that made it just that. You get what you pay for, of course, and as ever we've tried to do it on the cheap. That doesn't excuse making students take the jobs no-one - except asylum seekers - wants in order to pay their way.

We're putting our young people on a treadmill at school and they don't get off until it's time to grab that gap year or, worse, until they fall off with mental breakdowns.

Blair spoke of education, education, education. In our schools the creed is test, test, test. What's missing is teach, teach, teach or nurture, nurture, nurture as staff arrive and depart from our classrooms according to the validity of their return ticket to the Antipodes.

Homecoming beckons, and with it the chance to look up old friends and hear about their families. Oh and to catch up on latest developments in Leicester - especially at the mini-lecture on the costs and benefits of a university education today.

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Paul Nettleton has a third class BA, works for a national newspaper and has children at state and (much to his own surprise) independent secondary schools

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# TRAVELLING IN HOPE

A new report on migration from the Demos think tank says Europe should be more capable and confident about handling the challenges presented by growing mobility. Ellie Clarke wonders if it charts a way of getting there

Among the diverse opinions on the state of asylum policy, one thing is absolutely clear – no one is happy with the way the system is working at the moment. Even those of us who would go to the barricades to defend the right of asylum are deeply critical and unhappy about the way the situation is works in practice.

However, I suspect the feature that alarms everybody – whether they read the Guardian or the Sun - is the sense that the situation is out of control.

Nothing the government has said or pledged to try to manage the situation has any resonance with the public – they can see the reasons for flight on their TV and know how easy it is to travel and arrive in the UK. Despite the best efforts of several campaigning organisations, the case for anything other than the most badly damaged asylum seekers to live here has not been made, nor has the case that migration provides opportunities for the host nation.

Successive legislation has done nothing to make the situation better in any way – measures taken to remove the alleged ‘pull factors’ to the UK have helped very little – except to make life tougher and more difficult for vulnerable asylum seekers. The recent election of some BNP councillors is indicative of some elements of the public mood.

The debate and the whole asylum system has got hopelessly muddled in the government’s and public’s eyes around access to jobs and opportunities and protection from persecution.

The two concepts are not mutually exclusive – refugees want to build new lives for themselves and need access to jobs and education to do so – but their access to the UK is on the grounds of persecution under the 1951 Convention agreement. Opportunities to come to the UK for work or to ‘have a better life’ are extremely limited with the exception of certain categories of skilled workers. Hence the misuse of the asylum system.

So where do we start to untangle this mess and take a longer term view than the next election? Attempts to manage the system more effectively have failed. Victimising asylum seekers or more long-term draconian measures such as detention on arrival are the government’s solution to convincing the public things are under control.

A public debate would be helpful, but how to have this on a sensible playing field feels like a hideously

difficult issue without being accused of racism. There needs to be some way forwards from here that does have a broad range of public consent otherwise the opportunity for rightwing parties to offer their brand of ‘solution’ becomes immense.

Demos, an independent thinktank, has offered a document for discussion which may offer a way forwards. ‘People Flow: Managing migration in a New European Commonwealth’ argues that migration is a catalyst that presents challenges across a much wider range of public issues, and requires new forms of societal innovation – including, the renewal of national democracies, the radical reform of welfare systems and the founding of a new European Commonwealth.

The basic Demos premise is that Europe can cope with high levels of migration without closing its doors. Their analysis of the current situation is logically solid - immigration is an increasingly visible and explosive issue and a rallying point for increasingly complex global and security issues. It is directly connected in the public mind with other issues of wealth, work, welfare, security and identity and therefore a focus for deep currents of hope and fear.

Governments have to show that they have the issue of migration and asylum under control. However, control is expensive, whether that control is an effective barrier at the port or the effective screening of potential applicants. If legal entry is too difficult, then illegal or clandestine entry possibly by criminal gangs through people smuggling is the inevitable outcome and with it abuse of the asylum system.

Demos argues that the way migration flows are handled needs to change radically in the next generation. The dilemma is that it is more necessary but less feasible than ever before. There is growing concern about the sustainability of European prosperity and wealth coupled – after September 11 - with the fear of violence spilling into Europe from other parts of the world.

The report is in two parts – a new way of managing migration and the societal changes that will need to be made to see that work effectively.

Demos is proposing a system of International Transit Centres to manage migration, which would act as a ‘voluntary catchement’ mechanism for forced and unregistered migrants who are heading towards Europe.

They argue that migrants would be attracted to use the ITCs by the offer of help and support in making choices about their future. They would not necessarily help with travel to Europe but also encourage them to consider a return to their country.

This idea is clearly similar to the Home Office proposal to have transit centres in zones outside EC countries, but the Demos proposal goes further by offering positive incentives to register into one of four categories – visitor, worker, sponsored resident or refugee - and opt into the system, therefore cutting down the illegality of people smuggling and the potential for rootless drifting and suffering if aspirations of asylum or work are not met. The incentive to claim refugee status as a way of gaining access rather than for protection is massively reduced therefore maintaining the integrity of the asylum process.

Demos argues that the migrant's support should be paid for through loans or payment in kind, therefore removing the expectation of universal welfare support in Europe. This would formalise the remittance system where families pool resources in the hope of receiving money from overseas which funds their economic development.

However, while this is a considerably more managed and humane system, it cannot and will not be foolproof and we should not expect it to be. There will always be a trade in getting people through barriers. As Demos rightly point out, control of borders is pretty illusory and not an effective security strategy. The criminals and terrorists whom we should most fear are the least deterred by passports and borders.

The second half of the document, called 'A New European Commonwealth: beyond the fortress' introduces a number of ideas about founding a new European commonwealth and replacement of the welfare state with a system that supports people without offering 'cradle to the grave' security.

Funding and settlement ideas are also discussed for 'non self-reliant newcomers' and school management policies for focussing on practical efforts to respond to diversity.

This section is interesting and well considered, although probably the more controversial part of the document. It is difficult to see how existing poor communities will welcome newcomers when their perception is that the system already does not work for them.

Demos makes the point that the differences in the availability of welfare benefits to migrants and existing residents can greatly reduce the emotional acceptance of newcomers when perceived as unfair. Such perceptions are a significant barrier to the successful integration of immigrants into European societies. However, despite Demos' emphasis on migrants being or becoming self reliant, its proposals still require funding to travel with diversity, potentially, with little guarantee of regeneration for the whole community.

Demos says "many Europeans implicitly resist such change because it threatens aspects of life that we hold dear. Migration touches the shifting sands on which our identities are grounded. The steady arrival of new people with unfamiliar habits and alien faiths in our cities and on our streets provides the most dramatic focus for our anxieties about the ways in which the world is changing. This alienation is probably the single most sensitive factor preventing politicians from

adopting a pragmatic, innovative approach to migration. To do so in the current atmosphere of international crisis, division and insecurity may seem impossible".

And in this last sentence lies the fundamental truth of this document. In a document stuffed with ideas, the 'realistic how' is missing. There are some interesting ideas around settlement and using funding to support integration. But there seems to be an almost unbridgeable – and unexamined – chasm between how we get from where we are to where we want to be.

I'm not going to be critical of a document full of blue sky thinking for not having instant solutions, but there does need to be some discussion and thought about the near future and some practical attempts to respond to diversity and deprivation. They suggest using institutions to change public perceptions of the migration debate and European identity, again useful and on their timescale of a generation or two, probably more manageable than it seems at first reading.

Changing public perceptions is notoriously difficult - how we overcome people's sense of loss of identity or fear of loss of economic stability is a huge issue that is not addressed satisfactorily. Demos may be working on the assumption that the younger generations value the diversity that migration will bring in a way that older generations do not. This may be right, but I would also be concerned that the massive failure in alleviating deprivation and poverty in many parts of the UK could seriously undermine that assumption.

By any economic indicators we are a wealthy country, but the levels of deprivation in some parts of the UK mean that some local communities do struggle to accept that concept.

There must also be an implicit assumption when reading this that the UK has introduced identity/entitlement cards. It is difficult to see how any such reform of the welfare system can be managed without them. How far this undermines many of the ideas of this document for Liberals and how far its 'enabling' aspirations go towards mediating that natural Liberal hostility towards an identity/entitlement card is an issue that we need to think about and balance effectively.

This document will also alarm the Eurosceptics across all political parties. There are huge explicit and implicit assumptions about the increased role of Europe and harmonisation of systems. No doubt Liberals will welcome some of these, in particular the development of regions.

There is no doubt that managing the migration process effectively should be political imperative. A Europe where potential migrants have the dignity of a system that treats their aspirations with respect and does not leave them destitute whether they need protection or want access is the least a modern democracy should offer.

This first part of the document is very useful and offers a real alternative to the – at best shambolic, at worst cruel – system we have today. The second needs some serious discussion that aspires to public debate.

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People Flow: Managing migration in a New European Commonwealth is published by Demos and openDemocracy.

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# ASYLUM MYTHS

## Siamak Goudarzi says that the public would be sympathetic towards asylum seekers without the barrage of negative media coverage

Public opinion in a liberal democratic society is apparently fundamental. It is the public who can elect and re-elect the governments. They pay taxes and expect services and protection in return, and the more tax they pay the better services they demand from their representatives.

States try hard to allay public anxiety by addressing their concerns to gain their trust. Regarding asylum, the public play the extra role as the host society for asylum seekers. In a 'coiled spring' society that promotes multiculturalism and diversity, efforts need to be made not only to grease the integration machine but also to prevent racial tensions.

Public reaction to refugees and asylum seekers coming to this country depends largely on what they see and hear from the government and the media.

Asylum seeking understandably seems to be sensitive for the public as it is seen as something that could limit their resources or threaten their safety in particular with regard to welfare, accommodation, employment and health.

The host community may not like their taxes to be spent on the welfare of those who abuse their national welfare system by benefit shopping. Its members may be concerned about shortages of employment if others take their jobs. They may not want their health treatments delayed because of the need to serve others and finally they may not feel safe living close to those whom they do not know.

These are the issues which the public are concerned about despite the fact that some might believe them to be commonly circulating myths.

There are other elements of asylum that the public do not care about that much, not because they are not important but possibly because they cannot directly do anything about them.

These are either aspects that do not affect their life directly, or they feel they are out of the range of their expertise, or more importantly they feel that the government is fulfilling its responsibilities.

Among these are international and regional obligations towards asylum seekers, the impact of asylum on national security, the positive contribution of asylum seekers and immigrants to the economy, attracting skilled and non-skilled people for the labour market through the asylum process, making the decision on who is eligible for asylum, border control, rights and obligations of asylum seekers, deportation of

asylum seekers, detention centres, and finally integration of asylum seekers into the society.

The direction from which different groups look into the debate is constantly affected by factors like awareness, backgrounds, current domestic and international events, economy, and media coverage.

The public get most of its messages about asylum from the media plus what they observe here and there in the country - massive accommodation centres, detention centres, benefits paid to some asylum seekers and more importantly the huge amount of money spent to run the asylum system.

These together are shaping part of the picture. The rest of the picture is not as clear, either because it is not shown to the public in the same way by the media or the public itself is not as concerned.

The public may not be so interested in the government's international and regional obligations towards asylum as they are in their resources.

They may not appreciate the positive contribution of asylum seekers and immigrants to the economy, as they are concerned about the massive accommodation centres.

Also they may not be that concerned about the process of making the decision about who is eligible for asylum, the issues of border control, rights and obligations of asylum seekers, deportation, detention, and the integration of asylum seekers in the society as they are about the few asylum seekers involved in crime.

The responsibility of considering the whole picture, defining the most important aspects of asylum at any time and dealing with it accordingly, falls on the shoulders of the government.

It has also to fulfil its responsibility to update the public with the latest developments on asylum policy and to address its priorities; but the media seems not to be interested in this matter.

This could account for the gap in awareness of some the facts that matter critically for the government.

In this respect, some people believe that there needs to be a better link between academic theory and policy solutions, especially on such an emotive political issue, where macro decisions are common. There is also a need for a public debate to prevent the populist use of immigration issues by politicians.

Findings demonstrate that academic scholarship can be enlightening and research can draw a better picture of asylum for the public.

For instance, research has shown that refugees have made a great contribution to the UK in the last 450 years, despite often negative government and popular hostility.

As Sarah Spencer, of the Human Rights Programme at the Institute of Public Policy Research, has said: “The lesson of history is that immigrants and refugees can bring significant benefits, economic and cultural. While public debate on this issue is yet again dominated by proposed legislation to impose even tighter restrictions, it is a lesson that appears to have been lost.”

Government figures revealed a record number of asylum seekers and their families, 110,700 came to Britain last year 20 per cent more than 12 months ago, costing the government £3.5bn, while according to a Home Office study, migrants -including asylum seekers - actually contributed £2.5bn in taxes in 1999/00.

Regarding foreign workers as an economic asset, a Home Office study shows that people born outside the UK (including refugees and asylum seekers) are significant contributors to the economy. It is estimated that they pay 10 per cent more into the Treasury than they take out: around £2.6bn in 2000. Research has also repeatedly shown that a high proportion of refugees in the UK are highly qualified, successful individuals, exceeding the standards of the general British population.

Research by MORI on public attitudes towards asylum seekers and refugees, has concluded that the public's attitudes are, in many aspects, positive. The British public would be more likely to be positive than negative towards asylum seekers in their community, with a small percentage being willing to get actively involved in campaigning for their rights.

Others have shown from their studies that this is not the case if you ask asylum seekers.

They indicated in the Refugee Council's 1997 research 'Credit to the Nation', when interviewed about the negative climate for them in Britain, that they felt that public ignorance, rather than lack of sympathy, was the main barrier to a better perception of refugees.

A Sudanese woman said: “The word refugee is a label. As soon as you say the word, you put a bad picture in someone's mind. There is confusion about who is genuine and who isn't. People think you come here just to claim benefits but they don't see we had better lives at home. We had jobs, status, qualifications which aren't recognized here.”

Instead of asking why people come to the UK, and why they do not go to neighbouring countries, we should ask why they had to leave their countries, their families and their homes.

Refugees are still people with choices, even if these choices are often limited.

On the other hand, the public's perception of how the media treats asylum seekers is more negative. The phrase most associated with media reporting of asylum issues is 'illegal immigrant'.

This is a phrase that in January 2002 the Advertising Standards Authority found to be racist, offensive and misleading, as asylum seekers are not in the UK illegally. Reports in the media of refugees 'flooding' into the UK, and Britain being an 'asylum haven', may have contributed to the public's over-estimation of Britain's role in receiving refugees (and perhaps contributed to the increase in the proportion of people saying that refugees seek asylum for economic reasons).

Further MORI research suggests that: “In line with the more positive than negative reception towards refugees, the public would themselves want to be treated fairly if they were seeking asylum in another country.”

Finally the study relates the attitudes to awareness and education by arguing that, compared with the population as a whole, 15-18 year olds do display more negative attitudes towards asylum seekers and refugees in several respects.

However, it may be that they are simply less well informed on issues surrounding asylum in the UK, and the study also shows that it often the less well educated groups who are more negative.

# WHEN WE HAVE ENOUGH

## William Tranby reconsiders the arguments for a zero growth economy and the impact this might have on the pensions for the next generation

My memory is not that good these days, but I recall watching the TV coverage of a Liberal Party Assembly during the 1970s to witness an intriguing economics debate where the two protagonists were Eric Avebury and John Pardoe.

The different views being expressed were, on the one hand, the orthodox belief that continuing modest growth in the economy was both achievable and desirable, and on the other, the fleetingly fashionable argument that Liberals should embrace a zero growth economy.

John Pardoe won the argument for orthodoxy on the day, and the rest as they say is history. In many ways the views being expressed by the zero growth supporters predicted the development of green politics well before the Greens emerged from the Ecology Party, and indeed before the Ecology Party emerged from the People's Party.

Perhaps is now time for Liberals to consider again the idea of a zero-growth economy. As I recall it, (and forgive my memory if I got the wrong end of the stick in my youth), Eric Avebury was arguing the case for the Government not to actively seek any growth in the economy. The goal of economic activity should be to sustain only what we had already, or to replace it when it wore out. The objective was for a replacement economy, rather than one fed on increasing consumption.

It presupposed that in order to deal with the more glaring inequalities of wealth, such as the inadequate housing, education and health care suffered by poor communities, the state would need to intervene and tackle relative poverty in a genuinely redistributable manner. But it was argued that the Government should not be pursuing policies which stimulated growth for growth's sake. Encouraging unfettered capitalism was regarded as a danger to the common wealth of the community.

Thirty years on and we see around us the results of the Thatcher revolution followed by New Labour's courtship of big business. The overt and vulgar consumption of the aspiring middle classes of the 1980's might now be toned down a bit, and Blair and Brown might finally be trying to tackle the issues of relative poverty (although the administrations in Scotland and Wales, with plenty of prompting from the Liberal Democrats, are doing much better on that score), but the presumptions behind economic thinking

remain the same: to target for modest and sustained growth over the longer term.

What are the down sides to this presumption?

Firstly, we are finding it increasingly difficult to target for growth while pretending it has no effect on the environment. Pollution levels in some forms are being tackled, but the targets for CO2 emissions are only about future levels falling back to where they were a few years before (when they were already wrecking the planet), not about actual reductions that would make a difference. Real reductions require real cuts in consumption, because for some types of economic activity renewables might not be available.

Secondly, the presumption about growth in our economic thinking also has a bizarre effect on our psychological outlook too. Whenever we are told by the economists that we are in a recession, a depression, or indeed, a slump, it is because the measured outputs of economic activity in one, two, or three economic quarters have fallen behind what they were before. This leads to doom and gloom, even though the actual measured outputs are significantly higher than what they were during an economic boom ten years earlier. Given that the population of the country has only risen gently over a decade, how come one set of output statistics are called a boom and another, higher, set are called a recession?

Part of the difference is of course the rise in productivity of the workforce, in that the higher output measures achieved in a so called recession can still mean rising levels of unemployment and the psychological <sup>3</sup>depression<sup>2</sup> that this entails.

The effect of a national policy based on the presumption of sustained economic growth, is that when this is temporarily not achieved, companies shed even more staff to maintain their profits on the back of more modest sales, and the Government does what it can to prompt spending and therefore the growth required to get people back into work.

But ultimately demands are made on people. As companies shed workers those that remain are expected to increase their workloads. As the economy moves out of recession the workers who were kept in employment throughout the downturn are then expected to maintain that higher level of efficiency to contribute to increasing company profitability.



The effect of this is the increasing degree of burn out for workers in all walks of life. While some are happy to compensate their more stressful lives by the increasing consumption their wage packets can deliver, others are forced to turn to medical help or continue to lead dysfunctional lives.

Some people make life style choices to get out of the rat race altogether, and others more modestly choose to work less and consume less. This trend is still not enough to make a significant difference to the orthodoxy of moderate and sustained economic growth. So Gordon Brown can sleep easy for the present.

But what if it became fashionable for 'less to be the new more'? What if significant numbers of our citizens made lifestyle choices to pursue goals other than steadily increasing consumption year on year?

With many people deciding not to have children, the need to work harder to provide for the growing family disappears. With many more people living alone and with single households predicted to become the norm within the decade, some types of consumption might actually drop. The prospect of a replacement economy might become realistic. It might also be the case that if the country actively pursues its environmental targets for reducing pollution in different forms, this will only increase the trend of the economy to show a downward turn when measured in a traditional way.

The impact of EU directives to put a limit on working hours, and the need for employers to seriously consider requests from workers to go part time and consider their work-life balance, are all going to contribute to a change in our working culture. Our friends in Europe already enjoy shorter working weeks than we do. And to follow suit is surely going to be more attractive than following the work and consumption culture of the Americans?

Gordon Brown of course is proud of the fact that the UK economy demonstrates better growth figures than in the rest of Europe, and will use this as a further block to the country joining the Euro. But a further advantage from joining the Euro and from adopting their employment practices is that we can start to enjoy a more civilised approach to work and consider quality of life issues rather than pursue the frenzy of achieving growth targets which can only make us more unhealthy.

However, even if we do achieve the benefits of a slower growth or replacement economy as I have described; and with it a better chance for the environment, and the possibility of better mental health

for our citizens; there is still a massive problem for Liberals to consider in such a scenario.

Even if we had less, or at least steady, consumption in the economy, there will still be a hope that medical improvements will continue to lengthen our lives, and a continuing and universal belief that all our citizens deserve a long and fulfilled retirement.

For the economy to support a growing number of retired people with a decent standard of living, the remaining adults in work will need to work harder to achieve higher outputs, based on higher consumption. Otherwise there would be lower profits produced by companies for shareholders, and consequentially slower growth in share values on which pension schemes rely to sustain the lifestyles of those in retirement.

If those in work say "we have enough", and if Governments like ours in Britain actively pursue environmental policies which flatten consumption levels, it might be a sorry tale for those relying on a growth economy to maintain their pension entitlements.

This ultimately is the nettle to be grasped. If we aim to achieve a healthier work-life balance and aim to reduce the impact of economic activity on our environment, we will have to find a different way to fund the pensions for the next generation.

The Government is already thinking about forcing people to save for their own retirement to minimise the burden on the future taxpayer of maintaining an ever increasing elderly population. Isn't it about time that someone came clean and said personal taxes will have to rise too, to fund the gap?

# GLADSTONE'S 100

## Iain Sharpe looks at a new collection of essays to mark the centenary of the death of Gladstone

This volume of essays has its origins in the papers delivered at the Gladstone Centenary Conference at Chester College in 1998. The emphasis of the collection is mainly on the latter part of Gladstone's career from 1868.

The collection is book-ended by an introduction from one of the editors, tracing Gladstone's treatment at the hands of historians in the century since his death and a very useful bibliographical essay from the other.

In my view the best essays in the collection are those by Jonathan Parry on Gladstone's first administration; David Brooks on his fourth; D. George Boyce on Gladstone's attitude towards the Irish Unionists; and Eugenio Biagini on Gladstone and Empire.

The strength of Parry's chapter is in its insight into the divisions within Gladstone's cabinet, showing these to be more interesting and complex than just Whigs against Radicals.

Parry sees the themes of the administration as fourfold: improving legislation, such as education and licensing reform; democratic reform; Ireland and economy. The first two provoked divisions in the Liberal Party about the desirability of extending state activity and democracy. Irish policy ran aground on opposition in Ireland and Britain alike to the Irish University Bill. This led Gladstone to focus on the drive for economy, culminating in his bouncing the party into an unsuccessful attempt to win re-election on a promise of abolishing income tax.

The author stresses the importance of the Franco-Prussian war in undermining the drive to cut military spending and increasing suspicion that extending state activity in Britain might lead to continental-style autocracy. He concludes by arguing that the experience of his first administration led to Gladstone focusing, by the time of his return to power in 1880, not on specific legislative proposals but on a general set of personal values, with which people could identify.

David Brooks offers a partial rehabilitation of Gladstone's fourth and final ministry, pointing out the achievement of passing a Home Rule Bill through the House of Commons, with a small and heterogeneous majority, which included not just the Liberals but also the Irish party divided between Parnellites and anti-Parnellites. He also dwells at length on the 1894 Local Government Act, which was the one key legislative success of the administration, creating a network of parish councils.

At the same time, Brooks points out the problems caused by Gladstone's aloof and high-handed leadership style and how much the administration lost as a result of the death in 1891 of Lord Granville, described here as a sort of Willie Whitelaw figure of the first three Gladstone administrations.

D. George Boyce offers valuable insight into Gladstone's relationship with the Unionists of Ireland. Some historians have seen Gladstone as failing to understand or take seriously Unionist concerns, regarding this as a blind spot in his dealing with Ireland.

Boyce challenges this view and outlines Gladstone's vision of an Ireland where the Protestant aristocracy once again played a leading role in the country's affairs under a home rule parliament. He believed that Ireland's problems came from the abdication of responsibility by the natural, aristocratic, leaders of Ireland, following the 1801 Act of Union and that Home Rule would restore them to a rightful position 'in the front rank of the nation'.

Although this does not really absolve Gladstone of being impervious to the concerns of unionists of Ulster, it heavily qualifies the view that Gladstone was blind to the position of Irish Unionists.

Eugenio Biagini, writing on the imperial policies of Gladstone's second administration, stresses Gladstone's intellectual debt to Burke, not just in advocating colonial self-government, but also in stressing the need for order and respect for property. In doing so, he provides an interesting explanation of the 1882 invasion of Egypt, often seen as a departure from Gladstone's professed principles. In Biagini's analysis, Gladstone's view of the situation in Egypt can be likened to Burke's attitude to revolutionary France.

The apparent breakdown in law and order and the failure of the nationalist government in Egypt to show fiscal responsibility meant that British rule was necessary until such time as the Egyptians could be deemed fit to govern themselves: just as Burke had believed that counter-revolution was necessary in France in the 1790s. These are by no means the only highlights of the book. Eric Evans and Anthony Howe demonstrate Gladstone's debts to Peel and Cobden respectively, while Chris Wrigley gives an interesting insight into the use made of Gladstone's reputation by Liberal leaders. He shows how Asquithians contrasted the Grand Old Man's high-mindedness with Lloyd George's trickery to bolster their claim to be the true keepers of the Liberal faith after the split of 1916.

Overall, however, this is an excellent volume, which is to be commended to all who are interested in Gladstone and in late nineteenth-century Liberalism. Far from being a mere celebration of the nineteenth century's pre-eminent British statesmen, it offers much in the way of new insight and challenges to established wisdom.

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Gladstone Centenary Essay. Edited by David Bebbington and Roger Swift. Liverpool University Press £15.95 (paperback)

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# CITIZEN KANE

## A Trotskyist's success in Scotland leads Bernard Salmon to wonder whether the Liberal Democrats are diverse enough

It's probably escaped most people's attention south of the border, but there's a new star in the north.

In the few short weeks she's been a member of the Scottish Parliament, Rosie Kane has made more impact than many of her colleagues did during the whole of the last Parliament.

She became an instant media star merely by scribbling 'My oath is to the people' on her hand during her swearing-in as an MSP, in protest at the requirement to swear allegiance to the Queen.

Just as importantly, she attended the ceremony wearing - of all things - a pair of jeans and a fairly low-cut top. Many male parliamentarians and the largely male Holyrood press corps were unsure whether to ogle, be shocked or just ignore it.

Unfortunately from a liberal point of view, Citizen Kane, as she's been dubbed by the media, is a member of the Scottish Socialist Party. The substance of her politics consists largely of the sort of gesture politics shown at the swearing in ceremony. Like the rest of her party, she inhabits a Trotskyite fantasy land.

But what sets Rosie apart is that she looks and sounds like an ordinary human being, not a politician. Dammit, she is an ordinary human being. At the time of the Scottish election, her home telephone was apparently only accepting incoming calls, because she hadn't paid the bill. She claims to have read only five books in her entire life. She used to be intensely shy, almost agoraphobic, and initially found it hard to speak in public.

She first got involved in politics as a result of getting involved in motorway protests in Glasgow, before helping found the SSP. But although she's come a long way since then, she is still recognisably that rare creature in politics, an ordinary person.

The question which arises from this is whether the Liberal Democrats need to think about the way we look and sound. Do we all too often just seem like just another bunch of politicians, a species which many people seem to regard as having arrived from another planet?

In fairness, we are sometimes good at putting across our case clearly and directly, in a way which people can easily understand. A good example was our opposition to the war in Iraq, although the effect was somewhat undermined by our more muted message when the fighting actually started, which seemed to confuse quite a lot of people.

However, I think it is fair to say that the Liberal Democrats are overwhelmingly dominated by people who are white, male, graduates and professionals.

For instance, of the 64 people listed as PPCs on the party's website at the start of June - an absurdly low number at this stage of a Parliament, but never mind that - no less than 48 were graduates, with the

remaining 16 either being non-graduates or with insufficient information provided to determine the question. Of the 48 graduates, no less than 12 were from Oxbridge.

Only 20 of the PPCs are women, just one is a member of a visible ethnic minority and just one can reasonably be described as not coming from a professional background, although there was again insufficient information on some to be able to judge.

I also looked at the make-up of the 17 people elected as Lib Dem MSPs by 1 May. Of these, 13 were graduates (three Oxbridge), just two were women and none were from ethnic minorities. Five could be described as coming from a non-professional background, although a few of these are best seen as having had a mixture of professional and non-professional occupations.

The question has to be asked whether we mainly serve the interests of white, male, graduate, professionals; whether we couch our message in a way which mainly appeals to such people; and whether as a result the appeal of liberal values and policies is limited for people who don't fit that kind of profile. That could be one possible explanation as to why liberals have made so few breakthroughs at a parliamentary level in inner-city and industrial areas. If it is the case that this lack of diversity is holding the party back, then what can be done about it? First of all, the problem needs to be debated and understood. While there may be some who claim that all this does not matter and that what matters is a person's commitment to liberal values or otherwise, I think they are wrong. We may be ignoring a whole horde of people who could be very effective spokespeople for liberal values and policies by appearing to be the political wing of the chattering classes. Secondly, there needs to be a commitment at all levels of the party to tackle the problem, from local parties through to the Federal Executive.

Duties should be put on local parties to have someone in place with responsibility for increasing the diversity of our members, and especially our candidates. And the Federal Executive should adopt a monitoring role to ensure that this is happening.

Thirdly, and crucially, funding programmes must be put in place to ensure that the work necessary actually happens. I also think it would be reasonable for campaign funding to be denied to local parties which cannot show they are taking active steps to increase the diversity of their candidates.

There are some local parties which already do this kind of work, as well as a few Lib Dem parliamentarians who do seem to have the gift of communicating with people easily, in a non-patronising way. But if the party decides to take the issue really seriously, it can certainly reap real dividends. Before too long, we'll have a few Citizen Kanes of our own.

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## BLAIR BUSHED

*Dear Liberator,*

Hurrah for the Liberator Collective, who alone as far as my experience goes, have grasped the implications of the Iraqi war (Liberator 287).

In Liberal fashion I have tried to understand why some people, even Liberal democrats, have been in favour of the war. I have been unable to detect either principle or logic in their stance.

It does not help them that the whole war was based on deception and lies.

The avoidance of UN opinion-testing, the 'embedding' of media correspondents so that the propaganda may be more easily distorted, the misuse and abuse of terms like 'coalition', 'France' and the dossier of evidence, and now the behaviour of US leaders in the aftermath, are duplicitous.

Bremner, Bird and Fortune have shown this up more clearly than anyone.

I have completely failed to understand how support can have switched from anti- to pro- once the way got underway. I suppose that, if I see the school bully about to smash the face of a smaller kid, I should point out that he would be doing wrong. If he ignores me and goes ahead, should I then congratulate him on a thorough job done within three weeks and with minimum collateral damage?

How does something morally wrong become right through force majeure?

Yes, the Saddam Hussein regime was evil and needed to be deposed. This now an ex-post facto justification. And it was weapons of mass destruction and the threat to other nations, coupled with the invention of connections between the regime and Al-Qaida.

But if regime change is to be decided by people outwith the regime's subjects it should be an international decision, not left to the vengeful whim of the nation that has the most weapons of mass destruction.

Most of the media have gone along with this. Well, if you are British and a Liberal Democrat, you realise that a lot of 'news' is what the media choose to feature and how vested interests present it, like the trap of 'Kennedy will not

# LETTERS

support our troops', into which we as a party fell.

Why Tony Blair has been sucked into this vortex is hard to understand. Is he really expecting us to believe that the world will be a safer place now that decisions about good or bad regimes, and declarations of war, are taken by a coterie of bellicose, oil-fired, self-righteous thugs?

Ironic is it not that one of the term of abuse levelled at the French and Germans, is 'old Europe'.

In reality it is the Americans that are espousing an old outlook: brute force on anyone whom you dislike. Attempts were made during the twentieth century to move to more civilised ways of sorting things out.

The UN is the agency for this task, yet the twenty-first century has begun with an American reversion, backed by Britain, to the law of the jungle.

My opinion remains that the most dangerous man in the world is not Saddam Hussein, or even Osama bin Laden, but George W Bush.

*Alan Bailey  
Portsmouth*

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## BACK INTO EUROPE

*Dear Liberator,*

In Radical Bulletin (Liberator 287) you say of any possible improvement in relations between the Liberals and Liberal democrats, "the Liberal Party's anti-EU stance might be a problem, but since it was only adopted on a 26-24 vote at its assembly it is hardly the settled view of its members".

Indeed, that stance was considerably changed at the 2002 assembly by a motion which, while acknowledging long term aspirations for a 'Commonwealth of Europe' took as its starting point, "whilst being fully aware of the shortcomings and failings of the European Union as presently constituted, assembly nevertheless

believes that the EU still represents the best available vehicle for Europe cooperation and stability".

An amendment urging the party to campaign for UK withdrawal from the EU was emphatically rejected.

At the same assembly relations between Liberals and Liberal Democrats improved considerably when Birmingham Liberal Democrat council group leader John Hemming was an extremely well received guest speaker.

*Mike Oborski  
President, Liberal Party*

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## NOT IN OFFICE

*Dear Liberator,*

Many thanks for your hosting the fringe meeting at Torbay which arose from meetings between members of the Liberal and Liberal Democrat parties (Liberator 287). It is always good for liberals to have discussions with each other and no point in disagreeing just for the sake of it.

The discussions are also better if they are about issues rather than on "characters" who may be found in all political parties. Those in discussion share the concern that the case for liberalism is not being made.

In true liberal style may I raise two points of order. 1) I am the treasurer not chair of the Liberal Party. 2) The informal talks are between individuals in each party rather than office-holders from each party.

*Rob Wheway  
Treasurer, Liberal Party*

**Within These Walls -  
Memoirs of a Death  
House Chaplain  
by Rev Carroll Pickett  
Vision Paperbacks**

It has been a long time since I read a book that had tears flowing down my face just about every time I picked it up. I would like this simple short book to be required reading for any person interested in the death penalty or indeed simply the penal system.

Within These Walls consists of the memoirs of the Rev Carroll Pickett, who was the chaplain at Huntsville Prison, Texas for over 20 years.

During his term there, the death penalty was re-introduced in 1982 and so the task of being a companion to those spending their last day on this earth fell to him. In all, he attended the state-sponsored murder of almost 100 convicted murderers.

The book is a simple calm recounting of his experiences with these men, some cruel and unrepentant, others reformed and remorseful for the crimes that they had committed and the terrible tragedies that they had inflicted on the loved ones of those whom they had murdered.

There are also the stories of those whom he was convinced were innocent and those who due to mental illness should never have been on death row. He kept his own personal opinion that the death penalty was wrong secret during his entire ministry at the prison, feeling that if it were known, it would negatively affect his ability to be a compassionate source of support and human comfort to these men on their dying day.

It was when the rate of execution picked up, so that he had to officiate at two executions in the one day and he could not avoid feeling that he had become part of an assembly line of death, that he finally tendered his resignation.

Then and only then did he start expressing publicly his deeply held view that what was taking place was wrong. It made no sense to him that the state was trying to convey to the public that killing was wrong by becoming a killer itself.

But this is a valuable book, not only for its gentle recounting of these terrible last hours but also for the passing references in the stories

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to the other aspects of day-to-day prison life. Rape, murder, suicide and brutal violence were common occurrences within those walls. As the stories emerging from British prisons demonstrate, we know that we too have a huge challenge to ensure that the civilised standards that we expect in a democracy are experienced by those whose freedom we take away.

Prison reform is a core liberal issue and I regret that no Liberal Democrat parliamentarian has yet been able to establish a high national profile as an advocate on the issue.

David Blunkett has not given any indication that he is willing to face up to his responsibilities on this issue as he seeks to increase incarceration yet further. Unfortunately liberalism seems to be a dirty word for him, just as it is for the Republican right that supports the death penalty in the United States.

Since Texas re-introduced the death penalty for murder, many other states have followed suit. It is enlightening to note that in the 12 that have resisted its return capital offences have reduced by nearly 20 per cent, but none of those which restored the death penalty have seen such a decrease, indeed the opposite has happened in most of them.

It was when I read this, that I came to the dreadful realisation that it was the same awful flawed philosophy that had been applied to capital murder in Texas, that was now being applied to international terrorism by a former

governor of Texas, George W Bush, a man who had personally authorised many of the executions that Carroll Pickett witnessed.

You do not stamp out murder by killing those convicted of murder. It simply does not work and has never worked. But more importantly you do not stamp out terrorism by invading countries and killing thousands of enemy soldiers.

It did not work in Northern Ireland, so why should it work in relation to Islamic terrorists? The world's nightmare is that it is someone who has completely failed to understand the barbarism and futility of the death penalty and who is now in charge of the most powerful military force ever seen on this planet, leads on our response to September 11. The question is can liberalism and we as liberals rise to the challenge that this crisis now faces us with?

*Donnachadh McCarthy*



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## **Growing Old Disgracefully** by Alan Lakey **Firefly 2002 £20**

At last, the definitive story of the Pretty Things, the band that is the parallel universe of British rock music.

They were there in 1964 as a louder, hairier more threatening version of the Rolling Stones, and had a handful of middling hit singles. In 1967 they created SF Sorrow, the first psychedelic rock opera, preceding the Who's Tommy by several months. Their greatest commercial success came with their blandest music in the mid-1970s. By 1980 they were already a retro attraction.

Remarkably, they are still here. Their occasional forays on stage nowadays feature the intact 1966 line-up, memorably described in this book as looking like a bunch of old lags out on parole for a gangland funeral.

They won respect but never made much money. In an age of bands manufactured on television 'talent' shows, there is something oddly touching about a bunch of men all nearing 60 and still searching for another hit record.

*Mark Smulian*

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## **The Madness of George Dubya** **Arts Theatre, London**

They say satire is dead on the London stage. That's not quite true since some of the most pointed satire going can be seen any night of the week in comedy clubs. But with more than a third of west end theatres given over to tourist-pleasing musicals, satire has been driven into the back streets.

This play is satire done as high farce, and is obviously updated as events unfold. It is essentially a remake of Dr Strangelove for our times, with a subplot about a transvestite bomber crew.

A Bush figure, clad in pyjamas and clutching a cuddly toy, spends much of the play comatose while around him a deranged general orders a nuclear strike on Iraq from a base in Yorkshire.

The Blair character, summoned away from the more pressing purchase of two flats in Bristol to

deal with the crisis, is played as an oily, cringing lightweight, out of his depth and at the end of his tether. Salvation arrives in the shape of a suicide bomber posing as a domestic cleaner, who forces the two leaders to put the world to rights as the price of revealing the secret code to recall the bombers.

Amid the humour the play gets over the serious points about the Iraq with perhaps too light a touch until the 'Iraqi ambassador' is summoned to see Blair at the end.

This character's enraged tirade against western interference in Iraq over the past 100 years sets out the case that Saddam Hussein did not just appear from nowhere, but was the product of a country never allowed to develop its own body politic. There is an uncomfortable moment when the ambassador tries to justify the invasion of Kuwait, which may be a realistic representation of what an Iraqi ambassador would say, but must, or ought, to have detracted from the audience's sympathy.

The Madness of George Dubya manages to be both very funny and very serious, even if the events depicted are not very believable.

Perhaps the least credible is when the Blair character sends British troops to seize the American base whose commanders have gone mad. I can't imagine the real Blair committing such an act of lese-majeste.

*Mark Smulian*

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## **Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order** by Robert Kagan **Atlantic Books London 2003**

In January 1998 Bill Clinton received a letter from the recently-formed Project for the New American Century. It claimed the policy of containing Iraq was not working and should be replaced by the removal of Saddam Hussein from power. Just over five years later that recommendation has now become fact. And if we don't like it, we'd better get used to it, as a new book tells us.

Among the letter's signatories were the future Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and his deputy, Paul Wolfowitz. Alongside them was

Robert Kagan, a former State Department official, whose new book, Paradise and Power, has shot him to prominence with his explanation and analysis of American power.

Kagan offers a timely insight into the intellectual thinking of the neo-conservatives running the Bush Administration's foreign policy. He argues the United States has not changed direction in its foreign policy since 11 September; rather, it is pursuing a course of a rift that has opened up between itself and Europe since the end of the Cold War and which occurred under Clinton, although less perceptibly so.

American and European perspectives differ as a result of the positions they are in; whereas both America and Europe are both economically strong, Europe lacks the military power that the US has. In other words the US is capable of using a variety of different tools in its foreign policy toolbox, resorting to military force if it has to, while Europe relies on the art of diplomacy and negotiation.

But this doesn't mean European 'soft power' will win out over American military might. Indeed, Kagan argues there are few limits on American power. During the 1990s European military spending grew from \$150b to \$180b; America, meanwhile, was spending \$280b and is expected to rise to \$400b. Economic trends suggest the American economy may grow from roughly the same size as Europe's today to almost double by 2050.

Furthermore, European diplomacy and negotiation won't work beyond the 'liberal West', asserts Kagan. North Korea, Iran, Syria and Cuba cannot be tackled in the same way. Instead a degree of double standard is required, with European preferences used among those countries that make up the West, but alternative methods used outside.

With the current state of affairs set to continue, Kagan offers little alternative to the prospect of the beginning of a long-term American hegemony. Europeans may try to increase their military capability by increasing their defence budgets or creating an EU defence force, but they will remain marginal players at best. Yet for Kagan there is a silver lining for Europe: America, far from being a sinister behemoth, offers the

prospect of a benevolent power whose national interests include a liberal Europe. For Kagan this is best reflected in the fact that both sides share a set of common liberal values which can be traced back to the Enlightenment.

And yet despite Kagan's assurances, from a European viewpoint his conclusions remain strangely unsettling. If the future if the image of an America running rampant and constrained by no-one, what prospect does this offer the wider world? It is hard to imagine a vision other than one in which regimes in 'rogue states' are toppled one by one by Washington and replaced with others more favourable to American interests. All this may be very well if you follow Kagan's logic. But by focusing on what America and Europe want, he fails to tackle what should be done when people in those countries refuse to accept American-imposed governments.

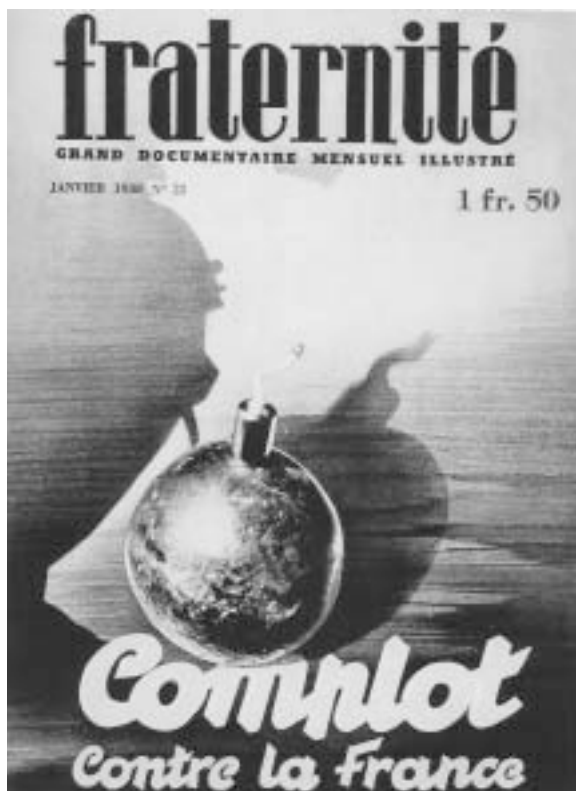
Just as Iraq offered a clear cleavage between America and Europe over the application of power, it would appear divisions are opening up between Washington on one hand and the aims and aspirations of the Iraqi populace on the other. While Kagan argues the future of the international relations is an increasingly dominant America that can do what it likes, this is an issue neo-conservatives such as Kagan and others in the Bush Administration might like to consider before they plan their next big adventure.

Guy Burton

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## Human Therefore Political by Rob Wheway The Liberal Institute 2002 £3.50

With concern about voter apathy in the UK rightly at all-time highs, it's welcome to see a second Liberal Institute publication putting forward, from first principles, possibilities for re-engaging interest and activity in local politics. It's also impressive that it was issued, and again distributed via *Liberator*, so quickly after the first, his "Political Access Broadcasting: Engaging the



Electorate", which I reviewed in *Liberator* 282.

At the heart of this pamphlet is the thesis that people are naturally, and very largely unselfishly, agreement-makers who co-operate to work out solutions. (It will be interesting to see the success or otherwise of this on various local government coalitions formed since 1 May 2003, including for example the one on Derby City Council.) Also included are arguments around the largely Thatcherite evolution of the citizen-as-consumer, which, he states, "did not empower citizens, but centralised power in the hands of the few, because it encouraged people to criticise providers of services rather than question the basis on which [local] government was being run". (I would have found some attempt at definitions of "new right" and indeed "new left" helpful at this point.)

On the way, we visit Pericles' view of the citizen as being one who cares for and takes forward public affairs, with useful if fleeting critiques of Milton Friedman, Leon Brittan, academics writing on local government, management gurus, and the limitations of any "market" model of politics.

All the arguments are cogently explored, and it is hard to disagree with his thesis that people need to be treated as citizens (people who "have the right to take part in the decision making processes or forum

of (their) community" rather than as consumers of public services) in order fully to be them.

The pamphlet is well presented, with a higher standard of proofreading than its predecessor - though lapses do creep in, notably the misspelling of "Foreword" on the inside front page. A strength of the writing is that points are illustrated by practical, readily recognisable everyday examples: family supplies, sports clubs, agreements by children in the playground on the rules of the game, social occasions run by voluntary groups, to name just a few.

This material deserves a wide audience just like its sister pamphlet; I intend to send a copy to my New Labour MP - and, of course, Mr Nannygoat Blair.

Kate Smith

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Available from 024 7671 4784  
or [rob@wheway.demon.co.uk](mailto:rob@wheway.demon.co.uk)

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## Front Page, covers of the 20th Century text by Stéphane Duperray & Raphaël Vidaling Weidenfeld & Nicolson 2003 £20.00

Is what it says, though perhaps the 'long twentieth century' appropriate to the changes in graphic print technology. The French authors give us a Gallic twist, making the titles covered more international than perhaps an English or American author would have chosen, commencing with the 1930s *Minotaure*, a surrealist magazine from France.

As we pass into a new century, I note that old Fascist magazines are included for their aesthetic rather than to denigrate them, though being quite clear about their political failings. In the last half of the 20th century, too many were still mesmerised by our Communist ally of the war, neglecting that they were (and are where still in power) every bit as bad. *Fraternité* was a French communist magazine.

Sadly no *Liberator* covers are included; perhaps more of the collective should study this book.

Stewart Rayment

## Monday

Did you read those reports about the cull of hedgehogs in the Outer Hebrides? It seems that our spiked friends are in the habit of tucking in to the eggs of rare seabirds, with the result that there is hardly a wheway to be found from one end of North Uist to the other. I went up to Lochmaddy for some sport, but found myself feeling sorry for the little chaps and, in a moment of weakness, offered them asylum at the Hall. They arrived the other day (pace the *Daily Mail*, there were no Albabians in pantomime hedgehog costumes amongst them), and I have to admit that I am finding them Rather Hard Work. It is not that they are infested with fleas: so are a number of Liberal Democrat activists of my acquaintance. No, what troubles me is that they are intensely religious and expect me and join them in singing psalms in Gaelic at the drop of a hat. And as to their views on keeping the sabbath: I shall merely say that they make Nanny sound like a libertine. Meadowcroft, however, will not hear a word against them. Not only do they eat slugs, they have joined the Wee Free Liberal who meet in his potting shed. I can here them singing there as I write.

## Tuesday

Early morning at Market Haborough station: I arrive on the Bonkers Hall branch and wait for the London train. A figure in an anorak catches my eye: as a goods train clanks north, he excitedly writes in a notebook before unwrapping a packet of sandwiches and treating himself to a cup of coffee from his thermos. Just as I am considering engaging him in discussion about the finer points of A4 Pacifics and dropping a few hints about how welcome a cup of coffee would be, a helicopter appears overhead. Suddenly the fellow is seized from all sides by armed policemen and frog-marched off the platform. "It's Guantanamo Bay for you, sunshine," sneers a constable. Such an intrusion upon our civil liberties is not to be borne, and I spend the journey to Town drafting a letter to The Times. My only consolation is that the poor fellow dropped his thermos in the m el e.

## Wednesday

I read in the *Manchester Guardian* that Norman Baker wants to ban parents from taking their children to school in landrovers and such like vehicles. I have an instinctive sympathy with him: one sees so much oil wasted when there are many other ways of generating energy (wave power, Malachy Dromgoogle's roof, an orphan on a treadmill...). So I telephone Baker to learn more about his idea. "Each district council," he enthuses, "will appoint a travel-to-school commissioner to inspect all vehicles. He or she will consider their environmental sustainability and age appropriateness, and award a certificate to any that pass." I can see that it might make work for graduates from some of our newer universities, but I cannot see it going down well with the voters. If I were Baker, I would concentrate my campaigning on Tibet and the reopening of the Lewes to Uckfield railway line – both subjects upon which he is acknowledged as an international authority.

## Thursday

All Liberals will wish bon voyage to the European mission to Mars, if only because it reminds us of the glory days of the Bird

# Lord Bonkers' Diary

of Liberty and the intrepid David Chidgey. Informed sources in Brussels tell me that the idea behind the latest rocket ship is to see, once and for all, whether there is life on the red planet. If there is, the astronauts, euronauts, blignauts or whatever they call themselves will persuade the little green men to implement the European Underwear Directive and, in return, we shall subsidise their agriculture and ensure that any cucumbers they grow are of suitable shape. Incidentally, what do you make of this new constitution up to which we are all supposed to sign? (Good grammar, what?) Bill Newton-Dunn (best

known as the hero of one of Betjeman's best-loved poems) assures me that the notion of our sending a tribute of twenty youths and maidens to Strasburg every year was agreed to by Mrs Thatcher when she agreed to the Single European Act, but that hardly strikes me as a consolation.

## Friday

David Rendel rows me out to one of the islands on Rutland Water. Having watched Lembit  pik's young lady in the jungle, I am considering making a programme here for Rutland Television. The idea is that you maroon a lot of people and make them eat beetles, wrestle hippopotami and so forth. One thing I have noticed is that slow bowlers are particularly popular with the public; hence my own series will be called *I'm an Off Spinner, Get me Out of Here (If Your Lordship Will Accept a Cheque)*. Already John Emburey, Vic Marks and Pat Pocock have agreed to appear, and I have no doubt that it will prove a huge success.

## Saturday

My old friend George Galloway is in the Algarve writing a book. Funnily enough, the other day I met an MP from the Algarve who was writing a book in Glasgow. Whilst in Scotland I attended the opening of their Parliament to see little Steel in the chair for the last time. All went well until one of the Socialists insisted on singing some verses by the immortal Rabbi Burns. I would not have minded, but when I took the oath back in '06 and had the idea of jollyng up the proceedings by accompanying myself on the banjolele, everyone complained. Not for the first time, I found myself ahead of public opinion.

## Sunday

I have long been in the habit of inviting the President of the United States to dinner at the Hall at this time of year. One does have to keep the Democrat incumbents away from the chambermaids, but there is often good conversation as a compensation. The current fellow arrives and I give him the usual tour of the old demesne. All goes well until I show him the palm trees in one of my glasshouses. The fellow gives a shriek of joy, shins up the trunk and proceeds to pelt the assembled company with bananas, and no amount of pleading will bring him down in time for dinner. Later I have to face Meadowcroft in his potting shed. "Yon monkey's befangled my tropicals," he complains bitterly to the hedgehogs.

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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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