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- **Attack of the willy-wavers - Simon Titley**
- **Murder strains Holland's liberalism - Peta Bies**
- **No choice offered to the poor - Andrew Toye**

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- * welcomes written contributions on relevant topics, up to 1800 words.

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COMMENTARY

WHICH TWIN IS THE TORY?

That was a Liberal slogan in 1966. It could apply again now.

Labour's plan for compulsory national identity cards ought alone to be enough for anyone who prizes liberty to strive to ensure its candidates' defeat at the expected general election. This vile assault on the country's fundamental freedoms is all of a piece with the Blairites' determination to turn Britain into a police state.

Only Labour candidates who have specifically repudiated both identity cards and the Iraq war should benefit from Liberal Democrat tactical voting.

Labour authoritarianism comes from two sources – one is the party's historic conviction that the state knows best, a stance which, however objectionable, is at least intellectually arguable.

The other is not. It comes from the spinelessness that defines the 'new' variant of Labour. Faced with a populist clamour from right-wing tabloids for simplistic 'action', Labour is ready to destroy the country's historic rights and liberties rather than face down this bullying.

Identity cards (under which citizens will have to account to the police for their lawful presence in a public place) and house arrest (for those of whom Charles Clarke disapproves) are the worst examples.

But the list goes on, ranging from a treaty that allows British citizens to be extradited on demand to America, through making criticism of religions illegal, to abolition of the secret ballot in some elections.

Blair has presided over an onslaught against liberty on a scale undreamed of even by the preceding Conservative government.

While he is quite willing to repulse any attack from the 'left', however widely defined, Blair has never in his wretched career stood up to the right.

Whether it is the Conservative Party itself, the newspapers that support it, or merely a transient opinion poll, he accommodates, rather than confronts, any attack from the right. The result is a ratchet effect that pulls the whole of political discourse inexorably to the authoritarian right.

The forces of conservatism that Blair once affected to oppose, but which in fact he embraces warmly, thus only have to keep demanding more in order to secure their goals. Since each time they demand something they are appeased by the government, they naturally come back for more. Indeed, it is scarcely worth exerting themselves to elect Tories when they can get what they want anyway from Labour.

Thus the coming general election will see a right-wing Labour Party fighting an extreme right-wing Conservative one.

It is vital that the Liberal Democrats stand outside this. This is not just an issue of principle, important as that is, but one of good politics.

Right-wing authoritarians have two parties from which to choose, and would therefore have no reason to give their support to a third one.

But that part of the electorate that is neither conservative nor authoritarian, and it is a large part, has nowhere to go but the Liberal Democrats.

Having for decades struggled to define itself clearly, the party now faces an election in which its position is not only clear but is one that gives it sole claim to the huge swathe of the progressively-minded electorate.

The Liberal Democrat position is about as distinctive as it could be: civil liberty, good public services paid for by fair taxation, a justice system that both punishes and rehabilitates, long-term environmental gains even though they may require short-term inconvenience, a full role in a democratic European Union, and a foreign policy independent of Washington.

With the possible exception of the latter, these are not positions that command easy headlines or sound bites, or that fit into posturing about who is 'toughest'.

But they do appeal to voters who think beyond simplistic slogans; who value their services, freedom and environment; who hate this government's interference with liberty at home and craven behaviour abroad; and who know the Tories offer no alternative.

On that base, the party can build the solid foundation of committed support - rather than floating protest votes – that has so long eluded it. Solidify that, and who knows what a future general election may hold.

Throw it away by trying to outbid the populism of the other two parties, and it will be painfully obvious what future elections will hold.

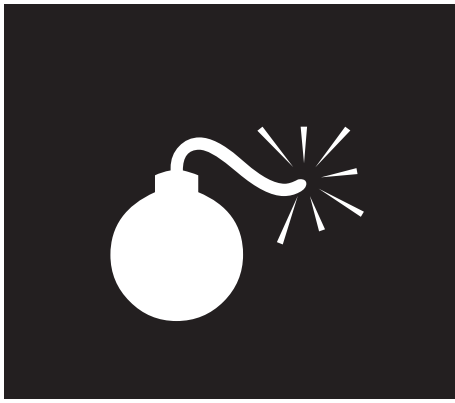
The Liberal Democrats are in contention for the whole progressive vote, and the party is largely united about its positions.

If it holds its nerve and resists siren calls from the right, it will enter the expected general election in the best shape, and with the best prospects, it has had in the lifetimes of most members.

YOUR NEXT LIBERATOR

Tony Blair has inexplicably failed to advise the Liberator Collective of the date of the next general election.

If, as everyone at present expects, it falls on 5 May, we intend to produce an issue in mid-April depending on how many people are available to contribute. That may prove impossible, in which case Liberator 302 would appear after the election.



RADICAL BULLETIN

SPLENDID ISOLATION

“Always keep a hold of nurse, for fear of finding something worse”. Hilaire Belloc’s cautionary verse may strike a chord with Liberal Democrat MPs as they contemplate being led into a general election by an evidently vigorous Charles Kennedy.

Perhaps they also think they will be led into a subsequent general election too?

A year ago, this would scarcely have seemed plausible as Kennedy struggled with allegations about mysterious illnesses with, some said, rather less mysterious causes (Liberator 295).

Wild plots were fomented involving the installation of Menzies Campbell as a stop-gap leader, while political pundits studied Kennedy’s sweaty shirts.

Now Kennedy gives every sign of buoyant health, and faces no serious challenge. Barring some cataclysm, he can probably stay as long as he likes.

How has he done it? He has not set out to crush rivals and build an unassailable power base of his own. Rather, the job has been done for him by others.

Few MPs want to see Kennedy removed for fear of what might replace him and, by remaining neutral between the parliamentary factions and their supporters, Kennedy has given them all an interest in his preservation.

The economic liberals gathered around Vincent Cable and David Laws, their Beveridge Group rivals around Paul Holmes and John Pugh, the hard right wing around Mark Oaten, and the left around Simon Hughes, all fear each other more than they fear Kennedy.

In between them is a mass of MPs who quietly get on with their constituency and other business, have no particular stake in this sort of leadership intrigue, and resent the ‘policy by press release’ approach of, in particular, Cable and Oaten.

“Kennedy is Billy No-mates, he’s not very close to any other MPs, and that is his strength”, one MP has observed.

Saner souls in the party are talking about a general election advance that could take the tally of seats into the mid-70s; the best result for more than 80 years.

In that case, the parliamentary party would be big enough for it to be inevitable that political and personal factions would form among MPs, just as they have always done on the Conservative and Labour benches, and Liberal Democrats might as well get used to the idea.

Above all this factional manoeuvring floats one MP who has no faction and, as long as he does not, can watch his colleagues fight like slightly decorous ferrets in a sack while staying on until a time of his choosing.

THE MAN ON THE FENCE

Home affairs is a demanding brief in the Liberal Democrats. It requires the holder to negotiate a mass of issues that other parties believe are susceptible to populist, simplistic ‘solutions’, while promoting a position that, being grounded in Liberalism, is usually neither simple nor populist.

The post has been held by people of the calibre of Alan Beith and Simon Hughes, because to make a success of it requires an instinctive liberal commitment and heavyweight political nous.

After his behaviour over the house arrest controversy, Liberal Democrats will surely wonder whether the present incumbent Mark Oaten possesses either quality.

It ought to be instinctive to any liberal that indefinite house arrest on the say-so of a politician (not even a judge) is intolerable. And it ought to have been obvious to anyone of political weight that, like so much else, this had little to do with security and much to do with Labour courting ‘crackdown’ headlines in the tabloids.

Liberal Democrat toes must have curled the length of the land during Oaten’s performance on Radio 4’s The Week in Westminster on 28 January.

His opening shot was: “I welcomed what Charles Clarke said in the sense that... there may very well be some measures that he is putting forward that the Lib Dems can support.”

This was promptly slapped down by Labour MP Bob Marshall-Andrews, who said he was “very disappointed to hear that the Liberal Democrats are giving any support at all to [house arrest]... For the first time for 300 years, what is being proposed here is executive arrest and detention without trial and indefinitely of British subjects. The worst thing that terrorism does to you is not the threat that terrorists pose to us, it’s what they induce us to do to ourselves.”

Beside Marshall-Andrews, Oaten’s performance was embarrassing. His managerial rather than liberal priorities shone through: “What I’ve got to do as a politician and a Liberal is to try and juggle this complicated equation over making sure that on the one hand I defend those civil liberties but on the other hand that I am responsible and listen to the security threats.

“What I have to do is to listen carefully to this change, and that’s got nothing to do with general elections, it’s got to do with sensible grown-up politics, to find a good way forward which can balance the civil liberty beliefs I have and I must take note of the security implications at the same time.”

It is usually a good idea to assume that a politician who takes refuge in claiming to be 'grown up' has run out of arguments.

Oaten had begun to come under pressure from all corners of the party following his initial response on 26 January, when he had described the house arrest plans as: "a welcome start and the Liberal Democrats will look carefully at measures to introduce new laws on prohibiting certain activities, and on house detention".

This provoked outrage, in particular among members of the House of Lords closely involved in human rights work, with Kishwer Falkner being notably active.

As angry letters and e-mails flooded in, Oaten was forced into saying that his comments had been a holding statement. Lords Lester and Goodhart were then brought in to draft a legally sound alternative with which the party could live.

It is significant that Oaten expressed his views in mostly administrative terms, as if house arrest involved merely weighing up technical issues.

He has accepted the false premise of authoritarianism, that civil liberty and security exist in inverse proportion to one another. Consequently, his argument with the government became a matter of degree rather than a principled disagreement.

What distinguishes a liberal political party should, above all, be its liberalism, which is what also should distinguish its shadow home secretary. But it doesn't.

Oaten has complained that party members should trust him more. If his instincts were sound, he would have that trust.

MANIFESTO DESTINY

When the pre-manifesto came to Federal Policy Committee last year, the committee was for the first time given a say on the campaigning priorities, and Matthew Taylor endured a rough ride from members who wanted to decide every word of them.

At its February meeting, no campaigning points were presented to FPC. Could it be the MPs and Campaigns Department have decided that involving the FPC is too much trouble?

One hole that still needs to be filled is policy on environmental tax. In 2001, green taxes were to be offset by cuts in National Insurance, which was later hypothecated to the NHS. That policy has now been dumped, but there is as yet no clarity over how green taxes would be revenue neutral.

The largest remaining problem in February was the draft 'justice' section written by, surprise, surprise, Mark Oaten, which drew fire from almost the entire committee over its 'tough' proposals on immigration and asylum.

Oaten had at the time of going to press been summoned by FPC to explain himself.

Indeed, the committee was sufficiently concerned for even leading members to use terms like 'rank populism'.

Former MP and party president Bob Maclennan appears to be aghast at Oaten's idea of linking prisoners' release dates to their educational performance, and has been heard to call them "profoundly illiberal, and quite indefensible".

OLD ENOUGH TO VOTE, BUT NOT DRINK

Another row involving shadow home secretary Mark Oaten concerns the party's policy, passed in 1999, of giving people the right to vote at 16.

They would become adults and, therefore, be allowed to buy alcohol. Oaten does not oppose votes at 16 but, with Labour making a fuss about the Liberal Democrats supposedly supporting binge drinking, he decided a change was in order.

This led to the party issuing a new 'line to take', which said: "In the current climate of concern over binge drinking and health risks to teenagers, the Liberal Democrats would not introduce legislation to allow 16 year-olds to buy alcohol".

Isn't it amazing the difference the simple word 'not' can make to party policy?

However, 16 year-olds might gain the right to buy alcohol "in the long term", so technically policy hasn't been changed. Amazing.

BROWN NOSE WINDSOR SOUP

It is with great regret that Liberator informs readers that our old mate Leighton Andrews has been making an arse of himself.

This erstwhile radical Liberal, now Labour AM for Rhondda, has taken up the cause of the dignity of the royal family.

Plaid Cymru AM Leanne Wood referred to the queen in the assembly as 'Mrs Windsor'.

About 40 minutes later, when PC's Lord Elis-Thomas was back in the assembly chair, Andrews raised a point of order about this "childish and offensive" reference to the queen, which, he claimed, would deeply offend his constituents. Wood was suspended.

Elis-Thomas felt Andrews behaved badly by waiting 40 minutes to complain so that he could embarrass Plaid Cymru.

This led to an altercation when the two met by chance in a Cardiff restaurant and Elis-Thomas enquired whether Andrews had enjoyed "a good republican dinner".

Andrews reply was delicately described by the Western Mail as "**** off", and he said Wood's remarks had been "infantile gesture politics".

And this from the man who wrote in Liberator in 1976 that parliament was "at best the eunuch of capitalism".

CRIMINAL ACT

There must be some constituencies still searching for a general election candidate, so perhaps they should consider selecting an indicted war criminal.

Liberal International's executive meeting in Costa Rica was confronted with the news that the Liberals of Serbia Party had run such a person on its electoral list for the parliamentary elections. The party had "acknowledged that it made a mistake".

Called to vote on the party's suspension from LI, 30 executive members appeared to see nothing wrong with this unusual example of candidate diversity, and voted against. Seven members supported suspension and two abstained, although the executive did manage to "strongly condemn the

inclusion of the indicted war criminal on the electoral list'. So that's all right then.

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

In keeping with the new spirit of freedom of information, the Liberal Democrat Federal Executive has banned observers from attending unless they give two days' notice, and has ceased to put its minutes on the web.

The excuse offered is that political opponents might get hold of the minutes. That eventuality would have serious repercussions because of the number of by-elections caused as Tory and Labour MPs died of boredom before they finished reading them.

The FE has always been able to declare items confidential and not publish them, rather like 'part 2' in a council meeting, so why the secrecy?

ITS THAT MAN AGAIN

Readers with long memories will recall the appalling Ian Powney, who fronted the divisive Merger Now campaign for Richard Holme in 1987/88 (*Liberator* 170, and others too numerous to mention around that time).

Powney came from obscurity, vanished again, resurfaced as an Islington councillor in 2002, then vanished from there too, only to get himself elected last year as an independent in Basingstoke, where he has been possessed by a revelation.

"The Liberal Democrat group on the council have been the driving force on the council for many years, promoting some of its most effective policies and notable achievements," he said on rejoining the party.

Enjoy him while you can Basingstoke, it probably won't last.

Liberator Collective members with the magazine 'birthday' cake at the National Liberal Club on 17 January.

Almost 100 subscribers and friends came to help celebrate the magazine's milestone.

Pictured from left are collective members: Stewart Rayment, Gareth Epps, Harriet Sherlock, Wendy Kyrle-Pope, Mark Smulian, Catherine Furlong, Simon Titley and Peter Johnson.

SCIENTIFIC EXPERIMENT

Baroness Margaret Sharp has been a consistent, if low-profile, participant in the party's policy making process since it was formed, with a particular expertise in science policy.

An ideal person, surely, to speak on science and technology policy in the Lords?

She was offered the post but refused because she was not prepared to defend in public shadow chancellor Vincent Cable's policy of ending all spending on innovation (which comes from the Department of Trade and Industry, which he wishes to abolish).

Sharp was also unhappy at the idea of the science budget being increased by an amount lower than that proposed by the government.

Most of those in the Lords who take interest in these matters believe Cable's policy is mad, and are expected to challenge it after the general election.



PATRIOT GAMES

Patriotism is viewed with suspicion for good reasons, but can describe an essential sense of community in a rootless world, says John Stevens

Most Liberal Democrats, I believe, instinctively agree with Doctor Johnson, that claims to patriotism are “the last refuge of the scoundrel”. Flag waving, of any kind, runs counter to our radical roots and insults both our intellects and our aesthetics.

Conservatives have long considered themselves to be the patriotic party, setting a sense of One Nation against the socialist appeal to class struggle. They still use the Union Jack as a standard prop of their meetings, even as the cross of St George more accurately represents their receding appeal.

Labour has been most successful at defeating Conservatism when it has risen above class politics or technocracy and spoken of national renewal. This was the case in 1945. It was also a feature of 1997.

Plainly, New Labour’s patriotism, since then, amply bears out Johnson’s dictum. What could be sillier than ‘Cool Britannia’? What could be clumsier than David Blunkett’s tests for citizenship? What is setting out more hostages to fortune than Gordon Brown’s shallow fiscal triumphalism? What could be more grotesque than finding ourselves accused of not understanding the British national interest because of our justified scepticism over the sources, scope and seriousness of the threat from Islamist terrorism, by a prime minister who, when we really faced the danger of annihilation from the Soviet Union, was content to frolic in frivolous and self-serving protest?

The west’s victory in the Cold War unleashed forces which are transforming, fundamentally, our sense of, and sentiment towards, the nation.

Social and cultural definitions are becoming increasingly blurred and unstable. An attempt is underway to apply America’s melting pot ethos to the world. The old linkages between collective values and productivity no longer apply.

We face the apparently contradictory prospect of being reduced to mere economic agents, as Adam Smith predicted, and, with regard to the relative worth of our labour, suffering the progressive alienation of Marxist analysis. All of which has heightened the longing for belonging, for some compass of community that can guide us through so new, unfamiliar and threatening territory, that is the dominant political desire of our times.

I would argue that the rise of Liberal Democracy, in recent years, owes a great deal to the fact that we, through our superior emphasis on localism, as well as on internationalism, and our deeper determination not to see diversity as the enemy of solidarity, have tapped into this more successfully than either Labour or the Conservatives.

Perhaps we have done so largely unwittingly? After all, we have stopped short of linking these various strands into a coherent ‘new patriotism’, for solid, Johnsonian reasons. They have emerged from our tactical circumstances, rather

than following from our strategic principles. Nevertheless, I feel that unless we are prepared to attempt such a synthesis, we will not be able to cross the cusp upon which we now find ourselves, from being a party of protest to one of power. Ruling the nation as it is, demands a comprehensive conception of what it should be.

The materials lie readily to hand. What is the common thread combining, say, our opposition to the war in Iraq, to the conflation of the boundaries between public and private in the delivery of health and education, to the undermining of proper pension provision, to the erosion of our rural environment, to the homogenising pressures upon our various ethnic communities, to imagining that Lowestoft should imitate Las Vegas, to identity cards, to the restriction of jury trial?

Is it not that we are defending a ‘British Way’ of doing things, defined by our determination to lead Europe into a partnership of equals across the Atlantic, rather than by a solitary subservience to the United States, and by our recognition of the negative social and environmental consequences of untrammelled economic globalisation, and not just its commercial advantages, by our understanding of the importance of historical continuity and rootedness, by our commitment to the strong helping the weak, to tolerance and fairness and, above all, to freedom, which our political tradition, pre-eminently, has fought to make central to Britain’s identity over the centuries?

Does this sound too old Tory? Indeed, too old-fashioned? Certainly, the Conservatives have vacated this ground almost completely. But the more serious response is that the path to the future does not always follow what appears to be most modern.

For example, it was parliament rather than the King that strove to uphold the ancient constitution of England in the seventeenth century. Nor must we necessarily go with the flow of the current disillusionment over what politics can achieve, which has been Tony Blair’s most baleful legacy. We should not make the mirror-image of Johnson’s error as to his own worth, and through an excessive fear of pomposity, lose the chance to proclaim that our vision is not only sympathetic enough, but also grand enough, yes, patriotic enough, for government.

John Stevens was a Conservative MEP and founder of the Pro-European Conservative Party before joining the Liberal Democrats, and was a candidate for the party in the 2004 European election.

CITIES SLICKER

The European election results suggest the Liberal Democrats should put more effort into urban areas. Michael Steed cast an expert eye over the figures

In the run-up to the general election, we will hear plenty of projections of the outcome based on opinion polls. Matters such as the unravelling of the tactical vote, the student vote, the Islamic vote or regional swings will all receive due, though not necessarily careful, attention.

My purpose here is to bring in the evidence from a neglected source, last June's European parliamentary elections. We must be careful. If we had taken the level of the 1999 Lib-Dem performance, particularly in such south coast seats as Torbay, and used it to predict detailed results in the 2001 general election, we would have gone hopelessly wrong. Just as William Hague's 1999 Euro-election success gave him a hopelessly exaggerated idea of what he could gain by campaigning against the single currency.

However, there were good reasons these disparities. In previously Tory Westminster constituencies where a Liberal challenger had effectively built up a strong challenge, squeezing Labour en route, the 1999 Euro-Elections brought home just how many voters in such situations are Westminster-only Liberals. Elsewhere, of course, we are familiar with local-government only Liberal voters.

As for that 1999/2001 Tory performance, Hague underestimated the intelligence of a small but critical Eurosceptic section of the electorate: prepared to use their votes to boost his arguments in Euro-elections, but not wishing to see him returned as prime minister. Generally, what is most interesting in the Euro-Elections is not simple headlines as to who has done well; it is what the detail registers about changing attitudes and behaviour within the electorate.

Back in 1997, I took the risk of believing that the particular geographical and local credibility pattern of anti-Conservative tactical voting in the 1994 Euro-elections would be a good predictor of Westminster behaviour. I placed carefully selected bets on that basis and was able to afford a much-needed new kitchen as a result. So what would I derive from analysis of the Liberal Democrat performance in June 2004? I would not extrapolate from the actual level of party's support, but I do believe that the 1999-2004 changes will prove a good indicator of the probable Liberal Democrat 2001-05 advance.

Overall Lib-Dem share of the British vote moved up by 2.3 percentage points. That is a rather more modest rise than those who have been attempting predictions from opinion poll standings, and I believe a better indicator for May 2005.

However, there was plenty of variation. In the two regions where we gained a seat, the increase was greatest - North East (+4.3) and North West (+4.2). In two other regions no progress was made. In East Midlands (+0.2), clearly the Kilroy-Silk effect hit all three parties (it was the only region where UKIP seems to have taken significantly from Labour);

that's one effect that won't be seen in May 2005. In South East (+0.02), I can find no easy explanation. Within the region, our share of the vote went down across both Kent and the Thames Valley counties; we progressed a little in Hampshire, Surrey and Sussex. I do not know why; analysis from other regions throws no light on this pattern.

However, the poor performance in the Isle of Wight, at -4.8 the worst in Britain, recalls an interesting finding from the 1975 referendum. Then, the analysis I did picked out two areas where a strong general-election Liberal vote had been more reluctant to support the yes vote: Wight and Cornwall. Looking at the 1999-2004 changes, we lost ground in both. And UKIP did particularly well in both; although in most of the country the Conservatives may be most threatened by any UKIP progress in May 2005, in maritime south-westerly constituencies with a traditional mildly Eurosceptic Liberal strength, we are also at risk. However, outside these few southern counties, there were no significant areas where the party did not advance.

Turning to the positive, the next best result after the two northern regions was in London (+3.7). The London electorate has changed a lot in recent years. It is now very significantly better educated, more cosmopolitan and younger than the rest of Britain. But this is more characteristic of the inner London boroughs and those on the western side; the outer boroughs on the southern and more particularly the eastern edge have kept populations closer to the national demographic or educational averages.

Within London, the 1999-2004 progress in the Liberal Democrat vote mirrored this pattern with eerie precision. The party's worst result, (-0.4, Barking and Dagenham) was in the least educated and third most elderly borough; its next worst (+0.6, Havering) in the most elderly and second least educated one. And if the proportion of the population born outside the British Isles is a measure of London's cosmopolitan character, these two are the least cosmopolitan boroughs as well. Generally the party's share went up around +2 along the eastern and southern edge of London, in line with the national swing. But in a large swathe of central and western London, more cosmopolitan, better educated and markedly younger, it went up +5.

This is the largest area in Britain with such a big rise in the Lib-Dem vote last June. In London, at any rate, there is little sign that campaigning at borough or constituency level mattered much: hardly any cases where a borough's performance cannot be predicted from the character of its population revealed in the 2001 census.

In the rest of the country, there are some signs of a similar pattern. The Scottish Liberal Democrats gained votes more in the better educated Scottish constituencies (especially Edinburgh): +6.7 in the five best educated ones.

However, the effect was limited to those; they did no worse in the least educated constituencies than in the average ones. We find least progress (with the spectacular exception of a personal vote of confidence at +7.6 in Charles Kennedy's seat) in the most rural constituencies: just +1.2 in the 10 most rural ones other than Ross and Cromarty.

In Wales and England, results were declared by whole districts, so we cannot break down provincial cities. However, it is clear that in most big cities we did better, and in some spectacularly well. Manchester (23.8%, +11), Newcastle (25.8%, +9), Bristol (21.2%, +8), Cardiff (19.2%, +7), Liverpool (24.9%, +6) and Birmingham (18.5%, +5) stand out. This level of support in effectively a four-way split means that, although we don't have the constituency breakdown, there can be little doubt that Lib-Dems topped the poll in at least half-a-dozen, and maybe more, seats in these cities. Compare those figures with the Liberal vote last June in Cornwall (21.9%), Powys (21.4%) or Somerset (20.2%); we won nine out of the 14 seats in those counties in 1997.

However, other cities such as Leeds, Leicester, Nottingham, Sheffield and Stoke-on-Trent did not perform in the same league. Some reasons may lie in how coincident local election campaigns were combined with the Euro-election campaign; I suspect that what this shows is that there was potential in most large cities in June 2004, but it was not realised in all.

I draw another interesting conclusion from the contrast between Newcastle, Liverpool and Manchester on the one hand and Leeds and Sheffield on the other.

The Yorkshire and the Humber region is very similar in economic and political history to the other two northern regions, and like them had an all-postal ballot. Here we were defending one seat and not expecting to make a gain; right across Yorkshire, the Liberal Democrat vote moved up at only the national rate. In North East and North West, targeted regional campaigning made all the difference. The biggest rises in these two regions came where one would expect it, from the personalities who were in the critical place on the lists - the number two on the North West list and the head of the North East list. The weakest results came from parts furthest from the home bases of these leading candidates.

Thus effective candidate-led campaigning and a credible challenge for a seat explains more in this part of England than demographic or cultural patterns. Despite the closed-list version of proportional representation, voting in Euro-elections is not so dissimilar to national and local ones.

Local campaigning and credibility also explain a scatter of individual 1999-2004 advances. There were a few good results in rural areas (such as North Norfolk); and in the West Midlands we did better in the western rural fringe area than in much of the industrial core of the region. Both these achievements must flow from enhanced credibility following 2001 victories.

Other individual good results include concentrations of a better-educated electorate (topping the poll in both Cambridge and Oxford), while yet others (like Watford) clearly reflect a significant and effective transfer of local

election success. The outstanding advance in City of Durham (+12.3) reflects both.

What conclusions can we draw from this evidence for the general election due apparently on 5 May? Bob Worcester, like several other pundits, is predicting that we will gain seats from the Tories while the Tories gain from Labour. If we take the 30 seats where we were within a 14 per cent margin of winning in 2001 (25 Tory hold and only five Labour held) that makes sense.

However, only nine of the 30 are in the most urban two-thirds of Britain, while 12 are in the most rural fifth. Only Cardiff Central, Bristol West and Aberdeen South fit the cosmopolitan, highly educated, youthful mould where Euro-voting predicts the largest advances. Only one is in London, and that (Orpington) on the suburban edge, and less affected by the changes in London's population composition. Pundits who rely too much on the 2001 votes cast to predict gains in 2005 may well get it wrong. I venture to predict a handful of unexpected Liberal Democrat gains in the more metropolitan parts of Britain.

Looking further ahead, what may be most important about the 2005 election is how it identifies targets for victory in 2009-10. When the lists of 2005's near misses is drawn up, it will probably include many urban Labour seats where 2001 figures make Labour look impregnable. PPCs still hunting for a future winnable seat should take heed.

Furthermore, this prospect should be appreciated by those looking to improve the party's pathetic performance in electing women MPs. The gender balance task force is boasting that 40 per cent of the candidates in the present list of target seats are women. By 2009, it will matter more if they had now got 40 per cent in the sort of urban Labour seats that we will be targeting next time round. Has that been taken on board?

Most important of all perhaps, if the pattern of advance in June 2004 is a predictor of what will happen in May 2005, then the Liberal Democrats will emerge as a far more significant challenger to Labour than they have hitherto been.

If it is clear throughout the next parliament that Labour is more vulnerable to a further Lib-Dem advance than the Tories, that will change the dynamics of the party competition. The detail of the Euro-votes, however, shows that to achieve this requires targeted campaigning and not just waiting for a demographic pattern to emerge. The potential harvest of new votes in urban Britain, even where winning the seat is unlikely, should be a major national target for the Liberal Democrats this Spring.

Professor Michael Steed is a former president of the Liberal Party.

ATTACK OF THE WILLY-WAVERS

The closer the Liberal Democrats get to power, the more they will suffer the attentions of testosterone-fuelled egomaniacs, warns Simon Titley

What makes people join the Liberal Democrats? Each member has his or her reasons (and I've often wondered myself). But if you talk to any defector from the Labour or Conservative parties, invariably one of the first things on which they remark is how "nice" the Lib Dems are.

When asked to elaborate, they explain it's not so much that Liberal Democrats are particularly pleasant people, rather that the party is not the nest of vipers to which they had previously been accustomed.

There is a good reason for that. The party has been unattractive to vipers. It has had little prospect of real power and so has not been a compelling proposition for power-hungry men who would join any organisation if it satisfied their lust for high office.

But this is about to change. The closer to power the Liberal Democrats seem, the more they will draw in aggressive alpha males who imagine they have found their ideal career vehicle. The reason the party suddenly looks attractive is the '2009 Theory'.

A number of senior party members (including most of the leadership contenders and their hangers-on) are convinced that the general election after this year's (probably in 2009) will be the big 'breakthrough' for the Liberal Democrats. It doesn't matter whether this assumption is actually true. What matters is that these people believe it. They are convinced that Charles Kennedy's successor as party leader has a good chance of becoming prime minister.

The conviction that so much is at stake explains both the increasingly intense rivalry between Liberal Democrat MPs and why various hangers-on are making selfish calculations about whose coat tails they should hang on to. Yes folks, guess right and a life peerage could be yours.

Jonathan Calder, in his review of the notorious 'Orange Book' (*Liberator* 298), noted the rising levels of testosterone in the parliamentary party and remarked, "successful political parties are full of ambitious young men, so we had better get used to the breed." I share Jonathan's analysis but not his fatalism. We should beware of allowing the party to turn into a shark pool.

The specific problem is the 'alpha male'. You all know the type. The chief characteristics of these men include physical prowess, high achievement, bullying and sexual attraction. They need to dominate others and bend them to their will. They aren't happy unless they are the top dogs. In British politics today, Alistair Campbell is the archetypal alpha male.

The phenomenon is best understood by reference to wild animals. You've probably seen natural history documentaries

on TV about some species of herd animal such as lions or chimpanzees. One powerful male animal dominates the group and imposes a pecking order for sex and food. As he gets older, however, younger males begin to challenge his leadership.

It's the same with human alpha males. Their motivation is essentially primal and visceral, to establish and maintain a pecking order. Though they may not realise it, they are expressing a primitive urge to spread their genes at the expense of rival males. But we should have grown out of this, both as a species and as adults.

We may be unused to alpha males in the Liberal Democrats but they can be found in abundance in other political spheres. President Bush's administration, in particular, reeks of testosterone. Note how, at last year's Republican convention, Arnold Schwarzenegger referred to the Democrats as 'girlie men'. He didn't need to elaborate.

The alpha male's view of politics is located at the conjunction of sexuality and power. Political participation is seen as a privilege based on imagined sexual prowess. The alpha male politician relishes gratuitous muscularity, expressed through a delight in toughness for the sake of toughness and a corresponding disdain for any aspect of politics he regards as feminine or effete.

This is a particular problem for Liberals. On the Mars-Venus scale, Liberalism tends to be very Venus, and this is what irks alpha males. Any alpha male in the Liberal Democrats necessarily has an ambivalent relationship with his party, loyal to it as a career vehicle but contemptuous of its values.

The recent adoption by the Liberal Democrats of the ludicrous slogan 'tough liberalism' is a clumsy attempt to reconcile these competing urges. It is hardly surprising so few people have been convinced. Anyone who uses the phrase 'tough liberalism' is an obvious charlatan. Anyone who actually believes it is a complete idiot.

The desperate attempt to compensate for perceived effeminacy was also in evidence in the 'Orange Book', where some of the authors indulged in childish contrarian postures or competed with one another to mock environmentalism and animal welfare. One senses, in particular, that the difficulty certain Liberal Democrat MPs have with such a 'soft' issue as civil liberties is that it offends their muscular political ethic.

As in other areas of political endeavour, alpha males see policy as some sort of virility test. They are not interested in debate, only in winning. Their starting point is not

fundamental values but a need to enhance their power and status, so they tend to advocate policies on the basis of either opportunism (whatever the polls say this week) or machismo (hence the obsession with being 'tough'). These shared urges explain why alpha males in all three main parties are competing on such narrow political ground.

The immediate danger presented by alpha males is not so much that they want power, rather that they want it more than you do. They will go to greater lengths to get it, and have fewer moral scruples about how they do it. It is a single-minded pursuit that consumes every fibre of their being. It is why they tend to get their way.

Excuses are always made for alpha males – “He may be an arsehole but at least he brings dynamism/drive/ leadership” (delete where applicable). This argument assumes the ‘great man’ theory of politics, an egotistical view in which political problems are reduced to the search for a saviour. This opinion has become fashionable in business circles in recent years, with the cult of the CEO, but the ubiquitous business books promoting this view are nothing more than self-serving propaganda, intended to justify telephone-number salaries.

Leadership and dynamism are of any value only if they are employed for the good of others. When applied to self-interest, they are of no use at all.

The attributes that make alpha males such dominating and dynamic people may have some use in business or the military but they are a positive liability in politics. Alpha males are so convinced they are right and so impatient with other people that they don't listen but tend to intimidate others. They are stubborn and lack the capacity for self-reflection. They are insensitive to the feelings of others, while prone to emotional outbursts themselves. The more they dominate an organisation, the more they tend to destabilise it.

One can see the disastrous effects of alpha male culture on New Labour. The Blair administration achieved its primary goal of power but has been hobbled by arrogance and insensitivity, and a determination to control everything. Indeed, power is its only achievement and it will leave no lasting legacy. Its failure to inspire and its obvious contempt for its own party members have led to a catastrophic slump in Labour's membership.

The skills and personal attributes needed for successful political leadership are less heroic. Listening, sympathising, consensus-building, motivating, team building, integrity and trust – such qualities require patience and understanding, not domination and bombast.

The irony of Nelson Mandela's success would never occur to an alpha male politician. Mandela acquired power through years of self-sacrifice and relinquished power when he could have held on. Yet he is probably the most respected politician on the planet, whose reputation will survive long after his death. The only legacy that most alpha male politicians can ever hope for is a pile of unsold autobiographies in a remaindered bookshop.

Liberals are right to be suspicious of the ambitions of alpha male politicians. Plato's famous dictum, that a desire for power should be a disqualification from having it, reinforces the Liberal view that concentrations of power are inherently bad and should be broken up.

Indeed, most Liberals would view concentration of power as the basic political problem underlying all others. The basis of Liberal philosophy is a concept of liberty based on

recognition of the innate human need for 'agency', the ability to influence and change the world in which one lives. This liberty is threatened when powerful people monopolise agency for their own benefit and force less powerful people to fit in with their selfish purposes and arrangements.

Given that alpha males wish to monopolise power, the consequences of them gaining it are never happy. When power becomes an end itself rather than a means to an end, its effect is immediately corrosive. Alpha male control of the Liberal Democrats would have a toxic effect on the party's culture. The leader would prize loyalty over competence, surround himself with toadies and stamp out dissent. The need for a defining 'other' would lead to internal witch-hunts and purges. Party members generally would be treated with contempt and told to “shut up and deliver the leaflets”. Policy would become short-term and populist. The macho culture would alienate women voters and drive down women's participation in politics.

So let's nip this problem in the bud. Our aim should be to make the party as uncongenial as possible for thrusting, testosterone-fuelled types. The task begins with candidate selection, both for parliament and local councils.

More than twenty years ago, I wrote a pamphlet for the Liberal Parliamentary Association (a predecessor of the Parliamentary Candidates' Association) called 'Raising Standards', in which I advocated an elaborate system of candidate approval. It was influential but in retrospect a mistake.

I now realise that simpler criteria would have sufficed. Anyone seeking public office should be motivated primarily by a sense of duty rather than personal ambition. And possessing a basic set of Liberal moral values is more important than a detailed knowledge of party policy. Alpha males have no sense of duty to others and few morals, so would fall at the first hurdle.

Second, it helps if one recognises the main weakness of alpha males. People with something to prove must also have reasons for doubt. Sexual insecurity is their Achilles' heel. The thing they fear above all, their 'Room 101', is public humiliation, so one should use mockery at every available opportunity.

For example, why on earth do Liberal Democrat conference delegates tolerate the spectacle of male MPs delivering their speeches while parading up and down the platform? The correct response to this macho posturing is not awe and admiration but scorn and ridicule. And given the threat that macho culture presents to women, we'll know how serious the party's women are about 'gender balance' when they stop drooling at such MPs and lead the mockery.

While we're about it, to obviate the need for any more willy-wavers to prove their masculinity on the rostrum, I propose a change to conference standing orders, to the effect that male speakers may not (a) walk up and down the platform during their speech or (b) use the word 'tough' unless they have had their penis length tattooed clearly on their foreheads (in inches, please; centimetres serve only to flatter).

Finally, if all else fails, remember the wise words of Zsa Zsa Gabor: “Men who try too hard to be macho are generally not mucho.”

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SHAKEN TO THE FOUNDATIONS

The murder of controversialist Theo van Gogh by a Muslim extremist led to events that put the Netherlands' traditional liberalism under serious strain, but Peta Bies argues that things need not go the hardliners' way

Luger, the first movie of Theo van Gogh, Dutch film director and opinion maker, came out in the early 1980s and van Gogh already knew how to shock the public; the movie showed little kittens in a functioning washing machine.

Since then, van Gogh was ever-present in the Dutch public debate. He loved to shock, he loved controversy and he seemed to love being the centre of commotion.

He became involved with the rise of the debate on the Dutch multicultural society, and launched his website *De Gezonde Roker* (The Healthy Smoker), which became a tribune for controversial opinions about, among other topics, Islam.

In August 2004 together with Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Dutch MP for the liberal party VVD and opponent of what she considers the excesses of Islam, van Gogh directed the movie *Submission* part I. The movie shocked the country, especially the Muslim minority. It showed Muslim women in see-through burkas, with Koranic texts displayed on their bodies. *Submission* was an indictment of the subordinate position of women in Islam. Before the movie was screened, van Gogh and Hirsi Ali were threatened because of the extreme way in which they ventilated their opinions.

The threats worsened after *Submission* was shown on national television. Van Gogh, however, said he did not fear the threats, and saw himself as the clown of Dutch public debate, reckoning that clowns wouldn't get shot.

The early morning of 2 November 2004 proved otherwise. Van Gogh was killed in a brutal manner by a 26-year-old man of Moroccan origin. To finish off his job, the murderer pinned two letters on van Gogh's body.

The first one was a farewell letter; he had expected to die as a martyr. With this letter, Holland's worst nightmare came true; the Netherlands had become victim of its first suicide attack. The second letter was a warning directed at Hirsi Ali, an apostate Muslim. He said that Hirsi Ali cannot deny her fate and that in the end she will go down.

After the murder, a shockwave went through the country. Following the murder two years earlier of Pim Fortuyn, another person had been killed for their opinions.

Masses of people came to the centre of Amsterdam to bid Gogh farewell and to display their anger, and public figures en masse demanded for hard measures against Muslim extremism.

But not only words were used to show pain and anger. Muslim schools, for example, were threatened and in some

cases even set on fire. Before the murder, relations between Muslims and non-Muslims were fragile, but this worsened after the murder. It seemed, especially to the outside world, as if the Netherlands had changed. The tolerance for which Holland was known seemed to have disappeared totally. It was as if we had our own 9/11, maybe not in the sense of numbers of victims, but certainly in the sense of impact on society.

But the murder of van Gogh did not radically change the Netherlands; this change was set in motion long before.

In 1991, Frits Bolkestein, then VVD leader, published an article in which he pleaded for a stricter approach to integration. This article opened up the debate about the multicultural society, but political policy did not really change.

Then in early 2000, the publicist Paul Scheffer wrote an article about the 'Dutch multicultural tragedy', which resulted in a flood of reactions. At that moment, the Dutch ideal of the multicultural society, tolerance and individualism got its first scratches.

Like the rest of the world, the Netherlands got its wake-up call on 9/11, before which it had seemed to be the perfect liberal country, a country of individuals deciding for themselves how they want to shape their lives.

The very ill can decide to put an end to their suffering by euthanasia, we can believe in whatever God we want and we can smoke a joint when we feel like it. These same attitudes applied for our immigrants; for long, the general opinion was that people should decide for themselves whether to put their children in Muslim schools and whether to speak Dutch. We even had the idea we would learn from the multicultural society, that our own culture would be enriched by these foreign influences.

But Fortuyn effectively blew the lid off. Elaborating on the discussion opened up by Bolkestein and Scheffer, Fortuyn said the Netherlands was not an ideal society in which different cultures lived peacefully and learned from each other. Instead, he said that the Netherlands had become fragmented by multiculturalism, that different ethnic and social groups were living on their own islands.

According to Fortuyn, the Dutch culture did not get enriched, it slowly faded away. Others before him had said the same but, partly thanks to his timing and his flamboyance, Fortuyn was the first to really get his message across. With his assassination, a few days before the

parliamentary elections of 2002, his message became even more popular.

A combination of factors like 9/11, the aftershock of Fortuyn's murder, an economic recession and the Madrid attack had its effects on the Dutch immigration and integration debate and policy.

Rules for asylum seekers to get a residence permit have become much stricter, for example. Discussions have been going on about demanding that immigrants speak Dutch before they arrive in the Netherlands.

There were also discussions about forced spreading out of where immigrant communities live, to avoid the formation of ghettos. Some schools decided to prohibit Muslim girls from wearing headscarves. Also, anti-terror measures were taken; for example, a law came into force that makes carrying ID papers obligatory.

In other words, advocates of hardline policy have seemed to have the upper hand in the Dutch debate of the last couple of years.

Not only policy and the line of the debate hardened but also the tone of that debate. An imam compared homosexuals with pigs, and a columnist known for his strong opinions about the position of Muslims in Dutch society decided not to write about the Islam anymore after he got blamed for polarising society and driving young Moroccans in the arms of the Jihad.

A separate debate about the tone, in fact a discussion about basic liberalism, came about. Liberalism means maximum freedom as long as this freedom does not harm others.

But how to define harm, and what if one group in society is more easily harmed than another group? Should you always be able to say what you want, even if this is insulting to others? Those were the key questions of this debate, and the film *Submission* and van Gogh's website became part of that discussion.

After his murder, debates concerning the freedom of expression, integration and terrorism became more intense than before. The minister of justice suggested dusting off an article of the constitution that deals with blasphemy. D66 in particular heavily opposed the minister's idea and suggested the article should be deleted, on the grounds that insulting someone because of their religious beliefs is not worse than insulting them because of their sexual preferences or colour.

Plans were developed by the government after the van Gogh murder for expansion of the Dutch intelligence service and the police were given more tools for tracing criminals.

More and more, the people are asked to hand in privacy and freedoms in order to establish a safe country. This means D66 has an important role to play in government at the moment. D66 will, and has to, try and protect the privacy and freedoms of the Dutch people as much as possible. We have to be careful not to create the appearance of safety by handing in our freedoms.

But, very importantly, the murder was also meant a wake-up call for advocates of a softer approach in dealing with the problems of a multicultural society.

They had seemed to have turned numb the last couple of years, as the debate was dominated by hardliners. Now the debate has finally opened up again.

The murder also created a sense of unity that had not been there for a while. People were united in the conviction that they had had enough; they demanded a peaceful, free future; they are sick of the violence and the polarisation.

Many people started wearing yellow bracelets as a token of their united rejection of violence and hatred. There was a mass demonstration in the centre of Amsterdam on the evening of the murder.

So how to solve these problems? Dutch politics seems to find itself in a devil's dilemma: choosing the hard line with the risk of even more polarisation, which turns young Moroccans who may be already on the edge into suicide attackers? Or choosing a softer line, which entails the risk of a very small group of Muslim extremists committing attacks? Do we choose pacification or confrontation?

For D66, the solution lies in one of the basic principles of liberalism, namely true individualism.

This might sound strange. After all, at first glance individualism seems to have caused all the problems; in the individualist society into which the Netherlands has slowly turned since the 1960s, people looked away from each other, it was everyone for himself and not caring for problems of others. In this climate of fake tolerance, a totally fragmented society could come into existence.

But this is not the true individualism D66 stands for; it does mean simply living your life the way you desire, but also taking responsibility for your actions, seeing their consequences for others and for society.

Our society does not consist of 'the immigrants' and 'the natives', the individual should be the centre of policy, all persons have different needs and should be treated accordingly.

D66 does not stand for an individualist society but for a pluralist society. In this pluralist society, a discussion about freedom of expression is not necessary because people do have the freedom to say what they want, but they also know how to deal with this freedom in a responsible manner. This means they express their opinion in a decent way, in order to avoid hurting the feelings of others.

In the opinion of D66, this new social contract entails two things: first a few very clear commitments and laws are needed on how we see our society, on what we accept from each other and what we don't. There should be values on which we all agree, no matter what our colour, belief, sexual preference, etc. Everyone in this society is equal and everyone has the right to make his own choices and lead the life he wants to.

Second, a strong government, not a big government, is needed to guard these agreements. The government should listen to what people want and should function smoothly without bureaucracy.

The murder of Theo van Gogh was awful and disgusting, and shook the country to its foundations. Xenophobia in the Netherlands was already widespread and has only grown.

As a result of this xenophobia and the dominance of hardliners, the Netherlands now has one of Europe's most strict anti-terror policies.

Although D66 agrees with a strict approach to terrorism, it also thinks the current policy harms civil freedoms too much and D66 will keep on fighting to protect personal freedoms to protect the liberal state for which we once were famous.

Petra Bies works in the international secretariat of the Dutch radical liberal party D66, which is part of the ruling coalition in the Netherlands

WHAT ABOUT THE WORKERS

The right wingers who elevate 'choice' above all other considerations are cynically neglecting poorer voters, argues Andrew Toyne

As the general election approaches and predictions are made about Liberal Democrat prospects – if not this time, but for 2009/10 – commentators are theorising about who the target Lib Dem voters are in terms of marketing profiles. So is there a 'liberal demographic' – a distinctive group of people who are likely 'small 'l' liberals' or even potential Liberal Democrat voters?

Most liberals have a natural suspicion of such speculation, as categorising people into groups goes against principles of classlessness and the belief that liberty is a politics for all people.

'Mondeo Man', 'Worcester Woman' and similar images are shallow and simplistic stereotypes that hardly touch the real personalities involved. Anyway, liberals gain support across traditional social divides, which should be a building-block for a wider popular appeal – but has been a disadvantage in our present system where appealing to a tribal niche reaps rewards for class-based parties.

The consensus among sociologists is that this is an age of individualisation, evidenced by rising levels of education, increasing access to information driven by technology, and growing affluence. The conclusion drawn by nearly all parties is that politics should address this change with policies that appeal to this new individualism. Out go "Stalinist monoliths" of collective public service provision, and in comes more "diversity", naturally involving private provision and other models of organisation: "People do not want a nanny state".

Such thinking motivates Liberal Future and the people associated with Mark Oaten and David Laws, but is also the rhetoric of Tony Blair's inner circle and the economically Thatcherite wing of the Conservative Party. The assumption is that 'consumer choice' is the overriding priority of the new demographic: "People are used to ever more choice in supermarkets/television channels, etc."... "Why not in schools and hospitals, etc." Other news is also bright and rosy: people are more tolerant, and value and respect human rights (but are albeit increasingly litigious), and are less deferential to authority. Liberalisation in all areas is an inevitable one-way street leading to the bright future of "modernisation", happily coinciding with the turn of the millennium.

The other assumption is that liberals should appeal to aspiration and success, and point to the growing number of people who are property owners, small business people and professionals. Advocates of 'modernisation' note the move away from traditional craft, manufacturing and extractive

sectors and towards sexy new service and knowledge industries; in other words, from "blue collar" to "white collar" patterns of employment. There is apparently little political capital in appealing to the working class because it is a shrinking minority; people who are insultingly portrayed as 'lacking in ambition' or belonging to 'Old Britain'. The only situation in which we appeal to the poor is as 'consumers'; we promise to deliver lower prices by building supermarkets in every community.

All this talk of demographic change and 'modernisation' is deeply annoying to those of us on the centre-left, including social liberals, who disagree with the strategic and ideological implications. It is grossly arrogant for the right to assume that its views have permanently triumphed as a result of inevitable and irreversible social change; that people apparently see themselves as self-interested consumers of everything and any 'social-anything' has to be out of date, as social cohesion is in decline. So, what if the sociologists have got it wrong? Suppose those who are ranting about 'choice' are barking up the wrong tree? And what is the reality behind this 'liberal demographic'?

The starting-point – that people are more knowledgeable, better educated and on the whole better-off than before - is happily true, but there is a word of warning. Despite the rosy-eyed optimism, the rise of UKIP and the BNP in the European elections shows that there is still a long way to go in promoting liberal values. Thomas Jefferson's famous phrase, "The price of liberty is eternal vigilance" is as relevant as ever.

It is on the interpretation of demographic change where the two sides part company. It may be true that 'people no longer trust politicians', but that does not absolve politicians from doing anything. A better educated public has an equal distrust for big business, and often demands that government intervenes to correct its failings. People may not swallow the promises of political parties, but neither will they be fobbed off by a simple faith that the free market always produces the best possible outcomes, and that they should put up with any economic unpleasantness and be grateful for small mercies.

Individualisation may have some truth to it, but the effects are over-exaggerated. The clamour for choice in public services among politicians is not matched by opinion poll findings, and the Liberal Democrat policy of focusing on quality and rejecting "false choices" resonates well. No-one is against choice per se, but it is simply not a high priority in voters' minds.

People like shopping in supermarkets, but they are sensible enough to realise that schools and hospitals are entirely different. The NHS is still the nation's best-loved institution, despite its alleged organisational failings.

Second, treating people as atomised economic units ignores the wider human experience. Behaviour that fails to conform to economic principles is treated as "irrational" and presumably needs to be suppressed or cajoled to fit the market or the "world of work". Why can economists not recognise human nature as it is, and tailor economic policies to serve people? Saying that 'we are all consumers now' and that this is all that matters is just another way of saying that there is 'no such thing as society'.

The lesson from the American election is that "values matter". This time, the Democrats used mainly economic arguments but lacked political passion; George Bush appealed to fundamentalist Christian values and got churchgoers flocking to the polls. This does not mean that right-wing values are bound to triumph, but it does mean that progressives should be bolder in promoting their own values, such as solidarity, social justice, freedom from the arbitrary power of business and that regulation can be our friend. One approach is to end the belief that we should side with big business as a check on government or vice versa, but address the dangerous collusion of both against the individual. Working patterns may be changing, but that does not mean that people's underlying values and beliefs have eroded. Anyway, it should be the job of a progressive party to encourage a sense of community and citizenship.

Third, industrial and demographic change is a more complex picture than that painted by right-wing triumphalists. Many people who wear an overall to work (skilled labourers such as plumbers, electricians and technicians) are better paid than some white collar office workers. It is quite shocking, as a councillor, to find out how poorly paid some council staff are. The new demographic is one of increasing inequality, and recent research has shown that social mobility has stagnated or got worse.

So what should be the strategy of the Liberal Democrats? Andy Meyer of Liberal Future is very clear on the issue, concluding, obviously, that we should promote more choice: "To be credible about forming a future government we need to attract the centrist liberal votes of middle England that voted for Thatcher in the 1980s and Blair in the 90s".

So the Lib Dems are to be yet another party of the benighted middle classes, and we should presumably abandon the idea of attracting disillusioned Labour voters in the inner cities.

The Peel group, coincidentally, will attract former Tories to join the party, but shouldn't we be a little careful about who we recruit? Former Tory activist, Alan Armitage, quoted on the Peel Group's website, said: "I consider myself to be a one-nation Heathite Conservative". Heathite Conservatism may have some merits, but what does that say about his commitment to Liberal Democrat values?

I maintain that there is a place for a radical, centre-left, non-socialist party to champion the causes of the people that New Labour has left behind. As we have said, the large majorities of the Thatcher government and the survival of John Major in 1992 were only possible because of the first-past-the-post voting system. Privatisation and marketisation have been pushed despite the fact that they are not popular. "What about the workers" may be an old left-wing slogan, but I think it is profoundly unhealthy that a

large section of the electorate is being sidelined for cynical electoral gain – and we reap what we sow when some people resort to extremist parties.

It should be the strategy of a progressive party to persuade the socially-minded and tolerant middle classes to join forces with their lower-paid fellow citizens – and help defeat the parties of Edmonton Man and the couldn't-give-a-toss-ers.

Andrew Toye is a Liberal Democrat councillor in East Devon.

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IT'S THE MEDIA, STUPID

International and domestic media coverage was vital to securing a fair re-run of Ukraine's presidential election, says Sue Simmonds

The Ukrainian elections held in November caused something of a sensation in world politics, which for a newly independent state was quite remarkable. It could all too easily have been written off as a former part of the Soviet empire struggling with the challenges of post transition democracy. It wasn't. Not since Lech Walesa and the Polish people power movement has the media given such prominence to people peacefully confronting their government.

The fact that the protests were peaceful and quietly determined gave the media every chance to report them.

That they were in support of the loser of an election, sympathetic to the agenda of the west, politically astute and generally liberal helped to ensure that they stayed under the media spotlight. That he had been allegedly poisoned by the ex-bogey men of an empire that had not quite faded was even better and had all the right elements to ensure a first rate media drama.

This media played a significant role in the election. There is no doubt that the western media was significant in ensuring that the presidential election was re-run. Without their scrutiny, and the encouragement that it gave to people who were protesting, it would have been easier for the Ukrainian courts and parliament to not make, and then stand by, their brave decision to have a re-run.

But it was the Ukrainian media that provided the leadership in ensuring the result was robust and would inspire the long term confidence of the outside world.

There have been four elections since Ukraine gained independence in 1991 and, according to international monitoring bodies, these have struggled with ensuring a democratic process. The last presidential elections, which took place in 1999, 'failed to meet a considerable number of Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe-related commitments'.

The parliamentary elections in 2002 demonstrated that technical improvements were still needed for the process to be completely transparent. The November presidential elections was heavily criticised for poorly prepared voters lists and massive abuse of absent voter certificates, which allowed the 100% turnouts in some areas to be unchallenged, and for distribution of inflammatory campaign material and

breaches of electoral rules which allowed intimidation and violent confrontations between members of the polling station committees which run the election.

The re-run was triggered by four members of the Central Election Commission, who refused to sign the official protocol of the results because of the large number of official complaints about serious violations of the process, which were filed but ignored.

Yanukovich was declared the winner on 49.46% of the vote to 46.61% to Yushchenko. Within a couple of days, the

Verhovna Rada (parliament) passed a resolution that the results of the election should be considered void and passed a motion of no confidence in the CEC. It also adopted a resolution calling on President Kuchma to dismiss the Yanukovich's administration.

The Supreme Court then repealed the CEC result and directed that the election should be re-run. Parliament voted to amend the electoral legislation and the constitution to reduce the power of the incoming president.

While these amendments to the electoral legislation were significant in assuring a fair election, just as important was addressing the media campaign and disregard of the ban on campaigning by state officials.

The Ukraine has some of the best legislation for ensuring freedom of expression in the newly independent states, but there are still huge problems with its implementation. A pluralistic media is starting to emerge but the state media is not yet independent and still needs subsidies. Private media serves the interests of its paymasters to the extent that journalists taking the 'wrong' line have been harassed and tax inspections are used to political advantage. Channel 5, which is the only TV station to have consistently supported Yushchenko, had been refused a broadcasting licence.

Newspapers often have a very uneven distribution, with high circulation in the towns and cities but low distribution in many rural areas. Many still rely on state patronage or tax benefits to keep prices affordable and as printers are still state-owned there are few independent newspapers. While



they did provide a plurality of views, many still favoured one candidate.

However, despite the problems of ownership, by far the most pernicious factor in obstructing a free press is the *temniki*, the instructional guidelines distributed to media editors, which suggest that editors should cover only certain points of view on political themes and events.

The *temniki* started to appear before the parliamentary elections in 2002, had expanded nationwide by August 2002 and were clearly used to distort the campaign. In September 2002, nearly 400 journalists signed a manifesto declaring the existence of political censorship in Ukraine and several resigned as a reaction to editorial interference.

As a consequence of the *temniki*, Yanakovich dominated the media campaign and received huge amounts of positive coverage in his role as prime minister. In contrast, Yushchenko's coverage was more negative. The state funded broadcaster UTI was clearly biased in favour of Yanakovich and breached legal provisions to treat all candidates fairly, but no legal sanctions have so far been taken. Predictably, the political satirists and cartoonists ensured this did not go unnoticed.

The mass demonstrations which prompted the re-run and the changes to the electoral legislation had the effect of ensuring that the media presented a wide and diverse range of views. Anyone who has watched the media in other newly democratising states will have appreciated what a huge undertaking this was and how fast this happened. And undoubtedly the potential for scrutiny by a fascinated western media further encouraged this, along with systematic monitoring and scrutiny by OSCE and other NGOs. The *temniki* were discarded to the extent that UTI complied with requests for free airtime for the candidates and a televised debate between the two candidates was held and fed to other TV channels, including those in the regions.

After such a high profile lead up to the poll, it was inevitable there would be an extensive election monitoring operation. Thousands of election monitors from all over the world descended on the Ukraine. OSCE alone sent more than 1,000 monitors from 44 states, and the CIS, Canada, Russia, and various NGO and pressure groups all sent more. There were times when it felt like 'monitoring overkill' and one felt for the PSC chairs, who seemed to spend more time being interviewed by election monitors than running their polling station.

A late decision from the constitutional court about the categories of disability eligible for home voting had left a number of people disenfranchised as transport was unavailable and put many of the PSC chairs under real pressure, as did the changes in compositions of the PSCs and changes in documentation required for voting. There were also some allegations of some heavy handed 'monitoring' by non-OSCE bodies, who were intervening in the electoral process by demanding changes to procedures and threatening court action for non-compliance.

I spent the election in Dnepropetrovsk, a heavily industrialised Russian speaking area and a Yanakovich



stronghold. There was an orange tented camp in the town centre under the statue of Lenin. People were happily campaigning and handing out orange plastic strips, which are used as armbands, although there was no sign of any campaigning on behalf of Yanakovich.

Remarkably, the enthusiasm for the re-run was palpable from supporters on both sides. The feeling was that this would settle the issue and allow them to move on, although Yanakovich supporters voiced real fears about the economic and cultural impact of a Yushchenko win. Clearly the candidate's emphasis on campaigning within their own tightly defined constituencies has exacerbated the lack of shared values, and left a lack of understanding and fear of the future that will take some effort to overcome.

The OSCE considered that the December re-runs had brought Ukraine substantially closer to meeting OSCE election commitments. The voting I observed was generally well conducted, procedures adhered to and access was granted to all the documentation we wanted to see.

Local observers were in place and active, and had a keen awareness of process. There were some discrepancies about how consistently the validity of the ballots were determined at the count, but these were resolved by the PSC, as were the formal complaints that were made by voters.

One interesting development was the use of video cameras by election observers to film the count. Every pile of ballots was filmed and all decisions of the PSC confirmed by a piece to camera by a budding TV journalist.

I learnt very quickly not to make sudden movements or look surprised as the camera was then trained on me. A local cat which had accidentally got locked into the polling station fared less well and a great deal of camera time was devoted to him playing with the pencils still tied to the polling booths while the final paperwork was being prepared.

The media were clearly a vital factor in ensuring that the re-run of the election was more transparent than previous polls. Its role in promoting civil society is deserving of further study. But the continuing scrutiny of governance is the next step and one hopes that the momentum is not lost.

Sue Simmonds is a Liberal Democrat in Merton, and has previously monitored elections in Kosovo.

LABOUR'S WAR ON LIBERTY

Terrified of the tabloids, Labour cannot even take advantage of falling crime figures, and instead fans the public's fears and takes away its freedom, says Kiron Reid

A general election is looming and we have seen the attacks that Labour will use against the Liberal Democrats.

We saw them in Manchester and Liverpool in the 'all up' local elections in June 2004, we saw them in Hartlepool, and in the dishonest campaign using the nasty personalised tactics that Labour tried out against Nicola Davies at Hodge Hill.

Labour will trumpet that the 'Lib Dems are soft on jobs', that the 'Lib Dems say jobs have rights too' and that the 'Lib Dems are on the side of the gang of jobs on your street corner' – such is the rhetoric of a great party once committed to civil liberties, including when many in Government and public appointed positions were younger.

Unfortunately there are enough such within our own ranks – those scared for their own seats in local government, those who believe the tabloid lies, who are taken in by the Labour campaign, activists, not just ordinary supporters. We need to show that liberty is at stake and the election will be nasty – in the general election Liberal Democrats must hold their nerve.

This article is not about a few terror suspects detained without trial in Belmarsh or Guantanamo Bay. Of course, the rights of small minorities need to be protected but concentrating on those issues has taken attention away from far graver threats.

This article is about the Labour attacks on civil rights that potentially affect every citizen of this country and have largely gone unreported by the right wing (Labour or Tory) tabloid and establishment media.

Charles Kennedy has proved a committed and outspoken Liberal leader, Conrad Russell's early endorsement of the new leader well placed. Contributors to this magazine have often criticised some of Charles' key lieutenants, Mark Oaten top of the list. However, it is undoubtedly true that the 'tough Liberalism' concept has caught some attention and many policy proposals are consistent with longstanding Liberal themes.

Ironic then that Liberal Democrat parliamentarians (often not seen as the most radical bunch) are the subject of the Labour party attacks locally to discredit council and parliamentary candidates. Lib Dem MPs voted against the Anti-Social Behaviour Bill – the small minded of New Labour equating this to being in support of crack houses and gangs of jobs.

On the other hand, says Labour, Oaten and Kennedy have done a U-turn on anti-social behaviour orders and now support anti social behaviour orders. This should be a strength for us – if some of Labour's measures work, we

should be quite happy to say so. Unfortunately, after an early flurry of rational research based legislation or progressive measures (for example the Human Rights Act 1998, parts of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, some of the youth justice measures), the government has increasingly resorted to knee jerk populist solutions, just like the Conservative government of John Major.

So what has our parliamentary party been up to? It has been up to defending civil liberties in a way that the party under Steel and Ashdown did not always do, though both often stood out against the most authoritarian and illiberal measures of their times.

Liberal Democrats have been concerned about the creation and extension of 'anti-social behaviour orders' as the concept is extremely wide, nowhere defined, subjective and yet gives the police significant powers to use against individuals who may not be committing any criminal offence or doing anything that is actually wrong at all.

In effect, anti-social behaviour is now a criminal offence but nowhere defined.

However, Liberal Democrat councils like Liverpool have used ASBOs effectively against many hooligans in the city - we use them when appropriate. Yes, Manchester has taken out more but we are still near the top of the league tables and took out the first ASBO against a juvenile.

In parliament, we have opposed Labour legislation that demonises children or simply wouldn't work, like local child curfews. In fact no council implemented these, so the government changed the rules so that the police could impose them – I've not heard of any so far.

"Demonises children"? I am not resorting to the sweeping rhetoric for which I oppose Labour. Labour's policy on dispersal of groups under Part 4 Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003 was entirely based on targeting police powers against children by banning them from particular locations. It was based on targeting children, but not enacted that way. As enacted, the legislation was very much wider. It gives the police a power when in force to disperse any group of two or more people; it doesn't just apply to children, it applies to anyone.

It says section 30 "applies if a constable in uniform has reasonable grounds for believing that the presence or behaviour of a group of two or more persons in any public place in the relevant locality has resulted, or is likely to result, in any members of the public being intimidated, harassed, alarmed or distressed.

“The constable may give one or more of the following directions, namely - a direction requiring the persons in the group to disperse (either immediately or by such time as he may specify and in such way as he may specify)”.

A belief that a member of the public may be alarmed is a very low level test. The academic Professor Nicky Padfield has noted that consultation with the local authority prior to authorisation was only included due to a Lib Dem amendment (she also highlighted the work of Joan Walmsley and our estranged colleague Tim Beaumont).

Labour has fundamentally changed the definition of public assembly to one that allows the police to attach conditions to gatherings – it has been reduced from “20 or more persons” to just two (a ‘rave’, incidentally, is now defined as 20 rather than 100 people!). The power to extend detention without charge has been widened from including serious arrestable offences to all arrestable offences.

It was a tradition in Britain that detention without charge was for a limited time and could be extended only for serious offences. Now, detention without charge can be extended (from 24 to 36 hours) for all suspects (Criminal Justice Act 2003 s. 7).

It was also a long established tradition that arrest is a serious interference with personal liberty and is justified only for breaches of the law that are objectively not trivial. Now Labour is to make all offences arrestable offences, so that, no matter how minor, a police constable could haul the person concerned off to a police station and cause great inconvenience.

Police officers have perfectly good powers at present to arrest if they need to, and this new power is a gratuitous expansion of the power of state agents to interfere with ordinary citizens, and erodes traditional hard won British liberties.

And then there is that proposed ban on demonstrations in Parliament Square. These are both contained in provisions of the Serious Organised Crime and Police Bill currently before parliament. A less ‘benevolent’ government than this one could readily use these powers to quell protest and dissent in any section of society.

The Labour attacks have been utterly appalling – to equate defending civil liberties with supporting jobs is a Neanderthal argument, which equates anyone who disagrees with its policies to being supporters of jobs.

That is an insult to the elected members and community activists on the ground – in any party and none – who work to prevent crime and nuisance but may not agree with every last part of Blair’s policy on home affairs.

In Liverpool, the attacks were levied most directly in the key marginal ward of Kensington. This was an extreme case of nonsense. The councillor up for re-election, Richard Marbrow, had had his house blown up because of his stand against a notorious family. His evidence helped get a crucial asbo, which helped further police action to assist a terrorised community.

Leaflets saying that Liberal Democrats in Kensington were soft on jobs would not work. Nor would they work across most of urban Liverpool, where the Liberal Democrat council’s programme of ‘alleygates’ had cut burglary and disorder in most of the terraced streets for thousands of residents.

In areas like Anfield and Walton, the council has paid for more police to support residents while regeneration proposals get underway. On the other hand, Liverpool City

Council did not recruit community support officers and Labour could attack that.

We countered time and again that people wanted proper police and that police numbers in the county have fallen under Labour. Both true. The latest Home Office research shows that CSOs patrolling do reassure the public, so maybe they have been more of a success than critics like myself expected. Liverpool leader Mike Storey and his key advisors predicted that Labour would attack again and again on law and order in last June’s election. Our response was to tell the public more often and more directly what we had done on these issues and how Labour had not delivered on some key issues.

This might not be an option elsewhere in the county, but don’t let Labour or Conservatives put you on the defensive so that you don’t tell the public positively about the work that you have done locally – tell them and keep telling them. And remember that the government will waste £33bn on ID cards that won’t stop terrorism and won’t make anyone safer. That is a criminal waste of money.

Speaking at the National Liberal Club in November, Charles Kennedy said: “Moral outrage is always a powerful political tool. But by creating a climate of fear, and stoking public anger; by ratcheting up the rhetoric and then resorting to gimmicky quick fix solutions, Labour seeks to deflect the real debate about how to deal with crime, security, law and order.

“The real, effective solutions to crime are liberal solutions - punishment and rehabilitation. But action to tackle re-offending, or to guide those headed for a life of crime into lawful productive lives, is certainly not a soft option, in fact it is not an option at all. It is essential if we are going to reduce crime. That is tough liberalism.”

Jack Straw and David Blunkett as home secretaries implemented nearly all of Michael Howard’s agenda left over from 1996/97. As a consequence, we have the highest prison population there has ever been in England and Wales.

Crime is undoubtedly falling – every measure says so – but Labour and media rhetoric exacerbates a natural public feeling of lack of safety. Some violent crime has gone up, and the Lib Dem policy of 10,000 more police would help tackle that.

Crime may have gone down due to Labour policies of thousands more people in prison; it may have gone down due to the economy improving or because of local solutions, crime prevention or a mixture of these. But Labour rhetoric increases fear of crime and Labour solutions reduce liberty for all.

Kiron Reid is a member of the Liberator Collective, a Liberal Democrat councillor in Liverpool and a law lecturer.

WEST BANK ROBBERY

Israel's wall has little to do with security and a lot to do with a land grab, says Michael Gwilliam

For all my adult life, I have sympathised with the special plight of the Palestinians. Yet while the historic lands of Palestine have captured my imagination, I did not want to visit simply as a 'tourist'. When I discovered an opportunity to visit with a small ethical tour group, I jumped at the chance and visited the West Bank for one week.

Our visit was very well organised and I had the opportunity to see Bethlehem, Beit Sahour, Ramallah, Qualquiyah, Jerusalem and its hinterland and a considerable number of Palestinian villages in the vicinity of the Ariel settlement cluster. We also met Israeli peace activists in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Jaffa.

Perhaps the single highlight was an hour's discussion with Mordecai Vanunu, a most impressive man. As well as some nights in Palestinian hotels, we spent three nights in basic accommodation provided by Palestinian farmers.

I believed that I knew quite a lot about the situation before I visited. I fully expected a bleak picture and that the plight of the Palestinians would be depressing. President Arafat had just died and sporadic violence associated with the second intifada was continuing. The reality was however far worse than I had imagined, because of the sheer scale of the Israeli repression and continual daily humiliations. The degree of unemployment and poverty, obscenely contrasted with prosperity in Israeli areas, especially the illegal settlements. All this was shocking.

With our British passports, we were of course privileged and protected but, even so, it was possible, especially when travelling with Palestinians, to gain vivid insights into their daily suffering. Standing at the major checkpoint at Callandia outside Ramallah watching the slowly shuffling queue of Palestinians and the attitude of the Israeli guards. Looking at the desolation surrounding the checkpoint itself, the piles of smashed concrete, the mud and detritus. Visible beyond the checkpoint, the potholed and muddy track that constitutes the only vehicular entrance into the Palestinians' administrative capital. Watching throngs of people, young and old, trudging through this squalor in driving rain. All of this forcibly reminded me of the scale of the injustice that Israel has illegally imposed on the Palestinians.

And yet the experience was one I was to see repeated many times in my short visit. Even more shocking was the contrast when we visited the Israeli settlements around Jerusalem.

Palestine is short of water, yet these Israeli settlements have extensive flowerbeds, lawns and personal swimming pools. All the Palestinian homes have water tanks on their roofs to catch any precious rain. The Israelis don't bother with such things. They have confiscated most of the water

supplies. On average, the Israelis have 15 times the water allowance per person, compared with the Palestinians.

Everywhere I went in the West Bank, massive highways were under construction or recently completed. Mostly they are only for settler use, blocking Palestinian roads and slicing through precious olive groves. The olive provides 35% of Palestinian agricultural production but we saw that production under threat in many places, especially where the wall is being constructed.

Whether it was snaking through East Jerusalem or cutting off Bethlehem, this concrete monstrosity, complete with monitors and watchtowers, casts an unforgettable shadow of menace across the land. In open country, the wall becomes a large fence, with 200m-wide 'fire zones' on both sides, where everything has been flattened.

The wall's tortuous route shows, however, that its prime purpose is not security; if that were the intent, then a much shorter wall would suffice. No, its prime purpose is clearly appropriation of land and water, weakening the Palestinian economy and increasing Israeli power.

Amazingly, in the midst of all this destruction and despair, I found the seeds of optimism and hope. Chiefly this came from the Palestinian people themselves. I was deeply impressed by their warmth, intelligence and resilience. I found most of them had a strong desire for peace, provided that it was coupled with genuine freedom.

The presidential elections had created a degree of optimism. High levels of education and an even higher birth rate also bode well for the future. The Israeli sympathisers I met were also impressive but sadly there were too few.

This optimism was nevertheless tempered by an abiding message: there is not much time. The Israeli settlements, roads and wall are advancing rapidly. Every day they are creating more 'facts on the ground'.

There is clearly an overall Israeli strategy. Maps of Israeli plans for land confiscation and more settlements show they intend to fragment the West Bank, creating 'Bantustans' and rendering a viable Palestinian state impractical.

I was shocked and alarmed at the scale and pace of change. I believe there is now no more than five years left in which to create that viable state. After that it will be too late.

Michael Gwilliam visited the West Bank in November 2004.

CATCH THE IMAGINATION

How have Liberal Democrats in power come to resemble their opponents and so do nothing to re-engage the public in politics, asks Kevin Peters

We can bemoan the rise of the anti-politics phenomenon but we should recognise that we have also benefited from this hostility to the wider political establishment. Countless parliamentary and local government by-elections have seen Liberal Democrats catapulted into office over the supposed preordained candidates.

There is a paradox here though, which many have spotted already. The more successful we become, the more we become the establishment ourselves. There is another lesser known paradox, which may have gone unnoticed.

As the quirky outsiders make inroads into the political mainstream, they tend to conform to standards of dress and conduct exhibited by those in the other parties. No longer does the media talk of the 'beard and sandals brigade', except as a nostalgic anecdote. Even the language we use becomes less about revolutionary measures as the realities of power beckons; it takes on the dulcet tones that will not frighten the horses of big business.

How might we make party politics vibrant and alive again to ordinary people in the street? The timing and contents of 'The Orange Book' were lousy, but we must have some serious debate once again. Conference is failing in this, and we shy away from controversy at every opportunity. Can anyone now remember the last time the youth and students upset the conference?

When we take control of a council, how often do we go for the easier option of simply being better administrators than the last lot? The administration has changed but the same suits are sat behind the same desks as far as the public can tell. It could be said with a degree of justification that community politics has long since degenerated into a mere election winning strategy devoid of its original heady idealism. Some new thinking is required.

Are we really only in the business of making sure the streets are cleaner than under the other lot?

The parliamentary party is not without its faults, but our team has performed remarkably well in comparison with the Conservatives, who are tied into the often nonsensical position of agreeing the government's every policy statement.

Charles Kennedy is right when he says the split is no longer between left and right but between liberal and illiberal. One important area where we could make a significant difference is to challenge this government through the European Court on its notion of a perpetual war on terrorism. This false premise has been advanced to justify the imprisonment of 17 foreign men without trial in Belmarsh Prison, and other measures like the introduction of identity

cards. A government in wartime takes these powers, but are these justified in a supposed perpetual war without end? Britain had 30 years of the Northern Ireland 'troubles' – note not 'war' – and at no point did the various governments offer the propaganda victory to the IRA of calling it a war, as Blair and Bush have done with Al Qaida.

The cabinet itself was attacked twice by the IRA but at no point were ID cards seriously mooted, even though MPs and many hundreds of ordinary people were murdered. Britain has had no major attack and yet our historic liberties are becoming just that, history.

I believe that, precisely because the majority of the British public approves of these measures, we should stand firm against them. While we accept the majority's verdict on the outcome of elections, majoritarianism in itself does not constitute democracy. A lynch mob is the expression of popular will.

We should not deny that the threat exists, but nor must we allow the destruction of our liberties supposedly to preserve them, as this government argues. Are we leaders of public opinion or mere followers, like the other two parties through their private opinion polls and focus groups?

Our principled and pragmatic stance on the issue of perpetual war should be well thought-out and devoid of posturing. The public has little concept of how an identity card system would work and the costs involved. Overspends with this project are virtually guaranteed given this government's dismal track record with IT projects. There are even similarities here with the dreaded Poll Tax.

Part of this strategy is about knowing who our enemies are. Both Labour and the Conservatives are locked together like Siamese twins on law and order front, trying as hard as they might to court the favour of the Daily Mail. One has to wonder at this rate how long it will be before one or other of them seriously proposes the reintroduction of the death penalty as part of their strange Dutch auction of promises.

We can decry the greater involvement of people in single-issue politics like pressure groups, but if we don't seize their imagination with our stances on matters of importance, why should people pay us any attention?

Kevin Peters is a member of Aylesbury Liberal Democrats.

LOSING THE PLOT

Why do Republicans control America, and can the Democrats recover, asks Brendan Harre

Republicans hold the presidency, congress and the senate; they clearly dominate US politics. And, unlike President Bush's first term in office, the Democrats cannot deny the legitimacy of the Republicans' victory. Democrats can no longer use the 'we were robbed' excuse to avoid examining why their party is so unpopular. How did this happen?

The Democrats lost the ideological war decades ago. Their political agenda is set by liberal ideology but that peaked with the 1960s civil rights movement. Since then, liberals have lost control of the political agenda.

It started to go wrong for the Democrats when the 1960s civil rights movement adopted an ideology called structuralism, whereby rights were no longer held equally by all citizens, but related to which group you were assigned to. Ethnic groups, immigrant rights activists, feminists, etc., quickly adopted these ideas.

The process went something like this: a group would gather facts showing their group was doing badly and then argue that it was discrimination from the majority that caused this problem, and finally the solution was to give some unique group rights to the group in question.

This process is reliant on convincing the public that one group (usually the majority, but sometimes rich white men) caused another group's lack of success. Justice under this ideology related to whether you were from the victim group or the victimising group. Individuals need emotionally to accept they were either an institutional victimiser or a hopeless victim depending on what group the liberal elite assigned them to. So the civil rights movement changed from demanding that all citizens be treated equally, to demanding that aggrieved minority groups be given special treatment.

Structuralism led to a version of liberalism that undermined the idea that, for society to succeed, citizens need to maintain commonsense civility values and replaced it with a belief that what is right is ever increasing tolerance and permissiveness. These new beliefs are popular in large US cities where single adults want no restrictions on their ability to enjoy themselves, but in suburban and rural areas parents find these permissive and tolerant values do not provide the necessary boundaries to raise children. This modern liberal-conservative divide is clearly represented in the presidential voting patterns. Bush won 25 out of the 26 most fertile states while Kerry won the 16 least fertile States as measured for the white population, who are 75% of voters.

These ideological changes soured the civil rights movement and liberalism because they divided US citizens into groups and played them against each other, a process that the average US citizen rejected.

The stereotypical groups promoting these ideas are the academics, the older media outlets and Hollywood. Schwarzenegger calls this liberal elite 'girlie-men'. This process undermined the public's trust in their own secular wise men, journalists and storytellers. Eventually, liberalism

became so unpopular that in America 'liberal' is now a potent political insult. It is widely believed that the only successful Democrat presidential candidates can come from the south because they would not be handicapped by this liberal insult, yet Republican presidents can come from conservatism's heartland.

This ideological handicap means the Democrats are a coalition of groups with no connecting ideas to get passionate about. It meant that, as the Republican ideology moved right, Democrats followed. It means Republicans are always on message, the public know what they stand for. It means Republicans campaign better; it allowed Bush to reduce complex theory down to simple statements that all conservatives could support. Sometimes this makes Bush sound stupid but this characteristic has more political pluses than minuses. The Democrats cannot use this tactic because their political agenda involves focusing on alternating groups of aggrieved minorities (blacks, gays, females, immigrants, etc.), or adopting some part of the Republican political agenda. So it is easy to label any Democrat politician as inconsistent and therefore a poor leader - a 'flip flopper'.

The Republicans' ideological advantage means that the public believe Bush's leadership comes from his own values, his moral convictions, while they believe Kerry's leadership came from telling the public what they wanted to hear. So when the public reported that moral values were the most important factor in deciding which presidential candidate to vote for, they did not mean that Republican policies on abortions, gay marriage and so on, were the decisive difference between the two candidates. What they meant was that the Republican moral values that underpin Bush's worldview give a clearer, more consistent and therefore a more trustworthy form of leadership. This explains why the public forgave Bush's poor performance in the three public debates. Kerry needed to do more than expose Bush's mistakes; he needed a morally based worldview that had the fervent backing of millions of liberal supporters.

Clinton managed to avoid this Democrat ideological void in the 1990s by borrowing the Republican economic agenda and establishing the Democrats' reputation as good economic managers, but this was just a temporary respite for the party's long term decline. After eight years of Clinton presidency, the Democrats still have no clear political agenda.

The first Republican idea is that 'the government is part of the problem not the solution'. Reagan convinced the American public this is true, that the public should look to themselves and the marketplace to solve society's problems. Reagan established that individualism is good and collectivism is bad. Thus taxes are bad, big government is bad and communism fails while capitalism succeeds.

Reagan established the Republican link with the popular culture of the West and its modern equivalent. The public were taught you just need a strong man like Schwarzenegger to fix the problem and that Republican politicians had this characteristic. Reagan and subsequent Republican politicians gained a huge amount of popular appeal from this approach. Ideas about individualism were more than just presidential campaigning; they summarise complex right-wing economic theories that have been exported around the world in recent decades.

Democrats have been unsuccessful at challenging these ideas and often adopt them as their own ideology, the best example of this being Clinton focusing on 'the economy, stupid'. But these ideas are challengeable; taxes are simply the membership price for US citizenship. Taxes pay for those things necessary for society to succeed that cannot be provided by the individual or the market. To deny government can solve society's problems is a rejection of US democratic traditions. You don't have to use communist or even socialist theory to challenge right-wing free market economic theory. You simply need to realise that markets need the rule of law to ensure the marketplace remains competitive and democratic governments make the best rules.

The Democrats could argue that the Soviet Union failed not because of communism but because it had a terrible system of totalitarian rule. And although post-Soviet Russia embraced capitalism, its reform of totalitarianism has been half-hearted at best, consequently economic and social progress has been problematic.

The second idea is aggressive unilateralism as the best form of foreign policy - 'the US doesn't need a permission slip to defend itself'. Republicans also claim the Soviet Union collapsed because it could no longer compete with Reagan's expansive military policy. So Republicans assert that aggressive unilateral policy is the best method for advancing US interests, especially in the post 9/11 world.

But this idea is also challengeable; globalisation, which benefits everyone by increasing trade, scientific, environmental and security co-operation, is underpinned by a whole raft of international agreements and institutions, ranging from the Sea Law to the World Trade Organisation. For one country, especially a superpower, to renege on its responsibilities as a global citizen could lead to a complete breakdown in these beneficial international institutions. The Soviet Union's isolation from the international community could also be another factor to explain its collapse that doesn't fit the Republican worldview.

The third idea - traditional moral and cultural values (guns, gays and god) - is the most common right-wing characteristic belittled by liberals but with little effect, as gay marriage and abortions retreat and gun rights advance.

Democrats need to realise the public is struggling with a society that has lost its commonsense civilities. The US public has turned to its puritanical background because it has lost trust in democracy and public service solving society's problems.

But this doesn't mean 'guns, gays and god' are beyond challenge. Liberals need to welcome values that have genuine widespread support (this after all is what democracy is all

about), while being ready to expose any examples of 'faith' being used to undermine traditional democratic values. It is quite possible that, like 'liberalism', Republican support for 'faith based solutions' will go too far. 'Right-wing fundamentalism' may become a potent political insult if the Republicans replace rational debate with faith based proclamations and if independent government services are replaced with faith based ideological public services.

In summary, when the Democrats' political agenda moved to better government for minority groups, the Republicans did not re-establish governance for all citizens. Instead Republicans created a political agenda revolving around the popular stories of individuals saving society, businesses not being accountable to citizens and the US not being accountable to the world.

But the most successful move by the Republicans was to align its cause with organised religion. This allowed them to have the support of a large, well-organised 'base'. So Republicans revolve around ordinary guys who see Republican politicians as real life versions of Clint Eastwood, Bruce Willis and Arnold Schwarzenegger, modern day robber barons who see Republicans' economic agenda as a means of advancing their privileged position in society and organised religion that wants to re-establish the United States' puritanical moral values.

These factors explain why a sometime Texan rancher, from a family with old money, who is a born-again Christian, became the president of the United States, while a Boston democrat with similar links to money, religion and heroism, but whose politics do not nurture these values, could not.

The Democrats need to create a new political ideology, a liberal ideology that gives the whole party a sense of conviction, a common purpose and a simple clear message. Democrats need to create a new liberal elite that unifies US citizens behind a notion of commonsense civility for this century.

This notion needs to educate the public about the purpose of government: to provide those things society needs to succeed that individuals and the marketplace cannot provide. They need to produce an intellectual political agenda that can be conveyed to the public in short, media-size sound bites. And they need to produce politicians that the public feel comfortable with; politicians that voters would want to share a drink with or watch the Super Bowl. The Democrats should distil the best ideas from their unique history of being a leader in developing democratic ideals.

If the Democrats do not revive their liberal traditions, then the ideals of a citizenship of equals, democracy and good governance will slowly die because they are not part of the Republican agenda. The Democrats need their own version of neo-conservatives to take over the Democratic Party. 'Neo Liberals' would campaign for the 21st century to be the democratic century.

Brendan Harre is a New Zealander and a student of US politics.

TOILET TROUBLE

Dear Liberator,

Shepway was and still is a tragedy that needs to be told in full (*Liberator* 300). I know many of the key players and the unfolding drama, as I worked for the local party as constituency development officer.

Many good people have sadly followed former leader Linda Cufley through personal loyalty, and their intention now is to wreak as much havoc on their former colleagues as possible.

When the Liberal Democrats took over in 2003, they little realised the full extent of the financial disaster left by the previous Tory administration. The Lib Dems walked into this mess and found that the financial position was far worse than expected. A number of black holes were littered throughout the budget book.

Ms Cufley took over a council in dire circumstances, and the discontent began with the now legendary budget where all public toilets were closed and the council tax increase was set at 39%.

The council group was told in no uncertain terms that these cuts had to be made. Better short-term unpopularity than long term financial misery, the arguments went.

When local MP Michael Howard was able to present a 20,000-signature petition to full council, the reality began to sink in to the cabinet and council group alike. Cabinet collective responsibility when straight out the window. The portfolio holder for, among other things, public toilets, who ironically had argued against the closure in cabinet, now found himself holding the baby.

Both sides differ as to how this decision was arrived at, but as an outsider it appeared that no formal vote was put. It came about in an informal if not even casual manner.

Ms Cufley demanded total loyalty. The term being 'treated like a mushroom' was one that many backbenchers voiced. She was a detached figure from much of the campaigning activity of the local party.

One of the most telling aspects of the aftermath is that the delivery network in her own ward remains intact and in official Lib Dem hands.

Rebellion began to spread, and people began taking sides. Ms Cufley made it clear that she would not go without a fight.

LETTERS

In any tragedy there are moments of sheer farce, and Shepway would prove no exception. The entire cabinet that remained had resigned and joined the breakaway Independent Liberal Democrats, as did several others. One became a Tory and two became Greens. Another councillor became independent. The independent Lib Dems tried to argue that they were still members of the party. Having your cake and eating it comes to mind.

Liberal Democrat arch-fixer Candy Piercy came down to ensure fair play, and at every stage the renegades were given opportunities to backtrack at the meeting that expelled them from the party, but personal loyalty to Ms Cufley was placed first.

The first full council meeting after the break was a joy to behold, and the Tories who had hitherto been gleeful spectators were fully expecting to witness a minority Lib Dem administration take control. The Lib Dem nominee however declined and made plain his group's intention to abstain. The renegades' candidate had now the very real prospect of being elected, and so withdrew. This left everybody looking at the Tories. In a fit of civic duty the Tory leader took control of the council. Rob Davidson, agent for Michael Howard, was seen at this meeting cradling his head in his hands.

Where are we now? Peter Carroll, our PPC, has had a front page of the Daily Express campaigning for Ghurkhas to get British citizenship after 10 years service in the army. Michael Howard was against the campaign from the outset. The government has backed us.

The Tories still rely on paid delivery to shift a significant proportion of their leaflets.

Lib Dems are seen as having knifed not one but two unpopular councils.

The Conservatives have now got to sort the mess out they themselves created.

If you want to place money on Howard retaining his seat, then I'll take your money. I'll warn you though I shall be keeping it.

**Kevin Peters
Aylesbury**

PET SUBJECT

Dear Liberator,

All Liberals are faced with hard choices about animal welfare and not just with the issues that are most often aired.

No Liberal can believe that the questions of sacrifice and ill treatment of animals for the 'greater good' of mankind in research are easy ones. But at last the question of hunting has been settled. The third most discussed issue, the welfare of farm animals, also presents difficulties though no Liberal would be satisfied with the position at the moment.

But what of animals used in sport or owned for companionship?

There has to be a difference in kind here. Sport is pleasurable and socially useful. Pets, maybe especially dogs, provide friendship and pleasure not least for the old and the lonely. But for me, there are problems.

Take angling. We are continually told that it is the country's top participant sport. It is unlikely that a party advocating intervention in it would benefit electorally!

But angling - unlike fishing for food - is the placing of a hook in the mouth of a fish, pulling it and then causing it to asphyxiate for the pleasure of the angler. Evidence is mounting that fish are sentient beings and, until we know that they are not, surely the precautionary principle should apply.

There are difficulties for everyone here, especially Liberals. The banning or regulation of fishing would certainly be an infringement of liberty but this must be considered alongside cruelty factors. Perhaps those who consider the hunting ban as 'the thin edge of the

wedge' are right, and maybe that's a good thing too.

There are similar questions about forcing horses over high fences, making them run at the limit of their speed or for excessive distances. And to use the jargon of horse racing, how can there be an 'excessive' use of the whip?

Dogs don't really look like their owners; many of them are pedigrees. Am I alone in believing that these are freaks almost by definition? Bulldogs can only breathe with difficulty; some dogs are prone to broken limbs; some are of an unnatural size; some die young. Do breed societies and dog show judges try to moderate or encourage extreme characteristics?

There may be practical problems in legislating for the breeding out of extreme characteristics in dogs. But ending the chronic suffering of animals for the rather perverse and certainly minor pleasure of humans does not to me suggest a great problem in principle.

Consideration of animal welfare issues should be holistic and not just concentrate on obvious emotional issue, they should be weighed against people's convenience. We should not assume automatically that intervention in the sports and pets' fields would be a vote loser. But even if it were, there may be a higher duty.

Roger Jenking
Former animal welfare
spokesperson
Liberal party.

REVIEWS

The Blairs and Their Court **by Francis Beckett and David Hencke** **Aurum £18.99**

Henke is a renowned investigative journalist with the Guardian and Beckett a former president of the National Union of Journalists and a Labour supporter of such loyalty that he did what he could to salvage its press operation in the debacle on 1983.

Together they have written a compelling account of why only chance took Tony Blair into the Labour Party and why he was determined to be prime minister, but not determined to do anything specific with his power.

Most prime ministers have been lifelong adherents of their party, with records of long toiling activism and contests in hopeless seats. They have also been in politics because they wanted to change things.

Blair fits neither tradition. He had no link with Labour before his

marriage to Cherie Booth and, if anything, his gut instincts would have placed him within the mainstream of the Conservative party.

Indeed that is, given his background and beliefs, almost certainly where he would have ended up had he not chanced to marry someone who was born in, and deeply committed to, Labour.

He showed no particular interest in politics until after his marriage, and appears to have chosen politics as a career option rather than out of commitment.

Such commitments as Blair has displayed have had little to do with egalitarianism or any desire to help the less fortunate; throughout his life he has above all unwaveringly venerated the rich and powerful, sought out their company and desired their approval, the book argues.

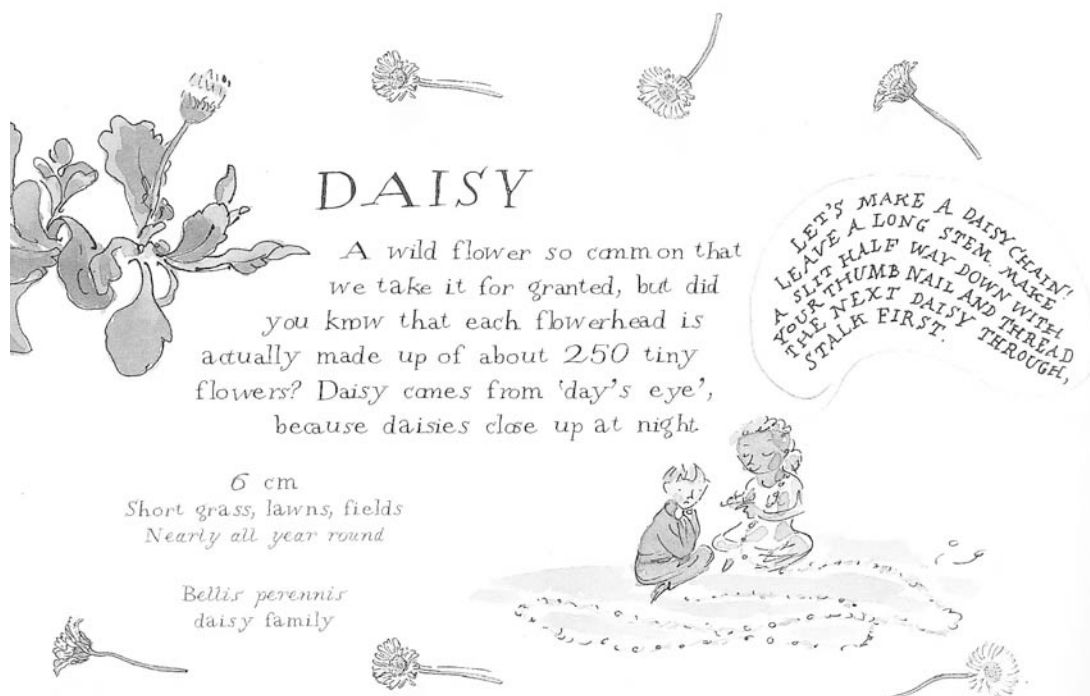
This is clearly a deeply hostile book – it does not credit Blair with very much that is positive – but it is a well-sourced deeply hostile one, as would be expected from its authors.

Indeed, Blairites can scarcely complain that much is based on anonymous sources, given the government's penchant for that practice.

It confirms that Blair's right-wing tone and conservative instincts are not there for reason of electoral opportunism – he really believes it.

Uninspired by political ideals, his main source of inspiration appears to be some theologians, who the authors suggest he comprehensively misunderstood anyway, and a Catholicism about which he is puzzlingly covert.

This has been enlivened in recent years by his wife's dabbling in New Age



nonsense such as their undignified mutual slathering in mud in a Mexican temple.

The questions of why Blair went to such lengths to support President Bush's unprovoked war on Iraq, told such brazen lies to the public and gratuitously alienated such a large slice of Labour's support have long puzzled his opponents.

Why should a man who doesn't believe in anything very much, except himself, act in such a way?

Beckett and Hencke suggest that the lifelong infatuation with the rich and powerful provides a large part of the answer.

More intriguingly, they argue that Blair is every bit as much an Atlanticist as was Margaret Thatcher and that, far from suffering a humiliation if he loses his opportunist referendum on the European constitution, he will welcome this as the chance to bind Britain ever more tightly to the USA.

The book is titled 'The Blairs' rather than 'Blair' for two reasons. Firstly, there is Cherie's influence on her husband joining Labour and the role she has played in his career.

But there is a running undercurrent, never quite spelled out, which suggests that she, coming from deep in traditional Labour, is unhappy with the thrust of her husband's government and resentful at being thrown to the dogs by his spin machine over the Bristol flats affair.

Cherie Blair no doubt has quite a story to tell, and the authors hint that she may one day be driven to do so.

Mark Smulian

The Subterranean Railway by Christian Wolmar Atlantic Books £17.99

Londoners love to hate their underground railway, yet it moves millions of people each day safely and, most of the time reliably, between more than 300 stations spread from the wealthy commuter towns of the Chilterns to the east London/Essex border.

Wolmar is a transport policy commentator and not, thankfully, a train nut. Consequently, he spares us more than the bare necessity of technical detail to cut to the chase about how the system was built, financed and operated, and draws lessons for the

contemporary fad for public/private partnerships.

His early chapters are a tale of Victorian engineering ingenuity married the era's fearless entrepreneurialism, as a chaotic mixture of companies built separate lines below the capital and ran trains with erratic lighting and ventilation.

The Victorian state would never have built such a system, but the early decades of the twentieth century were to prove that only the state could run it.

Even when one private company gained control of all the underground and many of the competing buses, it still could not make money.

Herbert Morrison took the underground into a public corporation – not a nationalised industry, but more like the not-for-profit model that eventually reappeared with Network Rail.

This began the underground's short heyday when lines were pushed far out into the suburbs, and the innovative design policy was launched that can still be seen in everything from stations to posters.

World War 2 put a stop to this progress and the post-war decades saw a fitful decline that is, just possibly, beginning to turn round.

Wolmar makes a convincing argument that the private sector cannot be left to develop transport infrastructure because it has no way of counting into its balance sheet the social benefits that its systems provide.

The early entrepreneurs also could not capture the money made by developers from building new suburbs served by their lines, and so ended up in financial limbo while others prospered and London enjoyed the social benefits of the system.

Alongside this central argument for public support for transport infrastructure, Wolmar provides plenty of entertaining anecdotes about the underground, and its haphazard development.

Gone for good reason, for example, is the startlingly circuitous Victoria to Wood Green via Brixton service that long ago took advantage of the complex web of lines that cover London.

He also explains the mystery that always puzzles visitors – why the underground hardly touches south London. It was all to do with geology and the rapid spread there of surface

railways.

Mark Smulian

Nelson Mandela in His Own Words: From Freedom to the Future by Kader Asmal, David Chidester and Wilmot James (eds.) Abacus 2005 £12.99

This is not a biography (or an autobiography as the title suggests) but rather a collection of Mandela's speeches from 1951 to 2003; a companion piece, if you like, to *Long Walk to Freedom*.

Initially, these are arranged chronologically, but later are grouped by topic; education, health, culture, religion, peace, etc. Each chapter has a foreword, which has been written by someone of note, such as Kofi Annan, Bill Clinton, Desmond Tutu and Miriam Makeba.

Most of the best are in the first two chapters, *Struggle* and *Freedom*. On reading these earliest speeches, especially those from his trials in 1962 and 1964, one is struck by the dignity, passion and erudition, but also puzzled by the fact that he repeats, time after time, the history of South Africa and its tribes. Then it dawns that no-one in the judiciary actually knew much, and cared less, about that history or the peoples who forged it.

Even on trial for his life, Mandela continues to try to instruct and inform, to convince the government to change its ways. "Poverty goes hand in hand with malnutrition and disease... There are two ways to break out of poverty. The first is by formal education, and the second is by the worker acquiring greater skills at his work... One of their (the government's) early acts... was to stop subsidies for African school feeding. Many African children... depended on this supplement to their diet. This was a cruel act."

Many of the later speeches are fairly standard head-of-state stuff, but not all. The passionate oratory and sense of struggle, which come through so clearly in his early speeches, appear again in his desperate pleas about the fight against Aids, the very existence of which is denied in much of Africa, especially Mandela's native land.

"If 27 years in prison have done anything for us, it was to use the

silence of solitude to make us understand how precious words are and how real speech is in its impact on the way people live or die. We are the human face of AIDS - we are breaking the silence!"

After Long Walk to Freedom, there is little new in this book, and one cannot help feeling that it is its format and editing, rather than its contents, that do not do full justice to Mandela.

But most of the speeches do, and are breathtaking when one considers the time and circumstance of their delivery. Nelson Mandela is, after all, one of the very few secular saints we have; the man who inspired Seamus Heaney to write "It means that just once in a lifetime/That justice can rise up/And hope and history rhyme."

Wendy Kyrle-Pope

Vote For Me ITV

What on earth inspired the producers of the pseudo-Pop Idol Vote for Me show, which blighted our TV screens for two weeks last month? Liberals everywhere will hope that whoever it was won't be allowed near an executive meeting for a very long time. Certainly not after the winner was unveiled: a certain Rodney Hylton-Potts, whose main campaign message includes ending immigration the day after his election and the castration of paedophiles.

Perhaps it was inevitable that Rodney, or 'Rodders', as he likes to be called, won. It was the more populist ITV channel which carried the programme and you need to cater to your audience. In the event then, it was perhaps something of a miracle that two of the final seven contestants could be classed as liberals. But I really hope that this wasn't a true reflection of British political opinion today. If it is, then hand me my passport and plane ticket: I'm leaving.

Vote For Me's conceit (insofar as it had one) was to jump on the bandwagon of various interactive talent contests in which the public votes for its preferred performer. Some bright spark last year must have thought that, with the general election expected later this year and political interest at an all-time low, what we really needed was a non-politician as a candidate we could really identify with.

Unfortunately, that person overlooked the fact that it's the shameless, publicity hungry and attention-seeking section of society that is most inclined to put itself forward for these things. And sure enough, the various contestants who fell by the wayside were an odd bunch of eccentrics, including most memorably a tree hugging guitarist who thought painting houses would do as an alternative to tax and a former porn actress of a 'large' variety whose solution to grabbing the judges' attention was to take her clothes off.

To be fair to the judges, journalist John Sergeant, Lorraine Kelly and the ghastly red top baron Kelvin Mackenzie, it was almost as if they didn't know what had hit them. Certainly Sergeant and Kelly appeared in a daze, having perhaps wandered onto the wrong set, only belatedly discovering that it was less the Politics Show and more Jerry Springer.

Of the seven who made the final round, wheelchair-bound Kevin and Irfan, the young doctor, were the two who could be classed as liberals. Indeed, Kevin sounded suspiciously like a Lib Dem, blending activist politics involving protests outside Downing Street (bringing a warm glow to older community politics Liberals everywhere) and a commitment to replace council tax with a local income tax. Unfortunately for him, local income tax is perhaps not the best subject to debate in 30 seconds or less. As for Irfan, he irritated judge Kelvin Mackenzie with his commitment to a state-funded NHS; and commendably, he stood his ground, besting him several times over the week by demonstrating to the audience he knew what he was talking about.

The others clearly came from the right of the political spectrum. The first to go was Dominic, son of the late barrister George Carman. Initially he gave little of himself away, preferring to seek the advice and counsel of others. But his early departure was no doubt the result of seeming, in the judges' eyes, "too much like a politician" in manner and appearance – an unforgivable crime on this most populist and anti-politician of shows.

Dominic was soon followed by Amanda, who apparently "felt safer under Thatcher". Her main bugbear though, was asylum seekers, about whom she seemed confused. She

argued that Britain should only allow those who made a request to come to this country before they leave their own. She also made an economic link, claiming they should only be welcomed if they contributed to seeking employment (all of which showed that she had comprehensively and successfully devoured the association made by newspapers like the Daily Mail between asylum and immigration).

Eileen was the resident single-issue candidate, determined to bring down telephone masts across the country. Firmly convinced that living next to a mast had caused her breast cancer, regardless of the lack of firm evidence or Lorraine Kelly's promptings, she remained cross throughout. Worse, she had the manner of a slightly bossy, hectoring middle-aged woman which will strike fear into the planning committee of her council should she ever decide to run in the local elections.

In another nod to tokenism (disability, ethnic, single issue) we had Julie, a single mother who made a virtue of her working class roots. Although she was by far the most presentable and personable of the candidates on offer, her lack of a clear campaigning topic only emphasised her main selling point. And perhaps I was being a little sensitive, but it seemed to indicate that because of her origins she spoke for a section of society that apparently I – as a middle class, university-educated, unmarried man – never could.

Which brings us back to 'Rodders'. Against Turkish entry into the EU and in favour of putting the word 'Great' back into Britain, he even had the cheek to compare his time in prison for fraud to that of the almost sainted Nelson Mandela! But it was less his criminal convictions that helped him win than the backhanded support he received each night from the judges who openly prayed he wouldn't win (including, believe it or not, former Sun editor, Kelvin Mackenzie himself!). Which just goes to show all budding Lib Dems candidates everywhere: find yourself a local paper to rubbish you and see your vote share soar.

'Rodders' has now said that he's going to use his new-found popularity to stand against Michael Howard in his Folkestone constituency at the general election. For the Lib Dems there, this must be an awful headache. Having spent several years plugging away at the

Tory leader's small majority, now they will be hit by a new media personality who could threaten their hard work. But presumably, given Rodders's views, there will be no standing aside to allow the independent a free run as happened in Tatton in 1997 and Wyre Forest four years ago.

As for the format of *Vote for Me*, the result appeared to be one of embarrassment. Could the ITV demographic really go for such an extremist? In an interview with the *Sunday Times* soon after, the show's presenter, Jonathan Maitland, claimed, "The winner is a comedy fascist nutter and a cross between Lord Brocket and Mussolini. It's not embarrassing that he won because we'll now respect our real politicians more." Spin truly worthy of the new Labour machine at its finest.

Whether the show's producers will be running this show again for quite some time – well, at least for another four years. And what of Rodders's prospects? Besides hoping for his electoral oblivion, isn't there still a vacancy going for Kilroy?

Guy Burton

Shooting History by Jon Snow Harper Collins 2004 £20.00

Having lived through some of the events described, I find myself wondering if the author is describing another planet.

Liverpool University was far from the hotbed of revolution he describes, indeed it had a reputation for apathy. Snow telescopes two events when describing the sit-in, combining a demonstration when the new Senate House was opened with the sit-in, which was a minority affair the year after.

However, the book does provide an account of Snow's progress from trainee to roving reporter to news anchorman, and gives an account of events he has covered progressing from Capital Radio to overseas assignments and meeting Idi Amin.

There is an overall critique of Western policy, particularly the "my enemies are my friends" approach that initially supported Moslem fundamentalists when they were fighting Russians.

Snow describes mishaps regarding filming and a degree of luck in meeting

the right people at the right time that would do credit to a John Buchan novel. He is frank about his privileged background; in fact he probably overplays its effect.

Although undoubtedly having Peter Snow as a relative would not have hindered his initial job in broadcasting, he would not have progressed without ability.

He gives an account of life at various public schools that is critical of the educational standards, in that he considers he had a better education at Scarborough technical college.

It would be unfair to describe his account as alternate history but there is an element of *Jon Snow* the movie in it. In his account of the Vietnamese boat people, Snow rightly mentions the role of the traffickers but there is no element of querying his earlier opposition to the Vietnam war and support for the Vietcong, whose actions led to the boat people, or any reflection on his support for Biafra, in that its backers may well have been the same type of moneyed influences that backed Tschombe in Katanga or Jonas Savimbi in Angola, or an acknowledgement that the Nigerian president General Gowon's conduct compared favourably with that of African leaders in a lot of other civil wars.

Andrew Hudson

Saving the Planet without costing the Earth by Donnachadh McCarthy Fusion Press 2004 £11.99

The Banshee of the McCarthys is a well-known figure in Irish folklore. Yeats tells us in *A Treasury of Irish Myth, Legend, and Folklore* that a banshee is "an attendant fairy that follows the old families, and... wails before a death". This is not quite the case with the Banshee of the McCarthys, as the young reprobate recovers from his illness and leads a salutary life thereafter.

It is appropriate, then, that a McCarthy be the banshee of the Liberal Democrats, wailing before their countless shortcomings and inspiring them to a better life. It is Donnachadh's conviction that you have

to live your beliefs. In fulfilling this as best he can, many regard him as a pain, but must grudgingly acknowledge that he is fundamentally right or, at least if more than one view is possible, earnest in his pursuit of his goals. The Liberal Democrats are a poorer party without his counsels on their committees, whether he was right or wrong on a particular issue.

I showed the book to some old farmers deep in the Irish bogs. They'd "never read so much nonsense in their lives" (and that's something with a Fianna Fail government) but gradually they conceded that there were "some good ideas among the nonsense", and even that "they might try some of them".

Until I read the book, I liked to think that I lead a reasonably green lifestyle. Yet I rarely scored above 40% when applying Donnachadh's audits. The book has a practical utility here, because it enables you to keep score and try to improve your lifestyle.

The small things suggested can simply become matters of habit. At first, I felt absurd picking up glass bottles on my way home, (I've never thought it cool to walk down the street with a bottle or can of lager in hand) but decided I was more concerned with the safety of the children who play on a particular patch of ground. It's no hassle and, if I find a green bin before my own, I can just drop it in. The couple of dozen bottles I pick up in a year won't save the planet, but it's a start.

Donnachadh has all sorts of practical suggestions of that kind. Some cost nothing, others will only be in the reach of a few of us. I'm sure if you're able to consider some of the projects that have greened Donnachadh's home in Peckham, the energy and water supply, he'd be happy to give you further points in the right direction. I'm wrestling with the Lib Dem website trying to locate the link to a renewable energy supplier - questions will have to be asked if it has gone.

The final chapter provides a brief biography of Donnachadh's career, including that in the Lib Dems up to the time of publishing. Long-standing readers of *Liberator* will no doubt be familiar with many of these sagas.

But what of his links with the Yanomani Indians? Despite recognition of their lands by the Brazilian government in 1991, they suffer from

gold prospectors, who massacre them, spread malaria and other infectious diseases. Are the forest fires that afflict them man-made, or a consequence of our increasing economic activity? It would be fascinating to learn more of Donnachadh's relationship with these people, but for the meantime, go out and buy this book if you haven't already and start changing your life.

Stewart Rayment

Anthony Blunt: His Lives by Miranda Carter Pan Books 2001 £8.99

Following the Hutton and Butler reports last year, you might be forgiven for thinking that we have dud intelligence services. The alleged deferral of the head of the Joint Intelligence Committee, John Scarlett, to Alastair Campbell over the presentation of the infamous weapons of mass destruction dossier and details of plagiarised postgraduate theses masquerading as government documents might suggest an amateurishness and incompetence at the heart of the country's spy operations. But what's more depressing isn't that it all came to light, but the impression that it is a common story.

What is remarkable is that we've been here before, albeit in different circumstances. Fifty years ago, two former spies, Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean, secretly slipped out of the country and sought political asylum in the Soviet Union. When the press got hold of it, the story exploded sensationally, as it became apparent that a Soviet spy ring had been at the heart of British intelligence during the Second World War. But it didn't stop at Burgess and Maclean. A diplomat in Washington, Kim Philby, was also implicated and sought refuge in Beirut before eventually making his escape to the east as well.

But perhaps most astounding of all was the exposure of the Surveyor of the Queen's Pictures and the Director of the Courtauld Institute, the art historian Sir Anthony Blunt, in 1979. How was it possible for someone at the centre of the establishment, who included the Queen Mother as a friend, to be implicated in what became known as the so-called spy ring?

Despite her best efforts, Miranda Carter's biography ultimately fails to

offer a single answer. But perhaps it is to be expected, not least given the complexity of the man Blunt. His Lives follows his birth in 1907 and life at Marlborough College before going up to Cambridge in the late 1920s. As well as acknowledging homosexuality, Blunt became part of two prominent groups at the university: the Apostles (the society of which leading lights including Isaiah Berlin and JM Keynes were also members) and a set of leading socialites at Kings, which acted as the 'Cambridge outpost of Bloomsbury'.

Having completed his degree, Blunt remained at the university to continue his postgraduate studies on the seventeenth century French painter, Nicholas Poussin. It was during this period that he began writing art journalism and discovered Marxism and its artistic virtues, about which he became dogmatic. It continued even when he left Cambridge for London and a position at the Courtauld during the 1930s.

Carter emphasises how Blunt compartmentalised himself; no-one ever had the sense that they entirely knew who the complete man was. So it was that his conversion from Marxist sympathiser to 'fellow traveller' and ultimately spy was just as enigmatic. Despite his views, friends claimed that he never appeared overly interested in contemporary politics. As for his decision to become a talent-spotter for the Soviets and hand over information that crossed his desk as an MI5 officer in the Second World War, Carter can offer little more than that 'even he [Blunt] could never satisfactorily answer.'

Maybe it was a game, perhaps it was incremental; certainly it must have included his and others' reaction against what they considered the greater evil of fascism in the 1930s. Whatever the reason, it sits oddly with the man who was part of the Bloomsbury set, who despite his comments and articles was part of the establishment.

After the Second World War, Blunt did seem to realise the position he was in. Whereas before 1940 he had slipped into the role of Soviet agent, after 1945 he tried to distance himself and make a break with the past. Although there were whispers about him which continued once Burgess defected (Blunt had not only shared a flat with him during the war but had made a

reference to him in his book, *Artistic Theory in Italy*, which he didn't remove even after Burgess settled in the Soviet Union), it suited the intelligence services not to pry too deeply, as the last thing it wanted was its incompetence exposed.

Following the escape of Burgess and Maclean, MI5 and MI6 were badly embarrassed by a series of exposures as more spies were found and tried. Although many of the cases dated back to the 1940s and 1950s, the experience only served to highlight the weakness of the services during the wartime period when Blunt had worked in intelligence.

By 1964, MI5 finally felt confident that Blunt had been a spy. But there was no great desire to out him; it would have been embarrassing not only for the intelligence services, but also the government and Buckingham Palace.

Blunt was therefore offered a deal: immunity for information. For Blunt, it was a weight off his shoulders. Over the next decade he was kept busy debriefing his minders, although given the passage of time it is questionable whether anything meaningful was discovered.

Once Margaret Thatcher became prime minister, this arrangement ended as she disapproved of the collusion. In November 1979, after allusions were made about Blunt as the 'Fourth Man' in *Private Eye*, she decided to expose him.

For the next year his life was spent at the sharp end of bitter criticism and denunciation. Peace of a sort returned before he eventually died, in 1983.

His Lives is an excellent record of the life and times of Blunt. With a good amount of research and some thoughtful interviews of his contemporaries and associates, Carter has also done a good job portraying the other characters that entered his life, and especially Burgess.

Nevertheless, at first glance the image presented of Blunt's England seems anachronistic – as if his England is a different country. It is an England with an establishment that is now commonly caricatured and often mocked: that based on class and prone to the stiff upper lip.

But while we may pat ourselves on the back for the apparent strides we have made since then, we should pause before celebrating. The evidence as set out in the Hutton and Butler reports is

anything but deserving of these accolades. As the present government has shown over the Iraq conflict, the establishment of old England is alive and well. It may not look the same as that of Blunt's time; but it looks after its own – just as it always did.

Guy Burton

A Child's Guide to Wild Flowers illustrated by Charlotte Voake text by Kate Petty Edén Project Books 2004 £10.99

Around the time that this Liberator pops through your door, green shoots will be forcing their way through the ground. What a joy. Lesser celandine, primrose, daffodils - though not wild; I find all of these, even in the urban woodland behind my home. Coltsfoot, cowslip and dandelion, all three buttercups; flags around the ponds...

Charlotte Voake has been a book illustrator since her university days - I first came across her through her excellent work on Eleanor Farjeon's *Elsie Piddock Skips In Her Sleep* - now there's a way to deal with faeries (Walker Books, 1997). She has a very light touch, redolent of Ardizzone.

Kate Petty's text gives identification notes - where and when, and often has a bit of folklore about the plant. The trouble is, it is too nice a book to use in the field - perhaps a replaceable paperback edition would be better for that.

Stewart Rayment

Roy Jenkins: a Retrospective by Andrew Adonis and Keith Thomas (eds.) OUP 2004 £18.99

Roy Jenkins was one of the few politicians to emerge from the Wilson administrations of 1964/70 and 1974/76 with any credit. As a reforming home secretary, he acted as a sort of midwife to the reform of the laws on abortion and homosexuality, as well as bringing in effective legislation against sex and race discrimination.

While no subsequent administration has dared attempt to reverse the Jenkins legacy, both Thatcher and Blair

have criticised the consequences of the so-called permissive society that he unleashed. One is tempted to speculate that if Jenkins himself had not been so obviously a champion of civilised values, the backlash might have been greater. For that, both small- and large-L liberals owe him gratitude.

Indeed, Jenkins continues to command respect and even loyalty from those across the political spectrum who share such values, as the range of contributors to this volume shows.

Roy Hattersley's essay on Jenkins's period as Labour MP for Birmingham Stetchford is respectful and affectionate, noting as it does Jenkins's ability to remain on friendly terms with former Labour colleagues even after he had deserted the party to found the SDP. Likewise, former Conservative home secretary Kenneth Baker contributes an excellent piece on Jenkins and cartoonists.

Although the title is 'A retrospective', perhaps 'A celebration' would have been more apt, since all contributors draw sympathetic portraits of Jenkins in the various phases of his life.

No place here for the thoughts of, say, Dennis Skinner or David Owen, both of whom were notoriously immune from Jenkins' charisma. More surprisingly, there is nothing from anyone on the Liberal side of the Alliance, which would have given a slightly different perspective on Jenkins's role in the SDP from that offered here by Bill Rodgers.

Disappointingly, Philip Allen's chapter on Jenkins's first period as home secretary reads rather too much like official history – Allen was Jenkins's permanent secretary at the Home Office – and although he describes it as 'an exhilarating and exciting time', one does not really get a sense of this. By contrast, Anthony Lester paints a vivid portrait of Jenkins's less celebrated period as home secretary from 1974/76. This includes the battles with Home Office officials over legislation against sex and race discrimination, as well as Jenkins's disillusionment with the direction of the Labour Party. He did not believe that Labour deserved to win the February 1974 election and was ill at ease with many of his cabinet colleagues, but not yet ready for the drastic step of breaking with the party.

Jenkins is widely regarded to have been one of the most, if not the most, successful post-war chancellors of the exchequer. But details of financial policy go so quickly out of date that Dick Taverne has a difficult job in bringing this period to life. However, he contributes one excellent anecdote: after Enoch Powell had interrupted one of his parliamentary speeches with what seemed a telling point, Jenkins looked momentarily stumped. After an uncomfortably long pause he said: "The right honourable gentleman's logic, as always, is impeccable. But since he always starts from the wrong premise, he is bound to come to the wrong conclusion." In one telling remark, he encapsulated Powell's entire political career.

Another outstanding essay is David Cannadine's on Jenkins as a writer and biographer. It does not just concentrate on the Jenkins canon – Asquith, Gladstone and Churchill, but gives attention to his lesser-known books and his journalistic output. It also provides a welcome reminder of Craig Brown's delightful parody of Jenkins's last complete book, *Twelve Cities*: "Hainault is, one might suggest, the most oxymoronic of tube stations, being on the Central Line, but very far from central."

Jenkins's letter thanking Brown for this parody was one of the last he wrote before his death.

We await of course Andrew Adonis's official biography of Jenkins and indeed Adonis is one of the editors of this volume as well as the author of its concluding essay. While we wait, this volume fills a gap nicely.

Iain Sharpe

A History of the Liberal Party by David Dutton Palgrave 2004 £15.99

Although the Liberal Party in the twentieth century has hardly been neglected by historians, there has long been a gap in the market for a good academic study of the subject. Roy Douglas's volume, published in 1971, is somewhat idiosyncratic and suffers more than it gains from the author's political commitment. By contrast, Chris Cook's regularly updated *A Short History of the Liberal Party* focuses too much on the party's electoral

performance at the expense of details of policy or strategy.

So David Dutton's book is welcome and it does not disappoint. It covers the century in five chapters, of which the first two deal with the party's decline from landslide election winners in 1906 to insignificant parliamentary rump by 1935. The third covers the period of stagnation and bare survival up to Jo Grimond's accession to the leadership in 1956, while the final two tell a story of gradual but definite revival.

The debate about the reasons for the decline of the Liberal Party and the rise of Labour is one of the most compelling in British political history, but of course is never capable of final resolution. On the Liberal side there is a tendency to take the 'we was robbed' line – a belief that, but for bad luck and some bad judgement, the Liberal Party could have been a more electorally successful alternative to the Tories than Labour in the twentieth century.

Dutton wisely avoids being either dogmatic or partisan about this. He presents a balanced picture, which accepts that each of a wide range of factors had their part to play: among other things the growth of Labour Party organisation before the First World War and the weakness of the Liberal party in some areas, the Asquith/Lloyd George feud, the failure of the post-war Liberal Party to build on its social reforming agenda of the pre-war era. In a debate where too many historians dig into entrenched positions, this approach is refreshing and surely right.

On the party's revival in the second half of the twentieth century, Dutton's judgements are again balanced but not anodyne. He makes excellent use of the telling quotation from protagonists: many Liberator readers will find themselves in the strange position of agreeing with David Owen on his fellow Alliance leader: "I never underestimated David Steel's manipulative skills. If they had been matched by an interest in the policies best suited to our country he would have been a formidable politician."

Coming up to the present day, Dutton is critical of the Ashdown-Blair Project and but not much more positive about the current strategy of overtaking the Tories. Although generous in his praise of Ashdown's role in reviving the party after the Liberal-SDP merger, Dutton convicts

him of being naïve in his dealings with Blair over the 'project' and of being 'curiously unaware of the fate of junior partners in peacetime coalitions'. However, he is also unconvinced by the contradictions of the Liberal Democrats trying to replace the Tories, while remaining on the political centre-left. His prognosis for the party in the future is therefore not wholly positive.

My one serious criticism of the book is its concentration on leadership and high politics to the exclusion of the party on the ground. The problem for the Liberal Party, Alliance and Liberal Democrats for much of the last half century has been the lack of ability to translate its share of the popular vote into parliamentary seats. That it has made great strides towards overcoming this in the last two general elections is at least as much due to more professional campaigning in the constituencies as to any considerations of national strategy. In that regard, the failure even to mention the role of Chris Rennard is a glaring omission – similar to writing a history of the Labour Party without reference to Peter Mandelson.

But in the end, that is a small matter. Dutton's book is an excellent synthesis, which makes full use of recent scholarship on the history of the Liberal Party in the last century. It will now surely become the standard volume on the subject.

Iain Sharpe

Al-Jazeera: How Arab TV News Challenged the World **by Hugh Miles** **Abacus 2005 £10.99**

So often, one section of the media writing about another section of the media tends to be sensationalist, sycophantic or sentimental. Thankfully, this book is none of these. However, Miles makes big claims for the book; that the story of this news network is the story of the upheavals that have taken place in the region.

To some extent this is right. Al Jazeera, in its reporting style, the story



COMFREY

A very leafy plant when growing, and rough to the touch. Also called knutbone, comfrey root was scraped into a gel and used to set broken bones in the same way as a plaster cast is used today.

1 m
Damp places
Summer
Symphytum officinale
boraginaceae family

of its creation in Qatar and its position as the leading TV station in the region, is clearly reflecting some of the upheaval and battle against cultural norms of the societies to which it broadcasts.

That it is accused of spying for Mossad and Saddam Hussein, has correspondents locked up in Guantanamo Bay and tortured in Abu Grahیب says something about how far it has confronted both Arab culture and the Americans, whose attitude to Al Jazeera reflects their foreign policy agenda - yes, they support the freedom of the press, but Al Jazeera isn't the press, it is a tabloid, which increases the likelihood of terrorist acts.

While the narrative of the development of Al Jazeera is well drawn, the more interesting and underlying narrative is of the Arab battle against its own cultural norms to produce news that would be comfortable in the western liberal model.

It is actually a story of the clash between culture and freedom of expression; and notions of the western model of democracy as it applies to the Arab culture. As well as being highly readable, this book is a real contribution to understanding the media within Arab cultures and the impact of western notions on freedom of expression.

Sue Simmonds

Monday

At Westminster I encounter a naggingly familiar figure in a grey suit. "Hello," it says, "my name is Mark Oaten." I look him up and down. No moccasins, no tomahawk, no feathers, but eventually I recognise him. "Rising Star!" I exclaim, "What have you done to yourself?" "I've decided to bin the Red Indian shtick," he replies. "It was all based on a misunderstanding anyway." It transpires that someone had told him that he would have to be brave to take on Winchester, and he had heard them as saying he would have to be "a brave". "Besides," he adds pensively, "people were starting to call me 'Tumbling Stick'." I invite him to my Club for luncheon, but he declines as he has a busy day planned. First he is off to the gymnasium to make himself even tougher and then he is going to the Home Office. "I have an important meeting with Charles Clarke about tepee arrest – I mean house arrest," he tells me.

Tuesday

Still at Westminster, I attend a meeting of the parliamentary party and demonstrate the Bonkers Patent Abdominal Protector for Canvassers. It is based upon the box worn by batsmen, but has been adapted to include both a jute bag that will carry an entire Focus round and a flask that takes a couple of generous measures of Auld Johnston (that most prized of Highland malts). Asked why I am promoting it at this juncture, I reply that, if we seriously intend sending our chaps out on to the streets of such towns as Guildford, Richmond and Cheltenham to tell the voters we shall allow them no choice in which school their children attend, they will need all the protection they can get. The chairman hurries us on to next business, but I am gratified by the number of MPs who come up afterwards to place firm orders.

Wednesday

Great excitement in the village this morning when Charles Kennedy visits us on his pre-election tour. When we learn that he is to arrive by aeroplane and be piloted by none other than Lembit Öpik we take a number of precautions: a cross is laid out on the green with white sheets, braziers filled with straw are lighted and the fire brigade stand beside the duck pond with their buckets, ready to form a human chain. All prove unnecessary when Öpik executes a perfect landing in his Sopwith Camel. Removing the battered colander he has taken to wearing on his head, the doughty pilot attributes their slight lateness to "a near miss with an asteroid over Cropwell Bishop" – or "Cröpwell Bishöp" as he insists upon calling it. While Kennedy is taken off for a tour of the Home for Well-Behaved Orphans and a slap up lunch at the Bonkers' Arms, I have Öpik fly me over the Estate trailing a banner with the legend: "Remember your rents fall due on Lady Day."

Thursday

I am up before dawn to enjoy the last legal day of weasel popping in England. How can it have come to this? Have our legislators no understanding of country life? What will become of our nation's celebrated packs of weaselhounds? Can these fools not understand that if weasels are not popped they will be controlled in other, less humane, ways? Nor is it only weasel popping that is to be banned: stoat tapping, badger nudging, squirrel toppling – all of them gone. I can hardly see through my tears, with the result that a particularly

Lord Bonkers' Diary

wily weasel nearly pops me. Relaxing in the bath this evening, I reflect that there remains one creature the law suffers to be hunted with dogs: the Trotskyite. (I have taken counsel's opinion and am assured that this is the case.) Very well then. Tomorrow seditious pamphlets will be scattered in my coverts to encourage a plentiful supply of the creatures for next season. Tally ho!

Friday

Passing the cottage hospital, I espy Paul Burstow half concealed in the rhododendrons. When I ask what he is about, he replies that he is hoping to catch a glimpse of a doctor. "They're such wonderful, wonderful people," he sighs. I advance a more nuanced view, pointing out that not all medics are so admirable. I mention such names as Owen and Shipman, and remind him that, greatly though we Liberal Democrats admire him, whenever one visits Evan Harris's laboratory in its mountain fastness between Oxford and Abingdon, the locals are besieging the place armed with pitchforks and flaming torches. My efforts prove fruitless. "When we are in government," Burstow maintains, "we shall simply give the keys of the Treasury to the doctors and let them take as much money as they want. Then we are bound to get the best possible health service."

Saturday

The Manchester Guardian informs us that a German politician wants to bar people from wearing the swastika. I cannot make the Germans out: first they want everyone to wear the swastika, now they want no one to wear the wretched thing. I wish they would make their minds up.

Sunday

Have you seen a moving television programme called "The East Enders"? If it presents a true picture of life in that neck of the metropolis then the East End has changed a great deal since Sir Percy Harris's day – and not for the better. Nevertheless, our leader was in it the other day so we gathered around the set in the Servants' Hall to watch. All that happened was that Kennedy stood at the bar nursing a pint of that dreadful gassy Dahrendorf lager whilst everyone else rushed around saying "Mind the stall" and "What's that s'posed to mean?" in the roughest accents. I could not see any profit for the party, but the bigwigs at Cowley Street were Terribly Pleased that he has been asked to appear. Funnily enough, Kennedy is not the first Liberal leader to be seen in such a programme. In the 1950s Clement Davies starred in "The Grove Family", which was the first British soap opera. He played kindly old Uncle Clement, who would resolve many a domestic crisis by puffing on his pipe and giving the younger generation a lecture on the ups and downs of marriage or Free Trade. The fame this won him was widely credited with enabling us to save our deposits in several of our target seats at the 1955 general election.

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