

# *liberator*



## ***In this issue***

- ***When two peoples claim the same place - Jenny Tonge***
- ***Blair goes totalitarian - Anthony Scrivener***

- ***Liberate the cities in June - Richard Kemp***
- ***Can Kerry cut it? - Dennis Graf***

**Issue 294 March 2004**

**£ 2.50**

**SUBSCRIBE!**

Only £20 per year  
Send a cheque payable to  
*Liberator Publications*  
Flat 1  
24 Alexandra Grove  
London N4 2LF

**INTERNATIONAL SUBSCRIPTIONS**

Overseas readers may subscribe by international bank transfer (but you must pay any bank charges). Please give the following information to your bank:

- \* Amount: GB pounds sterling 25
- \* Destination account name: *Liberator Publications*
- \* Destination bank: National Westminster Bank (Chorlton-cum-Hardy branch) Manchester M21 0BR UK
- \* BIC (SWIFT code): NWBKGB2L
- \* IBAN (account number): GB15NWBK01019704631935
- \* Communication: "Annual subscription from [your name and postal address]"

Please also notify us by email with your full name and postal address to [collective@liberator.org.uk](mailto:collective@liberator.org.uk).

**THE LIBERATOR COLLECTIVE**

Ralph Bancroft, Jonathan Calder, Richard Clein, Howard Cohen, Gareth Epps, Gina Ford, Catherine Furlong, Sally Hannon, Peter Johnson, Wendy Kyrle-Pope, Tim McNally, Stewart Rayment, Kiron Reid, Ian Ridley, Harriet Smith, Mark Smulian, Harriet Steele, Simon Titley, William Tranby, Alex Wilcock, Nick Winch

*Liberator* is printed by  
Lithosphere 90 Queensland Road, N7 7AS

**LIBERATOR**

- \* was founded in 1970 and is produced by a voluntary editorial collective
- \* acts as a forum for debate among radical liberals in all parties and none
- \* welcomes written contributions on relevant topics, up to 1500 words.

We reserve the right to shorten, alter or omit any material.

**DATA PROTECTION**

*Liberator* is registered under the Data Protection Act (1984) and subscribes to the data protection principles therein.

**YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS ON DISK OR EMAIL**

We accept your *Liberator* contributions on PC floppy disk or by email to [collective@liberator.org.uk](mailto:collective@liberator.org.uk)

Please send your file in Microsoft Word, or ASCII text format. Adverts as JPG only.

**INTERNET**

Email: [collective@liberator.org.uk](mailto:collective@liberator.org.uk)  
Website: <http://www.liberator.org.uk>

# CONTENTS

**Commentary** . . . . . 3

**☛ Radical Bulletin** . . . . . 4..6

**BOMBERS AND BOMBED** . . . . . 7  
Jenny Tonge, Liberal Democrat MP for Richmond Park, was sacked from the front bench for her remarks about suicide bombs in Israel. After the furore, she visited both sides

**BLAIR GOES FOR TOTALITARIANISM.** . . . . . 8..9  
New Labour is out to emasculate the courts, abolish juries and silence media critics, says former Bar Council chair Anthony Scrivener, who joined the Liberal Democrats from Labour in 2002

**TRUTH WILL OUT** . . . . . 10..11  
The Hutton inquiry has marked the end of public trust in Tony Blair, argues Simon Titley

**CITIES WHERE RED WILL TURN GOLD** . . . . . 12..13  
This June's elections are an unprecedented opportunity to turn Labour out of its urban strongholds, says Liverpool Liberal Democrat councillor Richard Kemp

**THE BUSH BEATEN ABOUT?** . . . . . 14..15  
John Kerry has an uphill task in trying to unseat President Bush, but he offers the best chance the Democrats have of removing their loathed rival, says Dennis Graf

**LONDON'S TURNING** . . . . . 16..17  
Liberal Democrat MP Simon Hughes can win the London mayoralty against the desperate Livingstone and disappearing Norris, says campaign manager Katt Martin

**LOST LEADER** . . . . . 18..19  
Clement Davies is the most obscure of Liberal leaders, but his determination secured the party's existence in the bleak post-war years, says his biographer Alun Wyburn-Powell

**WORKING WITH WHITE MINORITIES** . . . . . 20  
Liberal Democrats in Bradford have reached out to some neglected communities, reports Rev Geoff Reid

**Letters** . . . . . 21

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

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

# COMMENTARY

## BLAIR'S BANANA BUNCH

Tony Blair is a useless bugger. Recent revelations suggest he authorised the illegal bugging of friendly diplomats in his desperate efforts to find a legal fig leaf for the Iraq war. It sounds like the makings of a British Watergate.

Building on the dismal record of the Conservative years, the Blair administration has sent the UK well on the way to the status of a banana republic.

We live in a country where war is declared on the basis of questionable secret advice from a senior law officer who was a major donor to the ruling party; where the judiciary is headed by a man whose sole claim to office is that he once shared a flat with the prime minister; where the government seeks to keep potential miscarriages of justice away from the courts; and where people can be arbitrarily detained without knowing of what they are accused.

And in true banana republic style, we have a prime minister who takes his orders from Washington.

As Anthony Scrivener's frightening article in this *Liberator* makes clear, Blair's government is assaulting liberty in a way its Conservative predecessors would probably have liked to but never dared. It views all challenges to its authority, whether from the judiciary, the media, public opinion or even its own backbenches, with the vaulting contempt of politicians who long ago lost any moral compass they once might have possessed.

Fortunately, there is an opportunity to do something about this: it is called Tony Blair.

He may yet be forced from office by some further scandalous disclosures about the Iraq war (or indeed by the ill-equipping of the troops sent to fight it), or by a panic reaction among Labour MPs, that the best way to save their seats is to replace their leader. But it looks as if Blair intends to remain until the next general election.

Thus for the next year or so, the Liberal Democrats will face a Labour party led by a discredited liar who has forfeited public trust, and a Tory party lead by one of the living dead of the Major government.

While the opportunities presented by reminding voters of Michael Howard's past are pretty obvious, those to be gained by reminding voters of Tony Blair's present are a shade more complex.

The people Blair has most grievously offended over Iraq are the ones who really do care about politics. They may not be all that numerous in absolute terms but they talk to friends, they campaign, they act and they certainly vote.

This type of former Labour supporter was already feeling let down before Iraq, and is now even more alienated by measures like tuition fees and foundation hospitals.

Without needing to go through any particular policy contortions of their own, the Liberal Democrats ought to be able to peel off a huge chunk of Labour's most active former supporters. They will probably never get, nor much want, the state socialist diehards, but can attract those who broadly count themselves as 'progressive'. Add them to the people who are simply fed up about public services, and the potential is large.

It is improbable that Labour can recover this support so long as Blair remains leader, though it might under a successor who could offer a fresh start.

This opportunity will not stay open indefinitely, and the Liberal Democrats must take advantage of it, in particular, in this June's multiple elections.

As Richard Kemp's article in this issue shows, the near-total absence of the Conservative party makes the all-out elections due in the metropolitan councils an unrivalled opportunity to prise Labour's fingers from the windpipe of urban England.

For decades, Labour has ruled these areas in local one-party states where absolute power has, in varying degrees, corrupted it. If ever anywhere needed a good dose of liberalism, it is there.

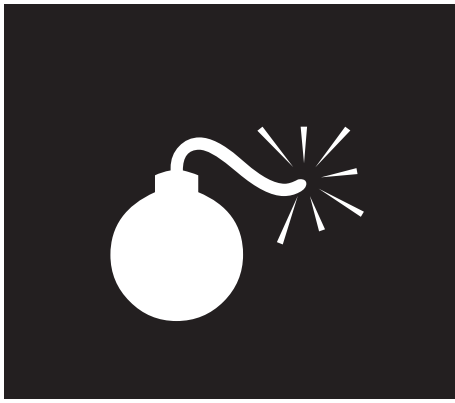
## OPTIONS KEPT OPEN

Events across the Atlantic provide a warning of the way the Blair/Howard two-headed beast would send British politics if it could. In *Liberator* 290, our American correspondent Dennis Graf wrote that, in America, a conservative party (the Democrats) faced a party of the radical far right (the Republicans).

While all Liberal Democrats would support the likely nominee John Kerry against George W Bush (indeed, they would support almost any opponent), it is easy to see that the pressures of the American system lead to a restricted choice.

We are by no means near this yet in Britain, though it is where Blair would like to take this country. He has always sought to shut down political options, even within the Labour party, by pretending that the only choice is him or the Tories.

It isn't, and the Liberal Democrats are the largest part of the reason why it isn't. That is cause enough to be grateful to the small band who, as Alan Wyburn-Powell describes in this issue, kept the Liberal Party alive in the bleak decade after 1945. Without them, British politics might now be like America's.



# RADICAL BULLETIN

## KENNEDY GETS A CIXING

All Liberal Democrats will, of course, be alarmed to hear that Charles Kennedy had suffered “dismay and incredulity”. What could have brought on this distressing condition?

The answer is various postings on the Liberal Democrat news group facility on Cix. The contents are supposed to be confidential, but so infuriated is Kennedy that he instructed underling George Crozier to make his musings public in February.

Remarkable reading they make, too. The first section concerns party strategy, on which Kennedy announced: “It is complete and utter nonsense to claim that - aided by some small secretive group of advisers - I am moving the party to the right.

“Nothing could be further from the truth. I remain determined to lead an internationalist party that argues the case for civil liberties, an environmentalist outlook and the absolute necessity for the provision of first-rate public services.

“Not only do I disagree fundamentally with the principles behind such a move - it would also make no sense tactically.

“We win many of our target seats by squeezing the Labour vote - we want disillusioned Labour supporters to switch to us; as they did in Brent. We will not achieve this by positioning ourselves as a watered down version of the Conservative Party.”

Quite so, and this statement appears to show Kennedy agreeing with the position Liberator has taken against those, such as Mark Oaten, who have argued that the way to win Tory seats is to become more like the Tories.

But Kennedy has promoted Oaten to the post of shadow home affairs spokesman, and Vince Cable, the driving force behind the laissez-faire ‘Setting Business Free’ paper, to shadow chancellor, along with the like-minded David Laws. It seems he cannot see why this should make some think he is moving to the right.

He describes rumours that the party is moving to the right as “madness and extremely damaging”, so perhaps he will have a word with those MPs who assiduously brief the press to this effect in order to boast of their real or imagined influence.

Liberator has heard that there was great wailing and gnashing of teeth that a list believed to be the party’s nominations for life peerages appeared in Liberator 293. Not that anyone has contacted us to say that any names were either wrong or omitted.

Kennedy’s Cix epistle also touched on the row about how the life peerage nominees were selected.

He said: “I can confirm, however, as minuted at December’s FE that my [nominations] would take into

account the interim peers list as elected in 1999 and also factors that had changed over the previous four years, such as people changing employment and coming off the list, as well as the need to balance issues such as gender, career background and the skills and areas of expertise needed to strengthen the Lords Parliamentary Party. I can also confirm that the names are very much my own.”

The whole point of having an elected panel from which peerage nominations would be drawn was precisely that they would not become ‘very much’ Kennedy’s list, or indeed anyone else’s, and peerages would be removed from the arena of secret patronage into one that was, at least in part, open and accountable.

But Kennedy has decided, “we need a better system for nominating our own peers”, pending Lords’ reform.

“It was possible to get onto the list with only six or seven first preference votes,” he says. “Many ordinary members didn’t know that the election took place and that they would have been eligible to stand; but most importantly, the system actively worked against those who would have made excellent peers but whose employment prevented them from putting their names forward in such a public way.”

Well that’s all solved. It is now possible to become a peer not with six or seven first preference votes, but with only one first preference vote - that cast by Kennedy himself.

No ordinary member is very likely to know that Kennedy had been invited to draw up a list and, if they did know, they would have no opportunity at all to put themselves forward.

Those who cannot take a public political role until being made a peer (usually people in politically restricted employment) were catered for by the power agreed in 1999 for the leader to add his own nominations to each list.

What ‘better system’ has Kennedy used to draw up his current list: ‘Take soundings’? Throw a dice? Ask Lord Razzall if he has any chums who fancy it? The first 10 who respond to a financial appeal? Probably he just thinks they are all Good Things, but the problem is that no-one knows the criteria.

If Kennedy wished to change the system, he had ample time to come to conference with a proposal, long before nominations were sought from him.

## TONGE IN THE FIRE

The Cix missive also included Kennedy’s response to those who criticised him for sacking Jenny Tonge over her comments on suicide bombings (Liberator 293).

He says he was “absolutely stunned when I read such comments, as ‘this was a convenient excuse to get rid of

someone from the radical wing of the party whom the core advisers hated'. This is complete and utter rubbish."

We have to take Kennedy's word for this, but he might reflect on why others think that that is what did happen, and reflect on how both Paddy Ashdown and (much more quickly) David Steel both became disconnected from first the party and then from reality by retreating behind a corps of advisers who told them what they wanted to hear.

Kennedy said he told Tonge: "It is completely right that as a party we should empathise with the plight of the Palestinians; but the party cannot take empathy that stage further and accept - or give the appearance of accepting - the use of terrorism as an appropriate response.

"This is not a 'freedom of speech' issue. No-one has any intention of trying to restrict what Jenny says; but some comments are better made as an individual Lib Dem MP rather than on behalf of the party."

Tonge's actual words appeared in *Liberator* 293 and she has elaborated in them in this issue (see page 7), so readers can judge for themselves.

But at no stage has Kennedy made it clear who complained to him about Tonge's remarks with sufficient force for him to sack her. Was it the press, or some external body? - in which case the correct response would have been to say that it is he, not they, who will decide who is and is not in the shadow cabinet.

## SQUATTING POSITION

Anyone who wants to view the party's website and makes an intelligent guess that its address is [www.liberaldemocrats.org.uk](http://www.liberaldemocrats.org.uk) will be in for a surprise.

As at early February, this URL led to this statement: "So, Blunkett is going to have a celebratory drink because someone committed suicide in prison. Blunkett you are a disgrace to the human race and the sooner you and your cronies are out of power the better for this country.

"A man who does not even know which countries have the Won as a currency and you feel you can help run a Country. If it wasn't so serious I'd laugh!!"

This refers to Blunkett's performance in a celebrity edition of *Mastermind* on Boxing Day, in which he identified the Won as the currency of Thailand, when in fact it is used in both Koreas.

A lengthy diatribe on Blunkett's performance, and some observations on masterminds of yesteryear, appeared to constitute the sum total of the rest of the site's content. *Liberator's* enquiries show that [www.liberaldemocrats.org.uk](http://www.liberaldemocrats.org.uk) is registered to someone called SN Pepin, who also owns [www.liberaldemocrats.co.uk](http://www.liberaldemocrats.co.uk).

The correct address for the party website is [www.libdems.org.uk](http://www.libdems.org.uk). Who omitted to register all the other obvious variations?

## GYPSY ROVER

*Liberator* 293 drew attention to an entry on the website of shadow home secretary Mark Oaten that could be interpreted as derogatory of gypsies.

It concerned an incident in which a group of people had occupied land in his Winchester constituency and some damage and nuisance had been caused, and we pointed out that the race of those allegedly concerned should not have been highlighted.

*Liberator's* Ralph Bancroft was sufficiently concerned to complain to Charles Kennedy's office about the item on Oaten's website.

Bancroft wrote: "His remarks about gypsies are completely unacceptable and are not compatible with Liberal Democrat party policies and principles. In view of your new policy of acting tough with front bench colleagues who speak out of line, will you now be inviting Mark to relinquish his front bench roles?"

"If my attention has been drawn to that web page, I consider it only a matter of time before the Gypsy Council of Britain's attention is drawn to it."

Oaten's former assistant Oliver Kendal received it and passed it on to his successor Hugh Roberts. The exchange, with Bancroft copied in, then went:

Roberts: "I've taken off the link to this story now. Will check with Mark when he gets in. Cheers - always grateful for advice from the legends of the past!"

Kendall: "Hugh - you were not supposed to tell this guy - he was the one complaining....! fcuk."

Roberts: "I must be very new (a few weeks) in this new job and it is certainly showing. When Mark gets in I will check his exact position and ensure that the website reflects his exact position. I hope that clarifies."

## HIDDEN MEANINGS

Conference representatives arriving in Southport will find that the Mitcham and Morden Commemorative Gold Toilet is already in town, having been awarded to local MP John Pugh. We think this is the first time in 21 years that an MP has won *Liberator's* coveted award for the worst motion submitted to a conference.

Pugh had strong competition from two motions from Camberwell and Peckham's Jonathan Hunt, which sought to rewrite policy on Northern Ireland and on railways in the space of about 50 words each.

But former philosophy lecturer Pugh set the conference committee a real brainteaser. How could they organise a debate on his motion and, if they did, how would anyone know what the result meant?

Pugh's motion stated that conference, "Recognises that party politics and politicians as viewed in the media stand in poor repute.

"Regrets the lack of individualism, openness and honesty and the dominance of politics by conformism, public relations and spin.

"Acknowledges the capacity of this party through its core values to unite people from widely different backgrounds, religions, cultures and walks of life.

"Believes this party has a role in changing both the substance and the style of the nation's politics."

As a consequence of these unremarkable observations, it said that conference "welcomes any active co-operation between Liberal Democrats and other organisations and individuals outside the party that does not compromise our core values.

"Thinks that there is little need, sense, attraction or benefit in the incorporation into a party policy of views which are overly prescriptive and illiberal, or alternatively in attempting to bolt into party policy opinions upon which significant numbers of committed, informed and sincere Liberal Democrats will reasonably and strongly differ in conscience and belief."

Who or what Pugh wishes to work with, and who or what he fears others might erroneously wish the party to work with, are, to say the least, less than entirely clear from this.

Pugh is a leading member of the Beveridge Group. If that body really is going to try to roll back the Cable/Laws

onslaught of economic liberalism, it will have to be less roundabout in its pronouncements than this. It is just possible that this is what the motion referred to, but it is equally possible that it didn't refer to anything.

## DICK'S OUT IN MANCHESTER

Manchester Liberal Democrat council group has a defector from Labour, and his name may be oddly familiar to older Liberator readers.

Dick Wilson (for it is he) was an eccentric, if affectionately regarded, presence around the old Liberal Party.

At the merger, he joined the continuing Liberal Party, but was later expelled from that party for 'intolerant behaviour'.

Wilson then resurfaced as a Labour councillor in Manchester in May 2003, but switched to the Liberal Democrats following a row over the council's subsidy to the Urbis museum.

The Manchester group is understood to have had a spirited discussion about whether to admit him, though the eventual decision was 'overwhelming'.

## MPs IN PORN SHOCKER

A piece in The Times, by political correspondent Greg Hurst, might merit the attention of Charles Kennedy, given his strictures to Cix users about irresponsible statements.

This article said that the Liberal Democrat Spring conference would spend the Saturday afternoon session debating "a plastic bag environmental levy, relaxing pornography laws and legalising euthanasia."

Instead of taking the usual press tack of mocking the party for debating subjects other parties fight shy of (the last two being notable examples), the thrust of the article was that they were being debated at the wrong time of day.

This curious preoccupation soon became clear when it stated: "MPs are fuming that its proposed agenda relegates their core general election campaign themes to the 'graveyard slot' on Saturday morning."

Saturday morning is hardly a graveyard slot, since debates taken then are certain to be over in time for the early evening news programmes.

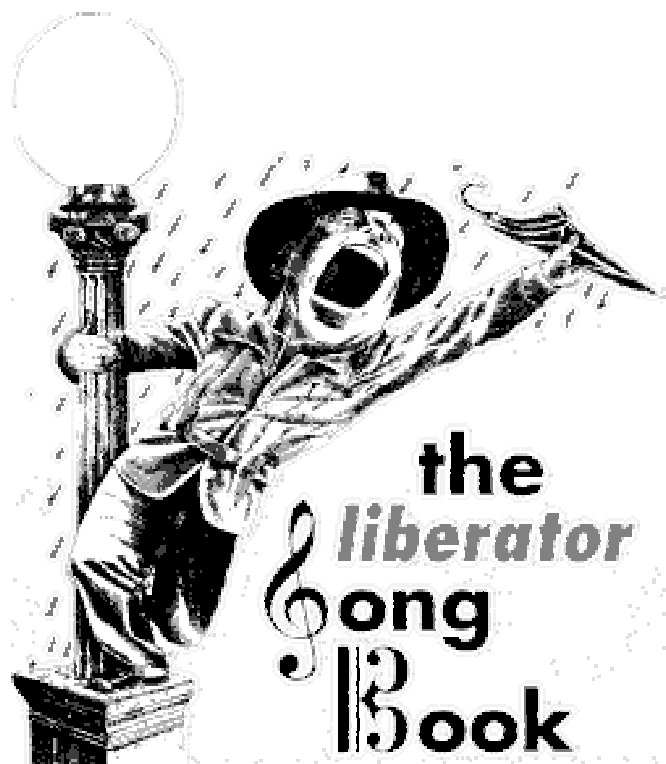
But since The Times is unlikely itself to care about the precise running order, which MP went mouthing off?

It refers to: "At a heated meeting at the Commons this month a series of Lib Dem MPs, led by Matthew Taylor, chairman of the parliamentary party, protested that the timetable would make the party appear ridiculous and called for changes."

Well, there's a clue perhaps, as also is the complaint that Vincent Cable and Paul Burstow have been 'relegated' to Saturday morning.

Surely going to the press with claims that "in the afternoon the media will see us debating plastic bags, porn and killing people" (a rather tasteless reminder of the fate of former Tory MP Stephen Milligan, one might have thought), is far worse than making critical observations on Cix. So will Kennedy be disciplining whoever was responsible?

Oh, and who briefed The Times that the MPs' 'demands' are "being resisted by party activists, who control the agenda". It is in fact controlled by the Federal Conference Committee.



## The 14th edition of the Liberator Song Book

- Old favourites
- Hits from the Liberal Revue
- Campaign songs old and new

Complete with historical  
notes on the origins of  
songs...

Only £3 from the Liberator  
stall at conference or from:  
**Liberal Publications**  
**Flat 1, 24 Alexandra Grove,**  
**London N4 2LF**

Cheques should be made  
payable to "Liberator"

# BOMBERS AND BOMBED

Jenny Tonge, Liberal Democrat MP for Richmond Park, was sacked from the front bench for her remarks about suicide bombs in Israel. After the furore, she visited both sides

All the people I met a few weeks ago in Jerusalem during a trip set up by the Today programme were relatives of victims of suicide bombers (800 in the last three years) or people who had treated them.

They all told me exactly the same things. There was no individual view or original slant. It was because of the hatred of the Jews, from the holocaust onwards: the Arabs' determination to drive Israelis into the sea; the corruption of the Palestinian Authority; the indoctrination of children in school; and the lack of concern of Arab parents for their children, and of course, the promise of 72 virgins in heaven "or the male equivalent for the women" – this last from the director of an organisation formed to support the families of victims of suicide bombers.

Unfortunately the Israelis, in their efforts to gain support for the policy of their government, seem to have adopted a universal propaganda 'rant' which allows for no rational discussion. They seem to accept the situation will just continue without change – the Israelis who want positive change are very low profile. And of course any criticism of the Sharon government is deemed to be anti-Semitic and therefore taboo.

I met one woman who bucked the trend. She had lost a daughter to a suicide bomber who was a Palestinian girl the same age as her daughter. She had begun to think. She had contacted the suicide bomber's family and was puzzled to find them 'proud' of their daughter. She had then received a letter from a Palestinian mother whose civilian son had been killed by an Israeli soldier. She was beginning to wonder if the way to deal with her own grief was to reach across the checkpoints and poverty gap and talk to the other side. A small beacon of hope there – like the rainbow that arched over Jerusalem as we returned from the Occupied Territories the previous day.

What then did I discover from the Palestinian side? I was surprised to find out that the terrorist groups are supported by many Christian Palestinians as well as Muslims – in fact, the 'safe' house where we met members of the 'Al Aqsa Brigade' was a Christian house.

There was no mistaking the terrorists, even in Manger Square where we had tried to 'mingle' unobtrusively with a large funeral party to escape surveillance by the Israeli F16s flying overhead.

The terrorists, in skullcaps, shades and cradling large black guns in their laps as they talked, were entirely pragmatic. No emotion, no rants. There were two suggestions to stop suicide bombing. Either give the Palestinians tanks, helicopter gunships and F16s and they

would not need to use suicide bombers, or Israel should dismantle all settlements and get out of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Retreat to pre-1967 borders and find a solution to Jerusalem – easy.

They did however state, very firmly, that all groups now accept Israel's right to exist – a new position taken up recently.

The family of a suicide bomber shed more light on why a young person with all their life ahead of them should want to end it.

Mohammed was 18 years old, a good student at school, not very religious. He had a girlfriend but had two friends killed by Israeli soldiers and had probably seen families thrown out of their houses which were then bulldozed, either as 'punishment' or to build a settlement for Israelis or to build the 'Wall'. This is a common experience and the evidence is everywhere. The West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which I visited last July, are like bombsites.

The first his family knew of his involvement with Al Aqsa was when his 'memorial' photograph was delivered to their house and the news given that he had completed his mission. I asked his mother – was she proud of her son? "He is my boy. God bless him," was the response.

There is no doubt, however, that these young people are 'heroes' in their communities. There are no football teams or sports heroes on the West Bank and the suicide bombers seem to fill the need. Civilian targets are 'chosen' because there is no way they can fight Israeli soldiers inside their tanks and watchtowers.

It is understandable, even if deplorable and to be condemned. I continue to ask myself what I would do in that situation. That question is the reason for my current 'disgrace'.

One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter and terrorist groups command the respect and support of many dispossessed.

Suicide bombing is a terrible phenomenon and increasing, because in our war against terrorism we are expanding the breeding grounds for terrorism – Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine and Chechnya for example.

Suicide bombers in Palestine are born out of resistance to an occupying and repressive force, despair and lack of hope for the future laced with a large dose of religion. I repeat we must try to understand before we can hope to triumph.

# BLAIR GOES FOR TOTALITARIANISM

New Labour is out to emasculate the courts, abolish juries and silence media critics, says former Bar Council chair Anthony Scrivener, who joined the Liberal Democrats from Labour in 2002

The government was lucky that Clare Short made her bugging revelation when she did. It excited widespread curiosity. Since friends were being bugged, where did it end?

Obviously Tony Benn was a ripe candidate for bugging – they probably forgot to take his name off the list when he ceased to be a cabinet minister, then there are people like the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Pope – dangerous radicals always going on about morality. It could become a status symbol for your CV: ‘2002 – 2004 Bugged by MI5’. However, the really sensitive issue is whether we were bugging President Bush and, if we are, whether we understand what he is saying?

The reason why it was lucky for the government was because it diverted attention away from the Gun prosecution, which was much more difficult for the government to explain. It was always going to be possible to deflect interest in the unfortunate bugging by blaming Clare Short for sneaking and not keeping her mouth shut, as any honourable former minister would have done. If the government has behaved dishonestly, the least you can do is to shut up about it – that is called pragmatic morality.

The prosecution case against Ms Gun was clear cut – like David Shayler, who got six months imprisonment for a similar offence. The forensic danger was that a jury might refuse to convict because it believed the prosecution was ‘silly’. This happened in the case of Clive Ponting, which was a horrid moment for civilised government. Whether a jury might take that view would have been considered long before launching the prosecution, but look at the timing of events.

It all happened at the very last moment. But what had happened? Nowadays, the defence has to indicate in writing before trial what is the defence. The prosecution would have known that Ms Gun’s defence was necessity. The prosecution continued.

What happened a short time before trial was that the defence sought to obtain disclosure of the Attorney-General’s Opinion about the legality of the war – this was highly relevant to the defence of necessity.

Although the Attorney-General is nominally in charge of prosecutions, in fact the Crown Prosecution Service runs all prosecutions under the supervision of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

But here, since the defence wanted an Opinion given by the Attorney-General, the matter had to be referred to

him personally. As soon as this was done, things happened very quickly indeed and the prosecution was dropped in haste.

There is obviously something very curious about this Opinion. In Australia, the comparable Opinion was made available to everyone to read. There must be something in the Attorney-General’s Opinion here that causes the government concern. It may be significant that, in Australia, the government never relied on the 45-minute claim at all.

It is naïve to say that this was the decision of the CPS, although in a sense this is no doubt true, since it brought the case in the first place. However, the CPS would have to obey any instruction given by or on behalf of the Attorney-General. If he had indicated that he would not permit his Opinion to be disclosed to the defence, and the CPS were advised that a court would be likely to order the disclosure of it to the defence, then the CPS would have no alternative other than to drop the prosecution. All the evidence indicates that this is what happened. The Opinion remains locked up securely under wraps, ticking away like a time bomb.

No doubt the government will be looking anxiously across the Atlantic. The issue of the legality of the war with Iraq will not go away. What is going to happen if Senator Kerry becomes President? Is he going to keep all the critical documents about the decision to go to war locked up in the White House safe to save President Bush embarrassment? If he decides they should be made public, then the cold wind will soon reach Westminster, causing further acute embarrassment to the prime minister. The only good thing is that the prime minister may get some early warning from our security services, who will have probably bugged everyone concerned.

All of this is deeply interesting. The electorate has a new game to play: trying to find out what our government has really been up to. This is the open government which New Labour promised.

But there are other time bombs ticking away for the prime minister. He is on a collision course with the judiciary.

Despite the usual reticence of judges to get embroiled with government, there are senior judges today who will not hesitate to take on the government to protect constitutional rights, such as the right of ordinary citizens of access to the courts. In taking this stand, the judges will



be supported by the overwhelming majority of the legal profession.

What has caused the furore and crowded meetings of barristers and judges is the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants etc) Bill, which not only prevents appeals but provides that “no court shall have any supervisory or other jurisdiction (whether statutory or inherent) in reaction to an Immigration Tribunal,” even if there is an error of law, unfair procedure, lack of jurisdiction or a breach of human rights.

This monstrous Bill heralds the beginning of a New Labour campaign to eliminate or curtail the right of a citizen to challenge government decisions by judicial review where it has acted unlawfully. Neither the prime minister nor home secretary David Blunkett like judicial review. To say that the judges and the legal profession are up in arms over this Bill is to put it mildly. The time is coming for a showdown.

There are plenty of other examples of the move towards totalitarianism.

The present method of appointing judges, which has worked well in the past, is under attack from New Labour. One of the proposals in the recent consultation paper proposes the setting up of a Judicial Appointments Commission as a recommending body. The actual appointment would be made by a minister or even by the prime minister. No wonder the former Lord Chancellor, as he faded into history leaving only the wallpaper behind as a memory, remarked darkly of his fears for the future independence of the judiciary.

Another unique feature of New Labour’s approach to the judiciary is that a judge who found against the government recently was subjected to a personalised attack by a minister.

Ever since coming into office, New Labour has attacked the jury system. Juries are considered to be unpleasantly independent and unpredictable. Totalitarian states do not have to put up with them. The first stage is to allow the Attorney-General to decide when a jury trial is necessary. He is a decent chap and a similar system has worked well in some colonies like Hong Kong.

But the plans do not end there. New Labour wants to begin the abolition of juries and, if you read the report Lord Justice Auld prepared for the government, the next stage is to abolish lay magistrates in favour of professional magistrates appointed by you know who.

There are other things which cause Mr Blunkett upset. He tried to bring in a Bill that would have empowered the police, some government departments, local authorities, the Postal Service Commission, the Office of Fair Trading, the Financial Services Authority and the Health and Safety Executive (to name but a few) to obtain your

communication data from telephone companies, internet providers and post offices.

Fortunately, someone mentioned the European Convention on Human Rights (which also causes Mr Blunkett upset) and this promising piece of legislation has been put on hold. However, the government remains committed to produce some similar but less ambitious spying legislation in the wake of 9/11.

Having no doubt looked with envy at Fox News, New Labour also wishes to curtail what it calls “unfair criticism” from the media.

This is the real importance of the Hutton Inquiry. It gave New Labour the chance to get its attack on the BBC approved by a retired judge. However, the much-criticised report contained no recognition that freedom of expression is considered to be a fundamental right under the European Convention.

It was also regrettable that the procedure insisted upon at the inquiry meant that the prime minister, alone of witnesses, was never cross examined at all. New Labour is now nicely poised to set about a new charter for the BBC and, with Greg Dyke gone, it will be left to those who approved those two profuse apologies to the government to secure the future independence of the BBC.

War can be good news, too, as long as you win: it can be used to quell complaints and create an atmosphere of ‘emergency’, which, with a bit of spin, can justify a government enacting measures that restrict freedoms.

Look at what President Bush was able to achieve in the wake of 9/11, culminating in the inspired Guantanamo regime. New Labour has done its best by detaining persons under the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 and refusing to tell them what is the allegation made against them. How they are supposed to defend themselves without knowing this, no member of the government has yet explained.

Liberal Democrats have always been strong on freedom and democracy and they have led the attack on many of these measures, and with success in the House of Lords.

However, the average voter does not have the same awareness and concerns over these matters of principle. They are more concerned with the money in their wage packet and the prospects of employment.

There is one sobering fact we should remember. No party has got into power on a ticket of increased taxation. The problem is that Lib Dem policy is often misunderstood and we are seen as a party of high taxation.

The fact is we are not in favour of increasing taxation generally. Overall we want taxation to be reduced but made fair by reducing the burden of indirect taxation, which is unfair, in favour of direct taxation which is fair. If this is not explained positively and clearly, the Lib Dems will never get a chance of fighting off these challenges to freedom.



# TRUTH WILL OUT

## The Hutton inquiry has marked the end of public trust in Tony Blair, argues Simon Titley

Does Hutton matter? On the face of it, the whole Kelly/Hutton episode seems absurd. One sloppy piece of reporting at 6am on the 'Today' programme leads to a major political crisis with long-lasting repercussions.

Technically, the Hutton inquiry was a sideshow because its remit was narrow, restricted to the reasons for David Kelly's suicide rather than the reasons for war. But the inquiry was significant because of what it has revealed about the prevailing culture of government, and because of how it has eroded popular trust in government.

The conflict between the government and the BBC is not transient but had been brewing for some time and is a symptom of a deeper malaise. The crisis was sparked not by the war itself but by the way in which the British government attempted to justify its involvement. The government's actual motives would have commanded neither public consent nor legal justification, so pretexts were sought. The gradual leakage of the truth is why, regardless of Hutton, the issue won't go away.

The real reasons for the Iraq war are now emerging. Former US Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill, via Ron Suskind's recent book 'The Price of Loyalty', has revealed how the Bush administration decided to attack Iraq from the outset. September 11 subsequently provided a handy excuse and ensured public consent within the US.

Britain's involvement is more complex. Blair's basic motivation was realpolitik. He is an Atlanticist, who sees Britain's role as a 'bridge' between the US and Europe and rejects the idea that Britain must choose between one and the other. Bush's determination to go to war, regardless of international law or opinion, risked undermining this policy. Blair calculated that only by supporting Bush could he maintain Britain's role and keep the US within the framework of international institutions.

While Bush could wage war without having to worry unduly about legality or consent, Blair had to construct an elaborate moral and legal defence, hence the botched attempt to win UN support and the insistence on 'weapons of mass destruction' as a justification. Blair's need for legitimacy also required a public relations exercise (including the infamous 'dossier'), which led to conflict with any news media eager to probe behind the official statements.

On the surface, the Hutton report was a victory for Blair because it vindicated the government and focused criticism on the BBC. But, despite the report's conclusions, Blair's reputation continues to sink. To understand why, we need to look at the underlying culture of Blair and New Labour.

Tony Blair's main characteristic is that he has no ideology. It is not simply that he does not carry Labour's historical baggage. He carries no other ideological baggage. He is a technocrat and a managerialist, who believes there is one way to 'get things done' and is

intolerant of anyone who cannot see what he regards as obvious.

A value Blair does share with Old Labour is a belief in the omnipotence of government. If there is any problem, big or small, he believes it is both possible and desirable for central government to fix it. The diminishing returns of a control-freak, target-driven approach to government appear to elude him. Instead, he is consumed by a delusional sense of mission. The worst thing you can do to someone inhabiting a delusional universe is to challenge his delusions.

In politics, it is not enough to do things. You must be seen to be doing them, hence the importance of public relations for any government. But news management is of overriding and obsessive importance to New Labour, for two reasons. First, New Labour is neurotic about the media, because of its long experience of hostility from a predominantly right-wing national press. The general election of 1992 was particularly traumatic in this respect. This neurosis explains why Blair allowed his spokesman Alistair Campbell off the leash.

Second, New Labour copied Bill Clinton's pioneering use of focus groups. This allowed the PR tail to wag the political dog, by subordinating policy decisions to perceptions of public opinion, and by forcing ministers to talk in market-tested slogans. Former spin-doctor Derek Draper joked that "eight people sipping wine in Kettering" were deciding government policy.

Together, these factors explain Blair's need for control, his incomprehension that anyone could query his mission, his determination to punish anyone who steps out of line and his consequent overreaction to the BBC. But there are two other sources of intolerance in New Labour's culture that tend to be overlooked.

One of these is a throwback to the oldest of Old Labour, working class machismo. This is expressed, for example, through a disdain for the environment and civil liberties, both widely seen within the Labour Party as effete issues. When Jack Straw and David Blunkett describe liberals as 'namby pamby', they are articulating an authentic working class tradition. This culture explains why, when challenged by the BBC, Labour's instinctive reaction was to threaten a beating outside in the pub car park.

The other powerful influence on New Labour is the culture of 1970s student politics, where many leading New Labour figures began their political careers (although Blair himself did not indulge). The defining feature of 1970s student politics (and I speak as a first-hand witness) was style over substance. It was like being in the school playground aged 13 or 14, when you invited sneers if you turned up wearing the wrong fashion. Political opinions did not arise from values or any rational debate. They were postures, worn as a fashion statement, enforced through social intimidation. Self-appointed political

fashionistas would declare positions and people 'in' or 'out', without there being any argument. This style continues to inform New Labour's approach. Following the publication of the Hutton report, government spin-doctors casually declared that further discussion of the Iraq war was "boring". Such a snide put-down is typical of this juvenile culture. Among students, it can at least be attributed to immaturity. Among middle-aged men, it is pathetic.

What of the BBC? Why did a single off-the-cuff remark by reporter Andrew Gilligan lead to the biggest crisis in the Corporation's history? The 'dossier' story triggered a conflict that was likely to break out sooner or later in any case.

The immediate cause was Alistair Campbell's increasing anger at the BBC. For some time, Campbell had been bullying BBC reporters and executives for their failure to conform to the government's news agenda. We now know, from Greg Dyke's revelations, the intensity of this campaign of intimidation before and during the Iraq war. Campbell felt personally slighted by the accusation that he had 'sexed up' the dossier, which is why he elevated this dispute onto a higher political plane.

However, Campbell's fury is not by itself an adequate explanation for the crisis surrounding the BBC. There is a wider context of the debate about the future of broadcasting in Britain, a debate that was becoming more heated even before Hutton.

The main element in this debate is the forthcoming BBC charter review and, in particular, the question of the validity of the licence fee as a source of funding. The BBC must serve all licence fee payers to retain public consent for the TV licence. But this obligation places the BBC in a dilemma. When it aims to please everyone, it is accused of chasing ratings and 'dumbing down'. If it attempts to become more specialist, it is accused of elitism and failing to serve the whole public. This is a difficult balancing act and there will always be criticism.

Given how harsh Hutton was on the BBC, it was inevitable that there was an instinct to rally round. Support for the BBC came not just from the chattering classes, who regard it as a cherished institution. Support came also from much of the Tory press, which, faced with a choice between attacking Blair and the BBC, recognised its true enemy.

The transformation of Greg Dyke into a folk hero should not blind us to some serious problems at the BBC. Chief among these is the risk-averse culture of the BBC's TV schedulers. BBC1 is particularly awful at the moment, its schedules filled with formulaic programmes such as makeover shows, while BBC2 has lapsed into populist poll-based formats (such as 'The Big Read' and 'Restoration'), capped this February by the execrable 'What The World Thinks Of God' (One participant in this show, Jonathan Miller, pulled off his microphone and walked off the set. He told the Guardian: "About 20 minutes into the thing, I just thought: I must get out of this, I'm drowning in shit.").

The other major problem with BBC television is the marginalisation of serious political coverage. News bulletins (particularly the 6pm news on BBC1) have adopted more tabloid news values, while current affairs programmes, even the venerable 'Panorama', have been shunted into graveyard slots. This may not matter to most viewers but it does matter to the decision makers. It is not a smart move, when the BBC needs all the political support it can get.

Ironically, the BBC's populism is analogous to New Labour's reliance on focus groups, in which leadership is replaced by followership. In broadcasting, it is reinforced by the misguided cultural relativism that says there are no objective definitions of quality. The BBC needs the courage to pander to its audiences less and challenge them more.

Fortunately, there is still much to celebrate at the BBC. Radio goes from strength to strength, and the depth and breadth of online coverage is superb. Above all, the BBC, through its website and sales of programmes, supplies an unrivalled global shop window for British culture and talent. The break up of the BBC should be resisted because it is inconceivable that the private sector could (or would) match these services. Likewise, a licence-funded public service spread around different broadcasters would lack the critical mass to provide anything other than a ghetto service.

The other major element in the debate about the BBC is the aspiration of commercial broadcasters to neuter or destroy the BBC. Rupert Murdoch makes little secret of his contempt, while other commercial TV executives are becoming more brazen in their criticism.

One could respect the arguments of the commercial broadcasters more if they made any effort to compete with the BBC on quality. But they don't even try. Murdoch's Sky satellite operation makes no programmes at all, good or bad. ITV, following the merger of the constituent companies into one conglomerate, is closing down regional studios and has slashed ITN's budget. Channel 4, once an innovative upmarket channel, now pioneers 'reality TV', while Channel 5 has always been a joke. Most of the new niche channels on satellite and cable bear out the old adage, that less is more.

The renewal of the BBC's charter is an opportunity to review and, ideally, improve what is on offer. But neither New Labour's desire for vengeance nor the commercial sector's self-interest is a valid basis for making any decision.

Tony Blair hoped that the Hutton report would, in trendy parlance, bring 'closure'. But his victory is pyrrhic. The details of the Hutton inquiry have really only ever engaged the chattering classes and most of the population isn't interested. New Labour therefore assumed it could move on, with no lasting consequences.

However, the effect of Hutton on most people is about broad perceptions rather than details. The electorate had a high trust in Blair in 1997 because of the contrast with the Tory sleaze that had gone before. The Kelly/Hutton affair has fatally eroded that trust. The steady drip-drip of fresh revelations makes matters only worse. Despite Blair winning a Hutton report beyond his wildest dreams, his decision to go to war - and the subsequent attempts to conceal the truth - have become the catalyst for the unravelling of the Blair project.

We may take delight in seeing the end of Blair. But something deeper and more worrying has occurred. Hutton has caused further popular disillusionment with politics in general. People's dominant impression of government is one of in-fighting and dissembling. The political culture of New Labour revealed by Hutton is that of testosterone-fuelled adolescents, locking horns in the school playground. It is not a pretty sight.

# CITIES WHERE RED WILL TURN GOLD

This June's elections are an unprecedented opportunity to turn Labour out of its urban strongholds, says Liverpool Liberal Democrat councillor Richard Kemp

Believe it or not, it is just possible that, by 11 June, the Liberal Democrats could be the biggest party in six out of the eight English core cities outside London.

Such a result is not very likely but even the fact that it is possible marks a significant step forward in urban liberalism in the last decade.

Just consider the situation in three of those cities:

	LD	Lab	Con	Other
Liverpool	63	31	0	5
Manchester	28	70	0	1
Newcastle	24	54	0	0

Three cities, with a combined population of more than 1.1m people, are now without a single Tory and with no likelihood of there being one. Or look at a single conurbation, Merseyside, where the figures are Lib Dem 127, Labour 169, Tory 47, and others 9.

But just consider the situation only 10 years ago, when some of us were so concerned at the lack of presence in urban areas that we established the Urban Campaign network.

At that time, the Liverpool group, of which I have been a member for 23 years, had 42 members and was the only sizeable group. Other urban areas outside London were just beginning to get into double figures. Most cities, including Liverpool, still had rump Tory groups just hanging on.

The optimism now is based on steady progress but also four things coming together give us increased cause for optimism.

In this year's metropolitan elections, every seat is up for grabs because of boundary changes. Many metropolitan councils have not seen all-up elections since 1980.

These elections come at a time when the party that we are fighting most in these areas is in government. Its electors are becoming increasingly disenchanted. We have never before been able to capitalise on the unpopularity of a Labour government, in the same way that we were able to capitalise on the unpopularity of the Tory government from the late 1980s onwards.

In many mets, the boundary changes help us. Small Labour wards are being abolished and larger Lib Dem wards are being reduced in size.

The Tories cannot take advantage of government unpopularity because, in many parts of urban Britain, there is quite simply no Tory Party. Last year, the Lib Dems took as many votes in the Church ward of Liverpool as the Tories did in all 33 Liverpool wards put together.

Last year was an exceptional year for us in local elections, when we took 30% of the popular vote, according to the BBC. If we were merely to repeat what happened last year, we would have a minimum of 200 gains because of the multiplier effect of the all-up elections.

Although 200 gains in the mets may not sound very big, remember that the average ward size in a met is more than 10,000 electors. In Birmingham, just seven gains last year meant that we represent an extra 140,000 people, so big are the Birmingham ward sizes.

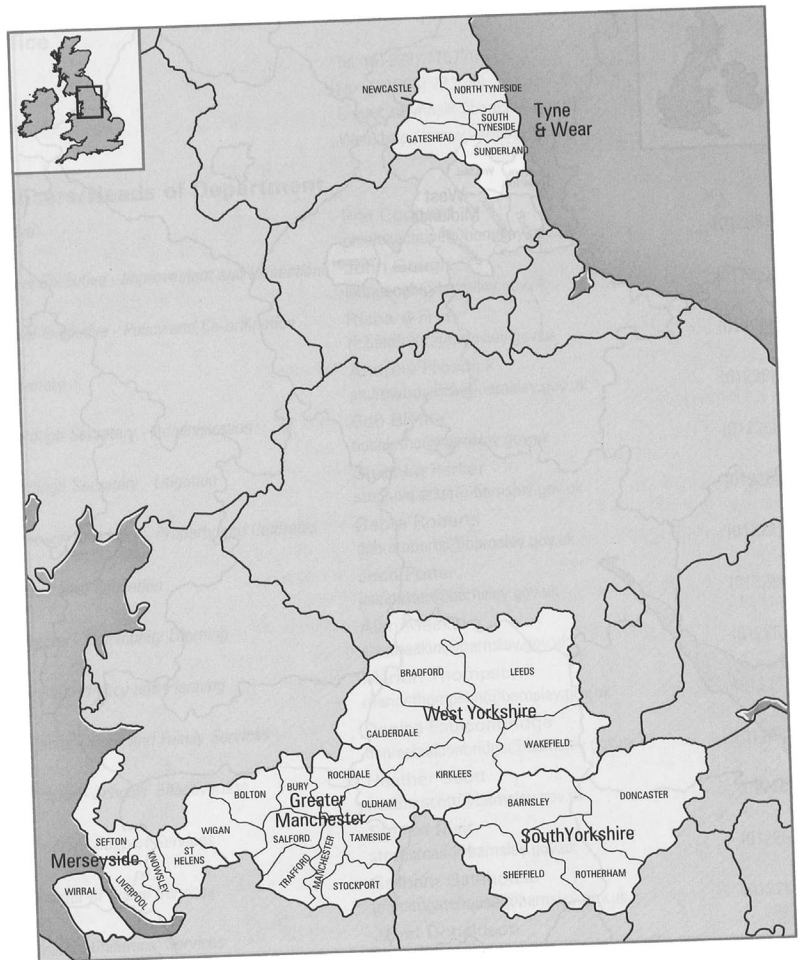
At our recent urban summit with the Lib Dem ODPM shadow Ed Davey MP, we heard from leader after leader detailing their impressive campaigning activity. In most places, our earlier telephone and physical canvassing is placing us marginally ahead of the position last year. Significantly, the drop in Labour membership does appear in parts of the country to be leading to a drop in activity, as activists and finances falter.

What has caused this change in prospects? In many ways it is hard to say, but here goes...

Having a Labour Government clearly helps, but the advance started under the Tories. In many cases, the advance started when we took on the Tories and either eliminated them or massively reduced them and made them an irrelevance. Only when we got rid of them could we effectively advance against Labour, which was then an opposition party that was nationally enjoying the effects of being anti-Tory. (What lessons can we learn from this for the continued demolition of Labour, in areas where they are now on the verge of extinction at local level?).

Our party is clearly campaigning on issues that have a resonance in urban areas. Its approach to fairness and higher appropriate taxation appeals to areas where poverty is widespread and the fruits of being a part of one of the wealthiest countries in the world are not evenly shared.

Our campaigners have become more experienced at the type of campaigning that is relevant to urban areas. Campaigns do have to be run very differently in deprived areas and, until recently, outside a few strongholds, we had little experience of this.



Does all this really matter? Well I believe that it does. Of course, there is poverty in rural areas and of course there are social and economic problems in many areas that could best be dealt with by a strong dose of Liberal Democracy.

But it is in our urban areas where there are the greatest aggregations of poverty, poor education, social problems, poor housing and other problems. We have created a society of ghettos. Some rich, some poor, but ghettos all the same. I fervently believe that, if we are truly to say that our principles are valid and can be applied to relevant and workable policy, then we have to prove that these principles work in the areas of the greatest disadvantage.

There are many parts of the country where frankly it would make little difference who wins the next or indeed any general election.

But in our areas of maximum poverty, the quality of public service can literally mean the difference between life and death. Poverty leads to despair, despair leads to illness and illness leads to death. If this seems hyperbolic, just compare the mortality rate differences between our poor and wealthy areas.

I hope that, in Liverpool, we have shown that our liberalism does work. We have not solved all the problems

that have accumulated over the years in our city. Some problems we have not even begun to solve.

But we can show that strong liberal leadership is leading to more employment, to a rebirth of our city, to improved environmental standards and to a massive rise in educational prospects that are the long-term way out of poverty for people, communities and cities.

I know that in other cities and towns, we can and will do the same. The rebirth of the cities and the rebirth of urban liberalism will go hand in hand.

If this is a dream, it's one where we are definitely making progress in ensuring that this is a dream that comes true.

***Passports to Liberty 5  
the latest in the series of booklets edited and produced by  
Bill le Breton and Kiron Reid.***

***Copies are available price £3.50 from:***

***Kiron Reid, 48 Abbeygate Apartments, Wavertree Gardens,  
High Street, Liverpool L15 8HB***

***Cheques for £3.50 should be made payable to Liberator  
Publications. Enquiries: kiron@cix.co.uk***

# THE BUSH BEATEN ABOUT?

John Kerry has an uphill task in trying to unseat President Bush, but he offers the best chance the Democrats have of removing their loathed rival, says Dennis Graf

Since I no longer live in Iowa, a small state which, along with New Hampshire, is the home of American retail politics, I didn't actually meet John Kerry and have my picture taken with him, but someone who did said his face reminded him of a bloodhound.

Kerry has the dour manner of someone serious and thoughtful and he must have some sex appeal - he married one of the most desirable women in America, Theresa Heinz, an heiress to the ketchup fortune; immensely rich, a bright, sophisticated, attractive and somewhat eccentric woman the London tabloids would love.

Kerry has always been a marginal figure in American politics, though, and like most people outside New England, I've not been especially familiar with him.

He's from Massachusetts, a state that much of rest of the country seems to hate. Kerry has always had the reputation of being rather aloof, upper class, Bostonian, a somewhat angular, older, version of JFK.

He has a deeply chiselled face and a mouth that never seems to move, even when he talks. In recent weeks, his stump performance has improved considerably and he's trying to construct an image of a rather macho sort of fellow. He has released pictures of him atop a Harley Davidson motorcycle, for example.

Like his inspiration, John Kennedy, he has not been a leader in the Senate, and he has the additional disadvantage of having been there a long time. America tends to prefer presidential candidates who don't have much legislative experience in Washington. "No paper trail," as we say.

Kerry was an authentic war hero in Vietnam and he relates well to many younger veterans, a large voting block, especially in some key swing states.

His success is mainly due to the general feeling that he might be the one man able to beat George W Bush: there is so much loathing of Bush among the Democrats, that this overrides any other consideration.

Bush's ratings have slipped recently but, even in the most unlikely chance that Kerry would win, he would still face a solid Republican Senate and House, not to mention the decisions of an increasingly right-wing judiciary. Any Democrat would have a difficult time governing.

Bush has an almost unlimited potential war chest and an absolutely first class team of political operatives, the best that money can buy. They're aided by a small army of local talk show hosts, all of whom are far to the right and they are the real source of political information for the average American. Those who receive their news from the tube are most likely to watch the stations owned by Rupert Murdoch, and his national chain, the Fox network, quite aptly named, by the way, does not have the pretended fairness of the Times. Americans in general do

not read political analysis in the newspapers or magazines.

Most people assume that Kerry will be the Democratic candidate. The Vice Presidency has become a much more important post in recent years and the current betting is that he'll tap Senator John Edwards, the number two Democratic choice in polls, a Southerner and a good public speaker. Edwards is a former trial lawyer, a rather famous one, actually, and he's most certainly one of the few men in American politics who could hold his own in a House of Commons question and answer period.

Kerry has represented Massachusetts in the Senate for the last 18 years. Before that he was a lieutenant

governor, a mainly ceremonial post, and earlier, a prosecutor, a lawyer representing the state in criminal cases.

Massachusetts is a predictably 'liberal' state, at least by American standards, a state where even the Republicans are out of step with the rest of the country. Kerry's legislative record in the Senate may be sparse, but he has been a loyal left-wing backbencher very much in step with the voters of his state.

He did back the war in Iraq, or at least he voted to give Bush authorisation to pursue the war, a vote he has some difficulty explaining, for, like most Democrats, he's trying to distance himself from the war without appearing to be unpatriotic.



This pro-war vote will not hurt him in the election and, in fact, this vote for the war would have been necessary for any serious presidential candidate. Democrats have to fight a public perception of being 'soft' on defence issues, and by extension on terrorism. Kerry voted against a number of big ticket, new weapon programs and Bush will almost certainly attack him on that.

Kerry's war record for bravery will be waved about whenever possible in these swing states, the dozen or so districts which aren't predictably either Democratic or Republican. Kerry's people, though he himself will avoid this, will try to contrast this with Bush's questionable military record.

American presidents are elected, though, on vague impressions of 'character,' of affability and telegenic charm. Bush has been made over into a rather polished politician, projecting an image of conservative religious faith, simple talk and great certitude.

He may have carried America and Britain into a strange sort of war and he most certainly has caused the American government to borrow an astonishing amount of money, but most ordinary Americans still identify with him and he'll be hard to beat.

It is always difficult to predict the performance of a presidential winner. Bush campaigned as a moderate, not much different from the Democrat, Al Gore, but he has almost immediately governed from the extreme hard right. In the campaign, Kerry will almost certainly try to capture the centre, espousing positions considerably more conservative than he has in the past. He might be able to do this. Bush can't move back to the middle; the public is well aware of his dramatically different policies.

A President Kerry, in the manner of Bill Clinton, would probably be fairly centrist. He has the support but is not a captive of the trade unions. He owes no special allegiance to any of the ethnic groups in his party. He would almost certainly face a very hostile Congress with an increased Republican majority. A number of older Democratic Senators in the south are retiring, and it is likely that Republicans will replace them. A President Kerry might well have to veto a number of major bills, something that always carries political risk.

Kerry is on record as favouring a rollback of part of the Bush tax cut, but only for the wealthy people unlikely to vote for him. In the past, he has been reluctant to vote for new and untested weapons systems. He has spoken out and voted for free trade policies. Although he is Roman



Catholic, he has been in favour maintaining abortion rights. He has not been identified with any specific approach to health care reform, a major issue in the United States. He opposes the Bush doctrine of preventative war, of unilateral military action, and he speaks in favour of international cooperation. He gives at least lip service to the idea of respecting the United Nations and world opinion but, aside from condemning Bush for appearing too eager to initiate a war in Iraq, he really hasn't said anything specific about how to get out.

There is currently a bizarre controversy concerning Bush's advocating a change in the American Constitution that would prohibit 'marriage' between homosexuals. Kerry suggests allowing each state to determine their policy.

Most ordinary Democrats who voted for Kerry in the caucuses and the primaries have very little idea of his political positions, but he was widely favoured because he appeared to be a winner. And a winner is all they care about now. Electability is the word.

A piece of trivia: Both Bush and Kerry attended Yale at roughly the same time and both were members of a small and exceedingly elite and mysterious secret society, Skull and Bones.

There are probably less than 1,000 current and former members of this group and many are men of unusual prominence. Neither man will say anything about this group and conspiracy theorists are already sharpening their pencils.

# LONDON'S TURNING

Liberal Democrat MP Simon Hughes can win the London mayoralty against the desperate Livingstone and disappearing Norris, says campaign manager Katt Martin

With little over three months until the elections this June, Liberal Democrats across London are working hard to win votes for the London Mayor, European Parliament and London Assembly.

With three elections on one day, five votes to cast and three different voting systems, 10 June will be no ordinary polling day.

Simon Hughes's chances of becoming the next London Mayor are looking stronger than ever. With the current mayor Ken Livingstone having rejoined the Labour Party, and the Conservative candidate taking the chairmanship of controversial contractor Jarvis, Hughes is the only real challenger left in the race. Even the national newspapers are now tipping that he could overtake Livingstone and knock him off the top spot.

Hughes is seen by many as the only candidate who is not tied into the two-party system that we see running national government. His record as a hard-working MP, and the position of the Liberal Democrats as the only party standing up for students, pensioners and better public services, are adding up to a strong chance of success.

Add to this the country's distrust of the Labour government over the Iraq war and it is easy to see how people are turning to the Liberal Democrats for a fresh and honest perspective on politics and government.

The election is being fought on the traditional issues of crime and transport, and Blair's mayor is falling at each hurdle. It is a year since the controversial Congestion Charge was introduced into central London, and Livingstone has been forced to admit publicly that Hughes's ideas for progressing this policy are the best way forward.

Livingstone is showing his desperation for re-election by insulting Londoners with unrealistic promises on crime. Despite doing little to make crime a priority over the last four years, he has now pledged to cut crime in the capital in half if he is granted another term - a pledge that the Economist called 'foolish' (21 February).

"Even Batman would fail to reach this target," says Hughes of Livingstone's plan. Tackling crime in London cannot be achieved by setting arbitrary targets.

Hughes says: "With just one in eight reported crimes in London being solved, the mayor must not focus just on crime reduction, but also on solving crime and boosting the perception of London as a safe place to live and work."

Many were surprised when Livingstone went back into the Labour fold. Not only did it cause disruption in the New Labour camp and unseat Nicky Gavron, the candidate chosen by London's Labour members, but it came at a time when the principles he purports to hold could not have been further away from those of his re-found friends.

Livingstone was one of the most vocal opponents of the Iraq war and has always been against university tuition fees, yet he rejoined Labour regardless. It will be hard for Londoners to forget how quick he was to put aside what he believed in, for an electoral gain that may now blow up in his face.

Blair's mayor has much more than his party's policies letting him down. His record over the last four years on public spending leaves much to be desired.

London's council tax payers are being forced to pay double the amount to finance mayor Livingstone this year than they did when he first came to power. But while the government is bailing him out of the black hole in the Transport for London budget, Livingstone continues to squander £20m of council tax payers' money on publicity. He has more press officers than Downing Street and, since taking office, the number of mayoral initiatives, events and conferences seemingly designed to promote the mayor's personal image has grown at an alarming rate. His 'I

spend now, you pay later' approach to public money is not earning him any respect with the electorate.

While Livingstone is spending Londoners' money on self-publicity, Norris is lining his pockets with directorships and salaries from large corporations.

His part-time job at Jarvis is earning him £100,000 a year, which, when added to the rest of his directorship income, totals several hundred thousand pounds. As the Times commented earlier this year, "This combination of personal greed and lack of commitment to the campaign is hardly going to endear him to London voters."

In the same article (23 January), the newspaper remarked on Norris's decision to accept the chairmanship of Jarvis as being "as politically astute as, say, Michael Howard offering Mohamed Fayed a peerage for £5m or Jack Straw joining the board of a cattle-prod company that exports to dictatorships."





“Not only is Jarvis loathed for its contribution to the Potters Bar train crash; the tube consortium of which it is a member has the worst performance record of the private contractors and has already been fined £16.8m for missing targets.” So, it is fair to say that things are not looking good for Norris.

We have the best candidate for the job, the other candidates are shooting themselves in the foot, and the national newspapers are jumping on board. How does this translate into electoral success in June?

In Hughes’s own backyard in Southwark, we recently had an excellent by-election result, which saw us hold the East Walworth ward against a determined Labour challenge.

Despite Labour’s efforts, we increased our share of the vote and retained control of Southwark Council.

This, following on from our dramatic 30% swing and gain from Labour in a Haringey Council by-election, shows just how soft the Labour vote is when we go out there and campaign hard. Not forgetting of course Brent East last September, where Lib Dem Sarah Teather brought us from third place to win the seat from Labour, becoming the youngest MP.

Through rail surveys, police petitions and a competition to design a Flag for London, we have already engaged thousands in our campaign to make London a better place to live and work. We are converting support for other parties into support for us – as demonstrated last year when a deputy director of the Conservative campaign left his job to join us.

Over the last few months, the Norris campaign has all but disappeared. The preconception that the election would be between him and Livingstone is falling through. As highlighted by the Times, “Mr Norris has no chance of leapfrogging the current mayor in the second round, while Mr Hughes does.”

Conservative supporters are quickly coming round to the idea that they cannot win the mayoral election and, if they want to kick Labour Livingstone out of City Hall, their first preference vote needs to be given to Hughes. Once in second place in the first stage of the count, he will be in prime position to sweep up second preferences from the other candidates and win.

This is more than a likely outcome, but only if we continue to campaign for the things we believe in – to keep local post offices open, for more ‘Bobbies on the Beat’, to scrap council tax, to abolish university tuition fees, for a better deal for pensioners, and for a public transport system of which we can be proud. To win the London mayoralty, more Liberal Democrat MEPs and more London Assembly members would send a clear message to the government that the time has come to buck up or clear out – the people of Britain are tired of its false promises and endless excuses.

# Simon Hughes

... will be a hard-working Mayor for all of London

**“Only Simon Hughes can beat Ken Livingstone”**



[www.simon4mayor.org.uk](http://www.simon4mayor.org.uk)



February 11th 2004

Dear friend,

I wanted to bring you up-to-date with the latest London campaign news, and it's good news for the Liberal Democrats.

No one can deny that the last 6 months have been superb for us in the capital. Post Brent East, media coverage is extremely positive about this June's elections, and by-election wins, particularly in Richmond and Hornsey & Wood Green, have backed up our winning trend.

Mayoral candidate Simon Hughes has been headlining London wide campaigns against crime, axing the council tax and for better transport. These have been backed up by local campaigning on the ground already, but we always need more.

**Different ways you can help include;**

- Holding weekend street stalls in your local area
- Door to door petitioning and street surveys
- Rail/Tube surveys at your local station
- Holding fundraising events to raise campaign funds
- Action evenings and days

If you want help or advice on how to get things moving in your area, contact me at [Simon.Hughes@libdems.org.uk](mailto:Simon.Hughes@libdems.org.uk) and don't forget to invite your

Whichever part of the country you are in, you can help us achieve this. If you don't have time to come and help us campaign in June, then send money now – we are up against two big financial machines – don't let this let us down.

Send a cheque to London Campaign 2004, Liberal Democrats, 4 Cowley Street, London, SW1P 3NB, or donate online at [www.libdems4london.org.uk](http://www.libdems4london.org.uk). Every pound will count in this election.

If you don't have council elections this year, come to London to help deliver our message, and bring your friends and family. Keep in touch at the website and look out for opportunities to get involved in this exciting campaign.

As Mary-Ann Sieghart of the Times predicted, “At this rate, it might not just be mobile phone operators crowing that ‘The Future’s Orange’.”

# LOST LEADER

Clement Davies is the most obscure of Liberal leaders, but his determination secured the party's existence in the bleak post-war years, says his biographer Alun Wyburn-Powell

Of all the Liberal leaders of the twentieth century, Clement Davies is the least well-known, and yet, but for him, the Liberal Party probably would not have survived its darkest decade after the Second World War.

Clement Davies's life is a story with many twists and turns, involving tragedy, addiction, determination, selflessness and money. He certainly should not have been forgotten and my biography of him has now appeared.

His life spanned 1884 to 1962 - from Gladstone's heyday to the Orpington by-election. A protégé of Lloyd George, Davies appeared to have the credentials to be his successor: he was a brilliant Welsh-speaking lawyer who won a first from Cambridge after starting his education at his local village school in Montgomeryshire.

Lloyd George first tried to persuade Davies to stand as a Liberal candidate in 1910. But Davies was a very reluctant politician. It took Lloyd George 17 more years to persuade Davies to stand for parliament, while Davies concentrated on building up his promising legal career. This was interrupted by the Great War, during which he worked as a government advisor on trading with the enemy, and later on enemy activities in neutral countries. After the Great War, he was appointed secretary to the Master of the Rolls, then a junior counsel to the Treasury and later a KC. His biggest client was Lever Brothers (later Unilever) and he helped the company to win the then largest-ever legal settlement of £1m.

By the time he was married with four children and owned a large home in Kensington and a country house in Montgomeryshire, Davies felt secure enough to be tempted into politics.

In 1927, he finally allowed his name to go forward as prospective Liberal candidate for Montgomeryshire. In 1929, at the age of 45, Davies was elected to parliament at his first attempt. Lloyd George confirmed his view of his leadership prospects, saying "After me, it's Clem". Lloyd George delegated Davies to introduce the Liberals' amendments to the Labour government's 1929 Coal Bill. This gave Davies his parliamentary debut, but the episode ended in confusion and disillusion for him. Lloyd George was trying to negotiate a secret pact with Labour and tactically pulled the plug on the Liberals' amendments to the Bill, without first warning Davies.

His resulting disenchantment with Lloyd George and politics generally coincided with his receiving an offer to become managing director of Unilever at a salary of £10,000 - double that of the prime minister of the day. Davies accepted and agreed with Unilever that his new role would not be compatible with his continuing in parliament. So, his much postponed foray into politics appeared to be ending after less than two years.

In 1931, before the next election occurred, Lloyd George became ill and resigned the Liberal leadership. He

was succeeded by Sir Herbert Samuel. Ramsay MacDonald formed the National Government and the Liberals split, after failing to agree a common position over this. Davies joined the Liberal National camp as a supporter of Ramsay MacDonald's government, for what he expected to be his last short spell in the Commons before the next election. The prospect of Davies ever succeeding Lloyd George seemed to have vanished.

But little in his life was predictable. Just before the election, called for October 1931, and after his successor as Liberal candidate for Montgomeryshire had been selected, Unilever suddenly changed its policy and told Davies that he would be free to continue in his job and to remain in parliament.

Davies decided to seek re-election and, after a series of delicate negotiations, persuaded his chosen successor to relinquish the Montgomeryshire nomination. He was returned unopposed as a Liberal National MP, but his main focus after the election was his business career. During the rest of the 1930s, Davies made only two significant, but controversial political interventions. The first was single-handedly to destroy the 1937 Budget, introduced by the Chancellor from his own side of the house. The second was to chair an inquiry into the incidence of tuberculosis in Wales, which produced a hard-hitting objective report.

In the Munich debate in 1938, Davies supported Chamberlain. However, after the outbreak of the Second World War, Davies became so disillusioned with Chamberlain's leadership that he left the Liberal Nationals and crossed the floor of the House.

He then co-founded and chaired an all-party group of MPs, the 'Vigilantes', who plotted to oust Chamberlain and install Churchill. Their opportunity came in the Norway debate in May 1940. Davies's group managed to rally opposition to Chamberlain, whose majority in the ensuing vote was so diminished that he had to relinquish the premiership. Following Chamberlain's demise, the Sunday Express carried the headline 'Davies the Giant-Killer - the man who pulled down Chamberlain and set up Churchill'. Lord Beaverbrook commented on Churchill's appointment "Don't thank God, thank Clem Davies".

Churchill offered Davies a viscountcy, which he refused and later a ministerial job, which he also refused. Instead, Davies chose to spend the rest of the war as a backbench candid friend of the government, unafraid to criticise when he felt that the government's efforts needed to be challenged.

To the outside world, Davies presented an amiable, talkative and genial front. But he was a driven character, a workaholic, highly-strung and unable to relax.

At times of stress, he resorted to binge drinking, as a result of which he was hospitalised several times. Unfortunately, his life was full of stress and trauma, the worst of which was that three of his four children all died in separate incidents, and all at the age of 24. As a result, his health went into serious decline for almost two years, until he was eventually able to return to work in November 1944.

Aged 62, he unexpectedly became leader of the Liberals, the party to which he had only formally returned three years earlier, as a result of the disastrous result in the 1945 election.

Sir Archibald Sinclair, who had taken over the leadership from Samuel in 1935, lost his seat. Sinclair, who had served successfully as wartime air minister, came third in his poll, but only 61 votes behind the winning candidate, Gandar Dower, who promised to resign when the war against Japan was won. Davies thus became 'sessional chairman' of the Parliamentary Liberal Party, pending the expected return of Sinclair. However, Gandar Dower reneged on his promise, no by-election was called and Davies continued as leader.

Davies inherited a parliamentary party which was polarised. The divisions were personified in the daughters of two former prime ministers who held senior positions in the Party.

Megan Lloyd George, on the left wing, was one of the 12 remaining MPs and Violet Bonham Carter, Asquith's daughter, on the right wing, was party president. Davies tried to steer a delicate course between the opposing wings. For the first half of the 1945 parliament, the Liberals were fairly united in their support for the Labour government's nationalisation legislation.

However, as the next general election approached, unity within the Liberal ranks began to crumble. A row broke out over whether the Liberals should enter a pact with either of the other major parties and over whether the party should fight the election on a broad or narrow front.

The Party entered the 1950 election with nine MPs defending their seats. Two MPs had left the party and one was to have his seat abolished. The Liberals came out of the election with nine MPs and a 9.1% share of the vote, virtually the same as in 1945. But these figures flattered the true result, as 475 Liberal candidates fought, of whom 319 lost their deposits. Davies's chief whip and his chosen successor, Frank Byers, lost his seat.

The next election followed just 18 months later and the Liberals were forced, by lack of money and candidates, to fight on a narrow front. The 1951 election was the party's worst - only 109 seats were contested. Six Liberal MPs were returned and the party secured just 2.5% of vote. But

the poor result had a compensatory benefit for Davies - his most vocal critics among his MPs lost their seats.

After the 1951 election, the victor, Winston Churchill, offered Davies a cabinet post as secretary of state for education and a coalition between the Liberals and the Conservatives.

Davies reluctantly turned down what he knew would be his last chance of ministerial office. Instead, his band of six MPs soldiered on independently. With hindsight, the party reached a turning point in 1953. That year saw morale and party membership at its lowest. In November 1953, the Liberal candidate in a by-election at Holborn and St Pancras (about four miles from Brent East) managed just 2.3% of the vote. But from then onwards a recovery began. In the Inverness by-election in December 1954, the Liberal candidate, John Bannerman, came second with 36% of the vote. Further good by-election performances followed at Torquay (24%) and Hereford (36%).

Davies was ill during the 1955 election campaign, but the party managed to hold on to all its six seats. An obvious successor had emerged in Jo Grimond and he succeeded the ailing Davies after the 1956 party assembly. Davies led the Party for over 11 gruelling and thankless years - more than twice as long as Lloyd George's tenure. He had been a weak, but nevertheless effective, leader in the difficult circumstances, holding together a fractious, emaciated party.

Although not strong on policy-making, Davies was prescient as an advocate of devolution, European integration, racial and sexual equality and House of Lords reform. After relinquishing the leadership, he concentrated on his role as president of the World Parliament Association, for which he was nominated (unsuccessfully) for the Nobel Peace Prize. Davies remained an MP for the rest of his life and died a few days after the Liberals' famous win in the Orpington by-election in February 1962.

Davies left no diary or memoirs. Only now has his first biography appeared.

---

Clement Davies - Liberal Leader has been researched and written by Alun Wyburn-Powell, with a foreword by Lord Hooson, Davies's successor as Montgomeryshire's Liberal MP. Published by Politicos, price £25.

Available from [www.bookshop.libdems.org.uk](http://www.bookshop.libdems.org.uk) or [www.politicos.co.uk](http://www.politicos.co.uk)

Signed copies are also available post-free from the author at [awyburn-powell@beeb.net](mailto:awyburn-powell@beeb.net).

---

# WORKING WITH WHITE MINORITIES

Liberal Democrats in Bradford have reached out to some neglected communities, reports Rev Geoff Reid

At the Bradford Holocaust Memorial Event in January, the Lord Mayor referred to a group of people around the White Abbey Road area (scene of the 2001 riots), feared by other citizens of Bradford, living in overcrowded conditions, with their own religion and language, whose numbers were seen as expanding at an alarming rate.

Such was the popular view of Irish immigrants in mid-nineteenth century Bradford.

Since then, the city has seen wave after wave of immigration: Germans, Jews, eastern Europeans, African-Caribbeans, Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis. More recently, asylum seekers from African countries have become a significant presence.

When Allan Hillary, the first Liberal Democrat Lord Mayor, and I agreed that we would do something with Bradford's eastern European communities, we knew that talking about white minorities, who were sometimes forgotten about, could easily be misunderstood.

However we reckoned that his record as a Liberal Democrat councillor and my nine years in my day job as team leader at the Touchstone Centre, where we specialise in city issues and inter-faith work, would stand us in good stead. Indeed, one of the reasons why councillor Hillary wanted me to be Lord Mayor's chaplain was because of our experience at building bridges across faith communities. It wasn't just about being a Methodist.

We arranged separate monthly civic receptions at city hall for groups of people from minority communities - Serbians, Poles, Ukrainians, Estonians, Hungarians, Latvians and Lithuanians.

The Lord Mayor's word of welcome stressed that he simply wanted to acknowledge the contribution made by the community to the city's life and development, while recognising that many had been involved in textiles and engineering, industries that had suffered serious decline.

For many of these groups, religion has provided a focus for community identity and this gave me a route into the networks. In addition to the usual range of Christian denominations, Bradford has German, Italian, Polish, Serbian, Ukrainian (both Catholic and Orthodox) church buildings as well as other language congregations using borrowed space.

Any Lord Mayor of Bradford, quite properly, gets invited to Muslim, Sikh and Hindu events. The warm response from these other groups seemed to justify the effort. Some of the Serbians, keeping their heads down since events in the Balkans during the 1990s, were literally moved to tears by the thought of the city taking them seriously as a group. Other groups found meeting together on 'neutral' territory a novel but positive experience.

Taking white minorities seriously in Bradford ought to be no big deal. In February (in what some might think the unlikely context of Songs of Praise on BBC1), I said that one of the hopeful responses to the riots of 2001 was the sense across the city that there could be no more excuses and we had to be more honest with one another.

Unfortunately, you still need a public reputation for anti-racism if you are to get away with some perfectly reasonable statements. I put Ann Cryer MP in this category in respect of what she has said about Pakistani women being trapped in poverty and isolation because of trans-continental marriage, leaving aside the horrors caused by forced marriages.

This did not stop a member of Labour's national executive (a contender for the Brent East nomination) coming to a university seminar in Bradford and scurrilously dismissing her as "giving comfort to the BNP."

The institutions of the eastern European groups, supplementary schools, social clubs, ex-servicemen's associations etc. are in decline for perfectly good reasons. It seems to take about 50 years for eastern European communities to dilute themselves in the wider population of Bradford through intermarriage, and dispersal - and I do not expect EU expansion to make a significant difference to this.

It took the Bradford Irish much longer to reach that point. Something similar, at least in part, will happen with our south Asian communities. Those who are furiously building purpose-built inner city mosques at the moment probably give little thought to their ultimate redundancy. They are unlikely to learn from the experience of the Christian churches, who got themselves saddled with huge inappropriate inner city churches.

When we embarked on our eastern European project, I did wonder if this would get us involved with some right-wing forces. After all, many of these people had fled from Communist domination in the 1940s or, in the case of some Hungarians, in 1956.

I need not have worried. As a Liberal, I should have set aside conventional left-right stereotypes. For what it's worth, many of these people seemed to have gained a reputation for enterprise and hard work. Certainly, adversity gave many of the older generation a distinctive sense of humour.

However, in a city like Bradford, which tends to gain a rather two-dimensional image in national media, the initiative of a Liberal Democrat Lord Mayor seems to have been a useful contribution.

---

## SOUND OF SILENCE

*Dear Liberator,*

I am developing a slightly disturbing tendency to make things I dislike members of the Labour or Tory party. A slug in the garden, a stain on the carpet, an expected whitehead - they all take on the form of opponents in an ALDC toughman election campaign and will be beaten.

I can't even now remember when this started happening. It certainly didn't happen before I became an active Liberal Democrat. And there is a certain perversity about it all. I belong to a 'liberal' party. I am tolerant. I have an infuriating ability to see both sides of every sodding argument, and then find a third, fourth or fifth side. Sometimes I wish I could see more black and white, and fewer greys.

But I am changing. Repeated exposure to election campaigns and writing drivel about two-horse races (yes I know it works, yes I know people don't remember the slogans from one year to the next, yes I do use it but that doesn't mean that I can't cringe about it - right?) has made me more hot blooded, keener for the fight. I like stirring. Even Glenda Jackson's office got a Brent East good morning leaflet. I hear the word 'Labour' or 'Tory' and I am prepared to dislike what follows.

This is the crux of it. In getting party political and going out campaigning for my party and against others, my views have become more polarised. One of the norms when being involved in politics is defending your position. And because you believe that your party is more likely to deliver a better world than the others, sometimes you would prefer not to admit that bits of your policy are weak or crap (especially around election time), and acknowledge that other parties have got it more right.

The times I feel genuinely proud to be a Liberal Democrat, when we opposed the war in Iraq, the times when we stand up and fight for the environment, are sadly outnumbered by the times when I am frustrated because we seem to do so little or do things so half heartedly.

Charles Kennedy has criticised the Labour party for having a 'paucity of ambition'. He's right. I think they do. But so do we.

# LETTERS

The party's main obsession seems to be with the media. What will they think? How will this look? Will it lose us votes? Does it make us look radical and sandal-wearing? Will it distinguish us from the other parties in any meaningful way? It does? Ohhhh be careful.

Sometimes it's worth reminding ourselves why we're active Liberal Democrats. We're here to promote and advance liberal democrat policies not just Liberal Democrat policies, and that includes explaining and selling it to the public via the media.

The public want to hear liberal policies from us, not watered down stuff that is palatable for pretty much everyone. Many of us have lost count of members, friends and family asking us why the Liberal Democrats haven't been making a noise about the latest big issue. Well, we probably did, but it was such a small faint pointless noise that it wasn't worth repeating.

The Liberal Democrats might attract people fed up with the other two parties. But if they don't know what we stand for, because we've been too scared we might lose their support by telling them, then there isn't much hope for us as a party. It would be a cheap joke to suggest that some of our MPs haven't discovered what we stand for yet.

But I won't today, as I have a Focus to write about an insidious invasion of Tory woodlice in the bathroom.

*Nic Rattle  
Bath*

---

## ME TOO

*Dear Liberator,*

Radical Bulletin (Liberator 293) reports "the January FE voted (with only Donnachadh McCarthy in opposition) to abolish elections for the peers panel." This is not the case.

The FE voted that there should be a motion to conference based upon the draft submitted to the January meeting.

I was one of two FE members who said clearly that elections should continue, although the current system needs reform. Another member made it clear that her assent for the motion going forward was simply to allow debate to progress.

A number of us will be looking with interest at amendments at conference to retain the elections element - it is after all for conference to decide, not the FE.

*Chris White  
St Albans*

---

## ELEVATE KISHWER

*Dear Liberator,*

Liberator 293 says that the names that Charles Kennedy is understood to have submitted to Blair as new peers include Kishwer Falkner. If this is so, the 'elevation' to the House of Lords of a woman, born as Kishwer Khan to a Muslim family in Pakistan, who started work in Pakistan Airlines and then gained a degree in London, who has worked for our party, the Commonwealth Secretariat and recently a charity combating AIDS in Africa, while being a working mother, will do us credit.

I have had the pleasure of working for Kishwer when she stood for parliament in Kensington and Chelsea, while many of our key activists had been asked to campaign in more winnable seats.

Our members in Kensington became aware of her considerable knowledge of foreign policy, when a lecture by Shirley Williams had to be cancelled because of her husband's death. At literally half an hour's notice, Kishwer provided the meeting with an in-depth account of the politics surrounding the Iraq war. I am sure we all hope that Charles submits her name, and that the Prime Minister accepts it.

*Bruce Ritchie  
Kensington*

---

## **The Third World War by Humphrey Hawksley Pan £6.99**

Humphrey Hawksley is well known as a BBC correspondent, who has been thrown out of more hot spot countries than most people have visited. His observations of places civilised and downright dangerous have informed his third novel.

The threads of the gathering disaster lie in North Korean ambitions strangely allied to the fanaticism of a Muslim cleric, which then impact on the India-Pakistan confrontation and gradually draw in the great powers. Interestingly, France and Germany play no role in the counsels of the world (other than the British prime minister, Nolan, believing he can persuade them to fall in line), and the Arab-Israeli issue is refreshingly absent.

It is an increasingly fascinating read - one is as out of breath at the end as the fictional President West.

Thought-provoking.

*Robert Woodthorpe Browne*

---

## **Reflections on the Irish State by Garret FitzGerald Irish Academic Press, 2002 £32.50**

The Republic of Ireland has suffered since its inception from the lack of a Liberal party. The Progressive Democrats, whilst economic liberals, use the small 'l' on their website and are not a member of Liberal International. Why did Pat Cox leave them? There was some talk at one time about Fine Gael joining Liberal International - they didn't. However, the sum total of Liberalism, and indeed of Liberals, is not found exclusively in Liberal parties.

Garret FitzGerald might have naturally fitted into Fianna Fáil. One of the other things about politics in the Republic is the number of senior players who are descendants of participants in the 1916 Easter Uprising. Both of FitzGerald's parents were present in the Dublin GPO building until pretty near the end (his mother, an ultra-nationalist Presbyterian, to knock a few myths on the head).

Instead, FitzGerald changed Fine Gael (to quote his biographer Raymond Smith) "from its basic conservative Civil War into a (party)...

# REVIEWS

that could attract... people... of liberal thought." He goes on, "Inside (FG) there were men of the Cosgraveite wing who wanted no truck with the liberalism that Garret expounded... If Garret at this time was pictured as a liberal head on a conservative body, it was not at all wrong." And further, "It has been said of him since he first became a Minister in 1973 that he was the extra Labour man in any coalition cabinet."

From reading his Reflections, I don't doubt that FitzGerald is a conservative, but one whose conservatism is very much of a social democratic nature, with the liberalism that often applies therein. This is probably not far from Fine Gael's present position.

The Reflections are a series of essays on Irish political economy; they are a very good introduction to it. FitzGerald argues convincingly in favour of the timing of Irish independence, and why this was not appropriate for the then more industrial north, but that those differences are less of a factor now as the two economies bear closer similarities - divergent from that of Great Britain.

FitzGerald recognises the faults in the Irish constitution that (the UK welfare state notwithstanding) made reconciliation improbable, but is perhaps a little rose-eyed about the relationship of the Irish state and the Roman Catholic Church, as the Irish vote with their feet against the 'Church of Christ, Paedophile', but are left with a spiritual void. In many respects, High Anglicanism (in the Church of Ireland) might be the solution to those problems, were it not for historical association. FitzGerald makes the point that there was possibly little the fledgling Irish state could do but entrust education to the church; where that trust was betrayed, it was big-time.

Then there is the question of

standards of morality in public life. Names are not named, though the newspapers are full of them and they are widely bandied about in general conversation! FitzGerald homes in on the problem. The Irish, half admiring some of their politicians for being a bit fly, are now somewhat bemused that many of those politicians get away with it, despite the well-known publicity for their actions. The localism of Irish politics is part of the problem, though I believe steps against the dual-mandate of holding national and local government seats may resolve some of the issues. Essentially, local government is too weak in Ireland. However, Liberals beware; there is something to be studied here as a potential short-coming in decentralised administration - the right checks and balances need to be in place. Furthermore, the general principals explored in this essay and the introduction are as good a starting point as any for ethics in public life and the book should be read for these alone, if Irish politics are not of immediate concern to you.

Enda Kenny, the current leader of Fine Gael, was first elected to the Dáil for West Mayo at a by-election in 1975. His father, Henry Kenny, the great Mayo footballer of the 1930s, had held the seat since 1954 and, on his death, Enda held the seat with 52.8% of first preferences. The Irish Sunday Independent recently (15 February) described his party as "A hopeless rump led by a hapless mannequin." Fine Gael currently suffers the fate of the Liberal Democrats, where its share of the vote is not reflected by the number of seats it holds. Whether this is rectified at the next set of elections, we shall have to wait and see. The political parties of the north are not the only ones that seem to be endangered species.

*Stewart Rayment*



Bell gives the example of Baghdad TV as the invasion got underway in March 2003. Coverage included: "To the surprise of many, the US has not take out Iraq's TV headquarters (NBC). A lot of people wondered why Iraqi TV had been allowed to stay on air (CNN)".

who can look after themselves in a trouble spot, and use what fame and clout they may have to draw international attention to relief needs. One thing we learn relatively little about from this book is the end of his political career. This stopped as strangely as it started, up against all three main parties in Brentwood. The reasons for this campaign remain obscure, since Bell pleads legal action as the reason for not going into them here.

That aside, this will prove a thought provoking read for anyone interested in international affairs and their reporting.

*Mark Smulian*

**Through the Gates of Fire**  
**by Martin Bell**  
**Weidenfeld & Nicolson**  
**£16.99**

The subtitle is 'a journey into world disorder', and Bell of course has seen plenty of that, ranging from tragedy in the world's war zones to the farce of his encounters with Neil Hamilton in Tatton.

However, though this is a book of memoirs, at least it is not mainly that. Much of its centres on how broadcasters have gone from being observers of wars and terrorism to a much more uncomfortable position of responsibility.

Smart terrorists have known exactly how to tailor their actions to milk the maximum coverage from them, but the advent of 24-hour news channels, with endless air to fill and the driving 'need' to be first with the news, may encourage events rather than reflect them, Bell argues.

War correspondents have not often been paragons of impartiality, and Bell reminds us that, in the First World War, reporters were roundly disliked by British troops for their failure to convey anything of the horror and futility of the trenches in their relentlessly upbeat writing.

Some nowadays go even further in not merely the way they report but in shaping what the military actually does.

Rupert Murdoch's Fox TV wondered whether the Americans should not "put one down the stove pipe there."

When the television station was bombed a few days later, the networks claimed credit for highlighting its potential as a target.

Bell pleads not for censorship but a sense of proportion from the media; that it should not report every outrage as though the end of the world were at hand but instead be more a source of information than an inciter to action.

This issue is less of a problem in British television than its American counterpart, but will still be an issue as the BBC comes under political pressure, and rolling news, even in the BBC and ITN, exerts its pressures.

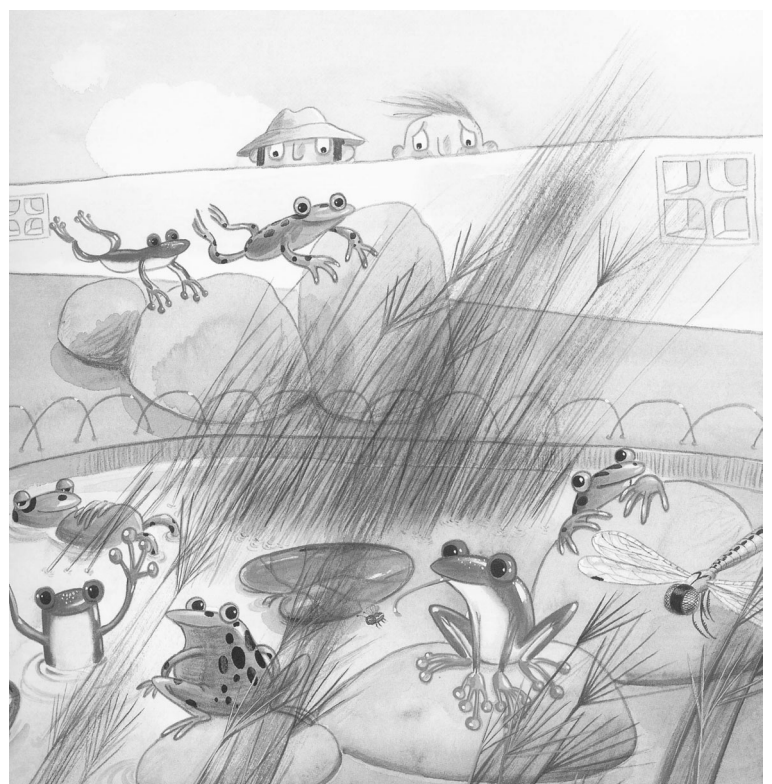
Bell is still involved in international affairs, as a special representative for humanitarian emergencies for UNICEF. This, he admits, is a grand title for someone

**Hopping Mad by**  
**Michael Catchpool**  
**illustrated by**  
**David Roberts**  
**Little Tiger Press 2004**  
**£9.99**

George Bush and his poodle Blair would do well to read this ribbetting tale. As the protagonists soon find out, frogs need their freedom. It might help their numeracy, too, when it comes to balancing budgets thrown by costly wars. Oh that our 'leaders' were 3 to 7 year olds again.

Nicely observed eco-system, though I'm not sure where Finn's frogs come from...

*Stewart Raymont*



## Monday

A pleasant luncheon with the Women Liberal Democrats. In my speech, I touch upon the latest lightweight corsetry designed for wear in closely contested elections and discuss the future of domestic economy in this age of the semi-automatic mangle. I am delighted to find that the new President of this august body – following in the footsteps of such diverse figures as the blessed Nancy Seear and the feared East End gangster Violent Bonham-Carter – is none other than Sue Doughty. Which landowner does not bear a heavy debt of gratitude to the inventor of the orchard doughty? This rugged staff is equally effective when applied to the crown of a poacher or the backside of an apple scumper, and I long ago chose to equip each of my gamekeepers with one. I am not all surprised that the people of Guildford had the good sense to elect the woman as a token of their esteem.

## Tuesday

Some years ago, I observed that there is something odd about the way our Scottish Members are named. Too many of them are equipped with two Christian names (Nicol Stephen, Malcolm Bruce) or two surnames (Menzies Campbell). My point was obviously taken, as immediately afterwards our friends North of the Border took to selecting people with sensible names like John Barrett and Alan Reid. So it is with dismay this morning that I open a letter (from “A Well-Wisher, Peterculter”) and find it contains a crumpled cutting from Liberal Democrat News showing a photograph of the aforementioned Stephen, his wife and children. The photograph itself is charming, as are the names of their daughters – Mirrhyn and Mharni – but the names the couple have chosen for their sons give me the gravest concern. Macleod Stephen? Drummond Stephen? The poor boys have been named backwards! The tragedy is that Stephen Macleod and Stephen Drummond would be excellent names: one could imagine the latter coming on first change for Worcestershire. Such is my concern that I dictate a letter to Jim Wallace – or should I call him “Wallace Jim”? – urging him to act at once.

## Wednesday

To the United Nations in New York for negotiations with Lincolnshire County Council over a number of parishes to which all fair-minded critics will admit that Rutland has an unanswerable claim. I begin by assuring Kofi Annan – I assume he is a relation of my old friend Noel Annan – that no one should read anything sinister into the naval exercise that we are holding on Rutland Water nor be alarmed by the manoeuvres our troops are undertaking in the hills above Stamford. I go on to emphasise that we Rutlanders are a peaceful people who ask only to be left alone to farm our land and turn our cheeses and, but that, when roused, we... At this point there is a horrible electronic squawk from beneath the table. When we look under it we find a chap with an RAF moustache holding one of those microphones with the large fluffy tops and what looks remarkably like a reel-to-reel tape recorder. “Terribly sorry,” he says when he has recovered himself, “just checking the table legs.”

## Thursday

The Prince of Wales pleaded with me to attend the first of what he termed “these, er, citizenship ceremony thingies”, but I tactfully refused. This sort of thing simply isn’t British, wouldn’t you say? (HRH took it badly, exclaiming “You dirty rotten swine, you have

# Lord Bonkers’ Diary

deaded me.”). In Rutland, being a more emotional people, we have long held such events. Those seeking citizenship are required to consume a meal of Stilton and pork pie before kissing the Great Seal of Rutland. (I am afraid it has rather fishy breath, but that is only to be expected). The rules also require that applicants swear an oath of loyalty to the Duke of Rutland, but when I am conducting the ceremony I generally skip that part in favour of a lecture on some of the other great families hereabouts.

## Friday

To a garden in Twickenham, almost in the shadow of the ground where the First Lady Bonkers used to command the blind side. Here I admire the bees belonging to none other than our Shadow Chancellor Vincent Cable. “What ho, Low Voltage!” I greet him, but he signals to me to be quiet. “I was telling the bees,” he explains afterwards. “Telling them what?” I ask, intrigued. “Telling them there is going to be a council by-election in Tunbridge Wells. It’s a tradition.” He then shows me a clever device that blows smoke over the stripy little chaps and quietens them down – I imagine he got the idea from the Conservative Whips’ office. Later, over a delicious tea (complete with honey), I tell him that his interest in beekeeping will do him no harm in the House but advise him to take his veil off first next time he asks Gordon Brown a question.

## Saturday

Great consternation in Wales, where careless use of the wireless e-mail has led to our draft general election manifesto being sent to members of the New Party. It happens that I have been spending some time in the Principality recently, in my role as a theatre impresario, putting together a retrospective season of the plays of John Osborne under the title ‘Look Back in Bangor’. I am therefore on hand (and I can report that Mike German is close to tears of gratitude when he sees me arrive) to calm everyone down. When someone says it is a disaster, I chide him (I am good at chiding) and point out that, however hard one tries, people are bound to find out what one’s policies are in the end.

## Sunday

I have never been terribly keen on judges: I remember the morning after the Boat Race one year when I was... Enough of that, but it does explain why I am no great lover of public inquiries. Some people are very fond of the things – Neil Kinnock spent his whole time as leader of the Labour Party calling for them – but you will rarely catch me saying, “Send for a judge. One of those fellows will get to the bottom of things.” Thus I was not surprised when Lord Hutton delivered his absurd whitewash of the Government. Hutton was just the chap to have on your side when you were chasing a sporting target on a sticky dog at Adelaide or had been put in on a damp April morning at Worksop, but dress him in a wig and he is no better than the rest of the tribe.

---

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

---