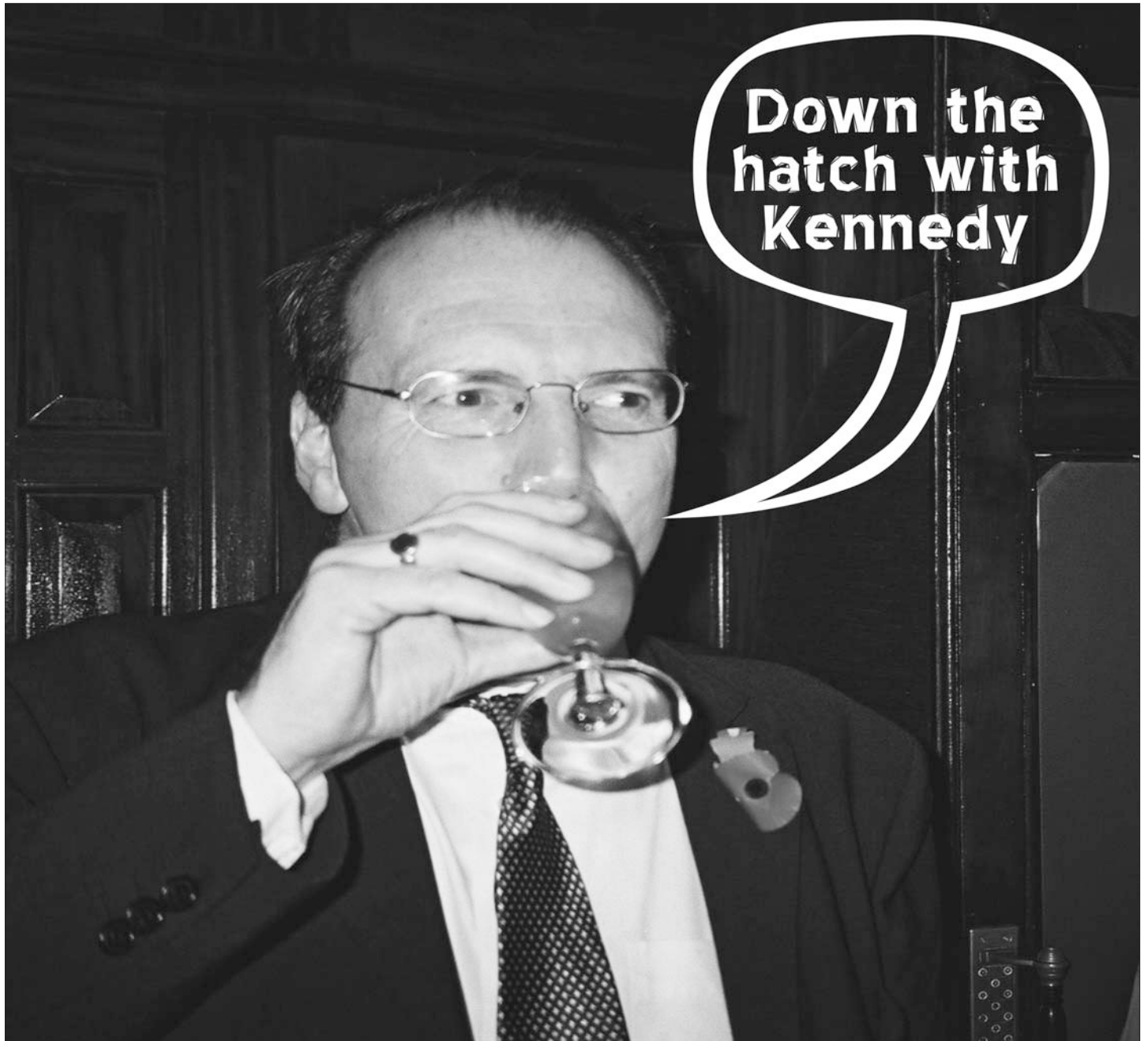


liberator



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COMMENTARY

ON LIBERTY

One good way to judge the Labour government is to think about what one's reactions would have been to hearing Tory ministers accused of equivalent conduct.

If a Tory government, led by a prime minister who lied to start a war, had proposed compulsory identity cards, allowed Britons to be extradited on demand to America, sought to introduce arbitrary imprisonment for 90 days and stuck a senior police officer in its whips office to intimidate its MPs, the whole of progressive opinion would have been in uproar, and rightly so.

It should be no different with Labour.

Blair's government hates liberty with a passion and every day it remains in office Britain creeps closer to being a police state.

Brian Sedgemore, who saw the beast from the inside, warns in this *Liberator* that a Labour government led by Gordon Brown would be no better, and even that Blair would have abolished the legal presumption of innocence had he thought how could get away with it.

While, as over the recent terrorism votes, Liberal Democrats can make common cause with the Tories in defence of liberty, we would do well to remember that the Tories' stance is largely opportunist.

Labour is a more dangerous opponent of liberty than the Tories only because the remnants of Labour's old reputation as a progressive party make it harder to mobilise opposition to it and blunt the suspicions of those who should be on their guard.

The past record of Tory governments makes it plain that they are no friends of liberty, even if their ranks, like those of Labour, contain the occasional genuine civil libertarian.

This is the Liberal Democrats' issue, and the party's record on standing up to the government in defence of freedom and due legal process is one of which its members can be proud.

But it is not a record to which the party draws much explicit attention. It has behaved rather as if it hopes only readers of serious newspapers and the more erudite television news programmes will notice its actions.

Defending liberty is something the party does, but not a flag it waves. It should be.

We still suffer from the assumption that standing up for civil rights equates to being soft on crime, and that this is an issue where good is best done by stealth.

Liberty is the right to go about one's business without having to account for one's presence in a public place to the police through an ID card.

It is the right to make telephone calls and send e-mails without fear of routine interception. The right to count on

being presumed innocent, tried by a jury and jailed only if convicted by due legal process.

It is also the right to vote in secret, the abolition of which in all-postal voting has been one of Labour's most shameful acts in its march to authoritarianism.

These are all rights that people take for granted until they need them, or are unjustly accused of a crime, or are harassed by officialdom or deprived of their vote.

They are also rights that most people assume a government only abrogates in order to deal with undesirables, rather than to affect "people like us".

It is hard to make a simple and persuasive positive case for liberty, though the plummeting circulation and influence of newspapers like the *Sun* and *Express* ought to help.

There is no simple way to wake voters up to the government's assault on their freedom, but it should be done.

On one level, the Liberal Democrats are uniquely placed to do this and the issue gives them the political distinctiveness that is always somewhat elusive.

On another, it is simply the right thing to do. Without liberty, we cannot conduct democratic politics.

Forging a message that liberty is in danger and worth defending is not easy but is one of the most worthwhile things that could come out of the *Meeting the Challenge* exercise.

THE EMBRACE THAT TRAPS

Iraq today is a country where arbitrary murder and imprisonment is commonplace, torture is used routinely by security forces, chemical weapons are deployed against civilians, and terrorists are at large.

The main difference from Saddam Hussein's time seems to be only that these outrages happen in a random rather than organised way.

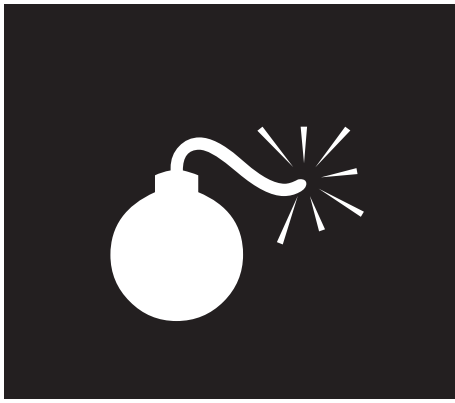
Menzies Campbell has been quite right to call for a parliamentary inquiry into the continuing scandal of the Blair government's involvement in Iraq.

There is something else for *Meeting the Challenge* behind this. Part of the public hostility to the Iraq war was fuelled by the abject demonstration it gave of British impotence.

An American government called and Britain tamely answered, puncturing the myth that this country has any independent foreign policy.

While knee-jerk anti-Americanism is deplorable, so too is the knee-jerk pro-Americanism advocated by this government and by both Tory leadership contenders.

The Iraq war showed a substantial public appetite for a looser relationship with America. This too should be fruitful ground for the Liberal Democrats.



RADICAL BULLETIN

I HAVE SEEN THE FUTURE

Clairvoyance is not a skill normally associated with Charles Kennedy, but it seems he has been able to foresee the conclusions of the party's tax commission nine months before it is due to report.

His sudden announcement of a change in Liberal Democrat tax policy makes it puzzling why tax commission members bother to continue to sit.

Whatever they conclude will either be the same as Kennedy's pronouncement, in which case their work will be superfluous, or contrary to Kennedy's view, in which case it will be ignored.

Indeed, why set up the commission in the first place if tax policy is to be the subject of a sudden pronouncement from Kennedy instead of the result of detailed consideration?

Kennedy said the Liberal Democrats now stood for "fairer tax, not higher tax", with an overall tax take similar to that at present prevailing.

This leaves the three main parties disputing minute differences in the level of public spending, allowing no political space to those who think it should be either significantly higher or lower.

He also argued that tax reforms should target the wealthy, and those who cause pollution, so that the poor and old can pay less. This ignores arguments about whether the old are necessarily poor, especially given there is now an effective 10p extra marginal tax rate on graduates of student loan repayments, plus largely generational barriers to entering the property market.

Shadow chief secretary Chris Huhne has been sent away to find £15bn of money that the Liberal Democrats would spend differently, to allow for an end to student tuition fees among other things.

This exercise proved to be news to both the tax commission and the Federal Policy Committee.

Speaking of which, the launch of the party's new pension policy, of a higher pension made payable by people working until the age of 67, also took place with no consultation of the FPC whatever. Its officers were told a motion to conference would be impossible because "not enough research had been done", only to have this policy sprung on them a few months later.

Those who recently stood for election to the FPC must be wondering why they bothered, since Kennedy is cutting it out of any input on policy.

MORE JUMBLE SALES NEEDED

Blackpool was not merely a disaster as a conference venue (Liberator 306).

It was also a financial disaster with a shortfall of about £100,000.

The Federal Finance and Administration Committee has been greatly horrified to discover that the party's main annual fundraising event had been jeopardised because hardly any invoices were sent out ahead of conference for events, stalls and other money-making opportunities. This has been blamed on staffing problems.

The FFAC has therefore sent the Federal Executive "a very difficult draft budget for 2006, as a result of forecast results for 2005 showing a much worse than expected position after conference", as one observer put it.

Invoices were sent out two months after the event, but it is common practice in the conference industry to secure advance payment on the basis that it is difficult if not impossible to chase up these payments afterwards.

FFAC was not told there was a problem with the invoices in advance, and was further unamused to find a £60,000 overspend on additional security.

This is not the fault of anyone in the party, since the increases security presence was demanded by Lancashire Police yet the party does not receive the same help from the Home Office with this expense as do the Labour and Conservative conferences.

A further problem arose when party staff were booked into accommodation too far from the hall and had to be re-booked at an additional cost of some £15,000.

FFAC chair David Griffiths is to attend the conference finance committee meetings to keep an eye on things.

A DOSE OF DEMOCRACY

Executive members of the largely irrelevant Parliamentary Candidates Association must have thought they had stitched things up to their own satisfaction with only one candidate nominated for each post.

To their surprise, Duncan Hames, who fought Westbury last May and the Tottenham by-election in 2000, stood against official candidate Gary Lawson, who scraped home by only 76-64.

Faced with a democratic election, there were attempts to rule Hames's nomination in valid. Chaos ensued over what the constitution said and who could vote.

Then the election campaign saw 20 executive members all back Lawson, together with a strong endorsement from retiring chair Jock Gallagher.

Telephone canvassing was supposed to be banned, but was carried on by both sides although Hames was handicapped by lacking access to the full membership list.

Despite these disadvantages, Hames very nearly won. What does that say about the regard in which a large minority of PCA members hold their executive?

If this is how the PCA thinks that elections should be fought, no wonder that all 62 sitting MPs seem to have made it to Westminster without feeling the need to have sat on the PCA executive, despite the PCA supposedly being the specialist body for aspiring MPs.

A LORD FROM THE SIDELINES

As *Liberator* went to press, speculation was rife about the identity of a new batch of Liberal Democrat life peers.

Things have improved somewhat after the rows about Chares Kennedy stuffing the last list with his mates and over the survival of the elected list of potential peers (*Liberator* 295).

The new names include former MEP Robin Teverson and long-serving head of the Lords whips office Celia Thomas, both from the elected list, former MPs Brian Cotter and John Burnett, and John Lee.

John who? Lee was Tory MP for Nelson and Colne and a former tourism minister who joined the Liberal Democrats in 2001, since when very little has been heard of him.

Kennedy's decision to elevate Lee will surprise the few people who have read Lee's autobiography *Portfolio Man*.

After a few pages on his decision to join the Liberal Democrats, Lee notes: "However, although enjoying my involvement, I found that I did not really have my original appetite for party politics and finally withdrew from Lib Dem activity in the autumn of 2004. Currently and metaphorically I view the political scene from the crossbenches."

If this is how Lee describes himself, what possible justification is there in wasting one of the party's peerages on him?

Peerages seem to be a consolation prize for MPs who lose their seats. Of the other defeated candidates, Sue Doughty wants to stand for parliament again, David Rendel does not want to be a peer, Matthew Green is too young and no-one was likely to consider elevating Parmajit Singh Gill.

SIMPLE SIMON'S FINGERS IN THE PIES

Friends of Simon Hughes fear that the stresses of the party presidency are taking their toll on him. He has been involved in a series of peculiar actions over the past few months.

Hughes has taken it upon himself to try to appoint a cluster of deputy presidents to help him in his work.

Since this post is unknown to the party constitution, Federal Executive member James Graham has taken the unusual step of a reference to the Federal Appeals Panel to rule on whether Hughes has the power to make such appointments.

The people he wishes to appoint are: Robert Adamson (disabled people); Jenny Randerson AM (devolved and local government); Claire Rayner (older people); Iain Smith MSP (gays and lesbians); Gez Smith (youth and students); Fiyaz Mughal (ethnic minorities); and Sue Doughty (women).

Regardless of the merits of those concerned, it is not at all clear that Hughes, or anyone else, can simply create new posts.

Another recent Hughes oddity has been his behaviour over the reference back of the Post Office motion at conference (*Liberator* 306).

Trade and industry spokesman Norman Lamb, who proposed the motion, attended Federal Policy Committee to ask for a steer on where to go next with it.

Hughes announced that Lamb had absolute authority to take any position he liked and say it was policy until the FPC told him it wasn't, and added blithely that conference could be told that the FPC and the MPs were agreed, and would then be bound to support it. To his credit, Lamb looked deeply unimpressed by this proposal.

Hughes has also caused worry by continual references to the merits of voluntary ID cards when the party is running a campaign against compulsory ones and would presumably prefer the waters not to be muddied.

Little escapes Hughes's meddling in his mission to run the party single handed, even late-night frivolity. He has urged an end to the ever-popular Glee Club at conference and its replacement by some unspecified other entertainment.

Liberator has long been involved in the Glee Club and the one in Blackpool was the most successful for a long time, but this event is not to everyone's taste.

There is no need to replace it – anyone who wishes to run an alternative event at the same time merely has to book a room and organise whatever performance they wish, while those who want to attend the Glee Club continue to do so.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The Centre for Reform, the rather low-profile Lib Dem-aligned think tank, has been reborn as the CentreForum.

Is this just a change of name? 'Centre for Reform' implies a place in which policies for reform are discussed. 'CentreForum' implies a forum for the political centre.

Chasing 'the centre' is what the Alliance wasted the 1980s doing to no effect. Seeking the centre forces a party to define itself in relation to its opponents rather than in its own right, and attracts support from people who don't find its programme actively objectionable, rather than from those positively convinced by it.

So, why the change? It has occurred at the same time as a £1m donation by hedge fund magnate Paul Marshall, SDP candidate for Putney in 1987, who worked as a researcher to Charles Kennedy in the mid-1980s.

Marshall was little heard of in the party after 1987 until he emerged as the main backer and co-sponsor of the *Orange Book* in 2004 (*Liberator* 298).

Challenged by the *Times* (28 June) as to whether he was mounting a takeover of CfR to turn it into an economic liberal mouthpiece, Marshall replied: "Hopefully it will be one of the most exciting think-tanks in the political spectrum".

He continued: "It is run by a group of trustees who represent a range of liberal opinion. I hope what we will be able to do with the extra resources is produce exciting liberal-based ideas which can be the basis of policies for government."

The think tank is not Marshall's only engagement in the party. He chairs the Business Forum, which offers access to MPs for business figures in return for vast fees.

His *Orange Book* associations will raise suspicion as to what he wants CentreForum to think about.

BAY WATCH

Torbay's election for an executive mayor in October was won by a Tory, with the Liberal Democrat making it into the second preferences run-off over an independent only by the skin of his teeth.

How this fiasco occurred in a town with a Lib Dem MP and a Lib Dem majority on the council forms an instructive lesson in what can happen when a council group and its local party fall out.

The problem dated back two years to a decision by the ruling Lib Dem group to greatly increase councillors' allowances.

Coming on top of various local issues over which the local party felt the council has embarrassed both it and local MP Adrian Sanders, a monumental row broke out.

Local party president David Scott, a party activist of 40 years' standing, led opposition to the council group, and Devon North MP Nick Harvey was brought in to broker a compromise.

Harvey's suggestions were accepted by the local party but not the council group, which led Scott to leave the party and set up a campaign for a referendum for an elected mayor.

The Lib Dems, led by Sanders, rightly campaigned against the prospect of a local dictator, since councillors have little role and no worthwhile power in councils with a mayor, unless the mayor chooses to pay attention to them.

Votes from an area within Torbay council, but not the parliamentary seat, are thought to have swung the narrow 'yes' vote.

By the time the mayoral election happened, the in-fighting was such that the party had lost public confidence and the Tory won.

A flavour of the climate locally can be gleaned from an editorial in the *Torbay Herald Express* the day after the vote.

It read: "The unseemly row still splitting the Liberal Democrats apart in Torbay can be laid entirely at the door of [council leader Chris] Harris and his lamentable cronies. Mr Sanders is as widely respected as much as Mr Harris is deservedly reviled.

"Even his opponents and people who, like this newspaper, sometimes don't agree with Mr Sanders' views, respect him for his local knowledge, integrity and capacity for hard work. Mr Harris is respected chiefly by dim-witted lickspittles."

Scott said in a message to supporters: "My one man stand against my own party was so hurtful but I felt I had to do if honesty, trust and integrity were ever to return.

"What I urged then has now happened but far too late. What a shame they bottled it in February 2004 and lacked the courage to face the truth then."

Torbay remains a deeply wounded local party. Coming hard on the heels of the debacle in Shepway, where the ruling Lib Dem group collapsed in a dispute about public lavatories (Liberator 300), is the party's support for ruling groups, as opposed to those fighting to gain control, adequate?

LAWKS A'MERCY, IT'S A FAIR COP GUV

All is not well in the East End. London region Liberal Democrats has suspended the local party in Tower Hamlets.

It is difficult to publish much detail about what is alleged to have happened.

Suffice it to say that the award at spring conference to Tower Hamlets of the trophy for recruitment caused eyebrows to shoot through the roof, given the large number of people who joined shortly before its PPC selection.

In a letter to local members, regional chair Sean Hooker stressed that no financial irregularities had occurred, but said: "The reason for the suspension is that the local party has no effective leadership due to the prolonged absence of the chair and lack of communication from the vice chair."

There were concerns, he added, "that the procedure in place to select prospective candidates for next year's local elections is insufficiently robust."

Suspension makes the region responsible for running the local party and for choosing candidates for next May's elections, which means that no would-be candidate can affect the selection outcome by recruiting new members.

A proposal has been made that to vote in a Liberal Democrat candidate selection a person should both have been a party member for a year and have renewed their membership (Liberator 306).

Tower Hamlets' demographics are changing fast, with the white working class in decline, a growing Bengali community that is the main source of support for Respect, and a growing very wealthy community in Docklands that has already given the Tories their first seat on the council.

Relations between Liberal Democrats and Labour have been sulphurous for 30 years, but Labour, seeing a hung council in prospect, has suddenly begun a charm offensive. The Liberal Democrats may yet play a pivotal role in sorting out an administration from what promises to be a four-way political mess.

BACK FROM THE EDGE

The parliamentary party is sprouting interest groups. The two new ones are the 555 Group, a social group for those elected on 5 May 2005, and Chris Huhne's Edge Group.

The latter is for those with majorities of 10% or less of the vote and is there to provide practical campaign advice.

It must be the only group that tries to attract new members by offering them the opportunity to become ineligible for membership.

ANNUS HORRIBILIS

It really is not Liberal Democrat Youth and Students' year. After the financial debacle of Westminster Day (Liberator 306), it found itself turfed out of its conference venue.

LDYS had booked a conference at the University of Lincoln but, with two days to go, the university found some constitutional clause banning political societies and cancelled the booking. This forced LDYS ignominiously into a local church hall instead.

BOOKS OF THE YEAR

Still looking for Christmas gift ideas? Liberator asked some leading political figures to recommend their favourite books of 2005

Lord Bonkers

My book of the year is **Are you looking at my bird of liberty? Inside Violent Bonham-Carter's Firm** by Harry "Knuckles" Bloggs. It brings back a host of memories of the smoky London of the post-war years. And what characters there were in those days! Jonquil "Mad Axe" Flowerdew (the no-nonsense tearoom proprietor), Jack "the Hat" McVitie (the biscuit magnate) and Barbara Windsor (the black sheep of the Royal Family) all spring to mind.

The normal courtesies of reviewing preclude me from mentioning the reissue of my own **Thoughts on Free Trade** (Oakham: Bonkers Head Press).

Keith Raffan MSP (ret'd)

I find it impossible to choose between **McGillicuddy's Road Atlas of Scotland** and my **Acme Pocket Ready Reckoner**.

John Hemming MP

Birmingham always gets a bad press, so it was refreshing to read a guidebook with a difference, **26 Things To Do In Birmingham**. It dispels once and for all the myth that a Brummie accent is the world's most powerful contraceptive.

Bob Russell MP

This Christmas I shall re-read Proust's **À la recherche du temps perdu**: I always find it almost jejune in insouciance. Then I shall toy with Wittgenstein's **Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus**, marking some of his more egregious solecisms in the margin.

Lembit Öpik MP

The year's most practical book has to be **Protect Yourself From Asteroids in the Welsh Mountains**. It contains no useful information whatsoever but is three feet tall, two feet wide and several inches thick, and I hold it over my head whenever I'm out canvassing.

Sarah Teather MP

My best book this year is **Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince**. It is very nice I like it very much. My best bit is where Harry fights with the Death Eaters. It is very exciting and very scary. It is like a by-election but Harry does not have Lord Rennard to tell him what to do.

Lord Razzall

This Christmas I'm looking forward to reading Mark Twain's classic tale, **The 1,000,000 Pound Bank-Note**. It's about a man with a lot of money who wins all sorts of favours without having to spend anything. A good job real life isn't like that.

Parmjit Singh Gill

I am studying the **A-Z of Leicester** again. What's that mate? Glenfield? No chance. I'm not going west of the Soar this time of night.

Simon Hughes MP

... then the forty-third book on my list is **Thanks For That Friendly Clip Round the Ear'ole, Copper**, a touching tale of law and order in Bermondsey between the wars. And while we're on the subject of the congestion charge, I must tell you about... (cont. p.94)

Vince Cable MP

It is hard to choose from the pile of volumes on my bedside table. There is **Beekeeping for Novices**, but the pages tend to stick together. (It's the honey, I think.) I also find the chapter about keeping bees out of your wimple redundant. Then there is **Advanced Ballroom Dancing**, but I think I pulled a muscle during Gordon Brown's last question time. So my choice has to be that most exciting of volumes: **The Optimum Level of Personal Taxation in a Market Economy**.

Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon

Frankly, my book of the year is **1001 Exciting New Ideas Before Breakfast** (not that I eat breakfast). It tells you how to cure world poverty and save the ozone layer and solve the Kurdish question and restore the rain forests and reverse global warming and bring peace to the Middle East and sort out the EU budget and give Britain a decent railway system and prove who wrote Shakespeare's plays and design a perpetual motion machine and make wine from the hedgerows and many other things. I like useful books like that. I once read a book by someone called Dickens but found it rather far-fetched.

Book recommendations compiled by Jonathan Calder and Simon Titley

LABOUR FACES ITS DEATH THROES

Labour has been reduced to a vehicle to keep the government in office, but its authoritarianism will be its undoing, predicts Brian Sedgemore

The Labour Party under Blair has become nasty and authoritarian, devoid of values, ideas and ideology.

Under his stewardship the only categorical imperative is the maintenance of political power for a ruling elite which sees government as an end in itself. Sadly it will be no different if Gordon Brown, the self-anointed successor, should replace Blair. One autocrat will be replaced by another autocrat who is moody, controlling and unforgiving. One control freak will be displaced by an even bigger control freak up to whom all the other control freaks in politics would look for advice.

Labour MPs and Labour Party members may hope for a return to halcyon days that never were, but they, like their leaders, are becoming lost in a moral maze.

I would have thought that the long term task for Lib Dem MPs and party members would be to create a party to replace Labour and become the centre left alternative to the Tories. In the short term there may have to be hung parliaments, coalitions and changes in the electoral system. But in the long term a centre left Lib Dem party should stand for liberty, internationalism, diversity and pluralism and social justice.

Market fundamentalism, which can only make the world worse, can be left to the Tories and the diminishing band of the heirs and successors to Blair, Brown et al.

Over the next 50 years, and possibly longer, one of the great fault lines of British politics will concern civil liberties and human rights. The divide will be, indeed is, between those who see liberty as the essence of civilisation and those who see it as a luxury we can no longer afford. Already the Labour Party has placed itself firmly on the wrong side of this fault line. Currently or imminently at risk from the Labour Party are freedom of speech, freedom of movement and freedom of association combined with liberty which is enshrined in the Rule of Law, due process, Habeus Corpus, a fair trial and the presumption of innocence until proven guilty.

Speaking in the House of Commons on one of David Blunkett's criminal justice bills when he was home secretary, I suggested, rhetorically and sarcastically, that he might indeed abolish the presumption of innocence.

However even I could not believe it when I heard recently that the prime minister himself privately thought that the presumption of innocence was an impediment to his kind of justice. But believing that most people in Britain might see this as having a touch of the night about it he was loath to put the matter into the public domain.

I suspect that the public, and particularly previous Labour voters, will not tolerate much longer a prime minister and prime minister designate, backed by a compliant and complicit cabinet, whose values and ethics owe less to the Old Testament prophets and New Testament God than to the pursuit and abuse of political power for its own sake.

Meanwhile the Labour backbenches in the House of Commons are suffused with worthy and obedient lackeys. Some of them, referred to as the usual suspects, have troubled consciences but have declared themselves impotent to respond further and have turned themselves into spluttering apologists for an authoritarian regime of a kind which predates the Enlightenment.

Should we sympathise with them in their predicaments or condemn them for their loyalty to a political party, which in the words of John Cleese will soon be as dead as his parrot?

Such a party, ever lower on membership, ever more disconnected to its leaders and the public, and now mocked even by those who vote for it, will surely not survive.

Perhaps, like the Roman Empire, but more quickly one hopes, it will be brought down by its own moral torpor. Hopefully a vibrant Lib Dem party, building on the success of a million or so Labour voters defecting to us at the last general election, will speed up the process.

This Labour Government has few principles but one of them is that whenever there is a problem the government has to be seen to be doing something, whether or not what they can do is effective and whether or not it should be the government's responsibility at all. In this way they have taken up the philosophy of Bishop Berkeley who argued that "reality is perception" and so it is that in the fight against terrorism Blair and his home secretary, Charles Clarke, have created what I can only describe as 'virtual politics' in which images, shadows and reflections are more important than substance or effective action.

Our prime minister simply cannot see that he now looks at the world through distorted prisms of his own creation.

Then there are all the cabinet ministers, and again especially Charles Clarke, eschewing collective cabinet responsibility and instead making Faustian pacts with Blair. In these pacts they agree to do Blair's bidding, however calamitous they know the results will be, providing only that he guarantees that they will continue to remain in high office.

Let's take Clarke's pact for example. Blair insists that Clarke should bring in draconian terrorist legislation. Clarke asks for and gets the assurance that he will remain in office. Then as he tries to deport six Algerians back home where

state torture is common someone reminds him that one of the six men was tried and acquitted in the ricin conspiracy trial because there was no evidence of ricin and there was no evidence of a conspiracy.

However in accordance with the terms of his Faustian pact Clarke says that he doesn't care what happened at the trial and that although the jury acquitted the defendant, he (Clarke) knows that the defendant is guilty and so must be deported.

This gives us the new authoritarian concept of 'virtual guilt'. As for the possibility that the innocent man might be tortured in Algeria, Clarke has in his pocket what used in diplomatic circles to be called a letter of comfort from the Algerian minister of the interior. This says boldly that Algeria does not do torture and that they are happy to work closely with the British Government in furtherance of human rights. So that's all right then - though I seem to remember Neville Chamberlain returning from Germany with a similar piece of paper, with a message approved by Hitler, prior to the Second World War.

As for Clarke I last saw him on television protesting loudly "I am not a liberal. I have never been a liberal" Its all right. We know, we know, Clarke, that there is not a liberal bone in your body and what a mess Clarke and Blair made of the defeated proposal to hold suspects for 90 days without charges.

Under Blair's presidential style of government there will be more Faustian pacts and more and more 'letters of comfort' scattered around the cabinet table. And it will continue and multiply when Gordon Brown takes over.

Gordon is so engrossed in the economic sorcery of endogenous growth theory that I suspect he does not even understand the ethical dimensions of removing precious liberties from British citizens or upholding the human rights of Algerians. Or is that when controversial issues arise - whether it be the threat of terrorism or university top up fees - Gordon simply keeps stumm, moves into the shadows and lets others take the flak?

I suppose the real question for the Lib Dems is whether we are prepared to combine the target seat strategy whose

continuance is, in my view, absolutely necessary with a wider and more broadly based campaign to go for Labour seats.

Labour has too many demoralised activists to mount a defence to an onslaught outside its marginal seats. Labour's historic task was to serve the interests of the working class. As that class barely exists today in any meaningful sense the Labour Party simply has no purpose other than the soulless management of its own survival.

Supporters of liberty and freedom among Labour voters, and there are still a lot of them, may take little persuasion to come over. In the field of international affairs we've already seen how the unlawful invasion of Iraq has led to large scale defections. Now as it becomes clearer that a Labour government led by Blair or Brown intends to review its stockpile of nuclear weapons, more sophisticated than the existing lot and hugely more expensive, another fault line could open up to the benefit of the Lib Dems

Even now the defence secretary, Mad Dog Reid, is desperately searching for a potential enemy against whom these nuclear weapons might be used in 20 years' time. As Labour's resolve weakens on climate change, carbon emissions and the environment the Lib-Dems can provide the sort of clear thinking opposition that is beyond those environmental lobbies that have been appropriated and emasculated by the Labour government.

Add to that a coherent set of Lib Dem policies on social justice and those vital intangibles that are so necessary in politics - honesty, decency and trust - and the matrix is there for a concerted attack on Labour at the polls.

But individual policies need to be brought together in a narrative that is susceptible to convictions and passion. Every political party needs its share of preachers, preferably shorn of religious attachments. Perhaps the campaign should start now.

Surely now is the time for the Lib Dems to capitalise on the death throes of Labour.

Brian Sedgemore was Labour MP for Hackney South 1983-2005 and joined the Liberal Democrats during this year's general election campaign.



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THE STATE AS LIBERATOR

Social and economic liberalism go together but both need a liberating state, says John Pugh

There is a central core of Liberal principles that unite the party and give underlying coherence to the diverse policy initiatives spun from the ever fertile brains of colleagues.

My presumption is that without undue fudge we can see off those who would divide us into two camps labelled through sheer laziness of thought as 'economic' and 'social' liberals.

The media stereotype of a party poised between bright young things who can do hard sums and municipal, bewhiskered Stalinists - however flattering to some - has to be contested for the opinionated drivel it is.

The concept of 'the state as liberator' I think does that. I have circulated this idea among parliamentary colleagues and found that with some minor reservations it has found broad agreement from people as differently positioned as Paul Holmes and Vince Cable. Though Vince remarked that it might be easier to get agreement at the level of first principles than at the next level of policy.

I don't demur from this judgement but to know we are united in our take on the Liberal agenda is something worth knowing, and much as some may love a scrap, carrying the Liberal case to the people is our main business.

I have tried to weave Beveridge, Gladstone, Oaten, Huhne, Beith, Kennedy and Cable into one seamless but well fitting garment- hung upon the concept of the state as liberator.

No one disputes that the object of our life is to seek personal happiness and realise our nature.

Liberals have always recognised that this is done through freely forming relationships with our fellow men and women and not as a result of following any state prescription.

No state can dictate the path to individual happiness, though many have tried and failed. That's why our previous definition of party philosophy was called *Its About Freedom*.

However *Meeting the Challenge* has now complemented the Beith plea for freedom by endeavouring to re-establish the link between freedom, social policy and the individual pursuit of happiness. Implicit in it is the belief that although the policy of state cannot prescribe how we may happily live, it can remove the obvious obstacles to doing so.

Liberals have classically opposed the over mighty, bossy, seemingly omniscient state telling us how to live, because we have always doubted both the ability and the right of our rulers to do so.

However, just as we have recognised that there is no one pattern of life that can be recommended to us from on high (and no consensus about it), there is almost universal agreement on the kind of things that make people unhappy and incapable of self-realisation.

We may not as human beings pursue the same paths to happiness, but we are pretty unanimous about the obstacles and hindrances.

The removal of such obstacles is the work of enlightened, liberal, social policy. Beveridge classically sought to task the state with slaying the giants in the path of individual progress such as 'want and the fear of want' and 'unemployment'.

Other Liberals would seek to add 'war and the fear of war'; still others will talk of 'environmental destruction' and the fear of it. Internationalism, environmentalism and welfarism are all integral to modern Liberalism - all aimed at removing barriers and hindrances to human happiness and development.

Clearing the path, removing hindrances, and individual empowerment is the golden thread, the heart of the Liberal narrative and the moral mission of the state.

The state carries out its role in two ways, by regulating the behaviour of individuals and providing for individuals' needs (from basic security through to educational opportunity).

Regulation and provision are the two basic activities of the state whereby the state tries to deliver what it believes individuals are entitled to.

Regulation gives to individuals rights it is felt that they are entitled to and state provision gives people opportunities and benefits it is felt they are entitled to.

Since it is recognised that one person's right is another person's duty and one person's benefit is another person's taxation, the issue of how entitlements are decided in a democratic society will always be a matter of some debate.

However it is not that debate that has pre-occupied the Liberal Democrats in recent years but the secondary debate on how 'entitlements' are to be delivered - whether by direct state provision or by the state manipulating an existing market or sources of private capital.

The technical question of how far private capital and entrepreneurship is used to deliver public purposes has exercised people rather more than the question of what those purposes might be. Quality, Innovation and Choice was largely an attempt to answer these secondary, technical questions.

Concentration on how entitlements are delivered, rather than what they are and should be, has been understandable given the ever new mechanisms and initiatives for the delivery of public services regularly advocated and the publicly voiced concerns about them.

Ultimately the answer we will give to the question of how public services or entitlements will be delivered will be pragmatic. We will advocate the most effective means currently available - whatever that turns out to be.

Our answers though will look odd if we fail to recognise that the state's job is to deliver entitlements, not market products or services - with the citizen reduced to a mere passive consumer. Or indeed if we fail to get clear about what we think those entitlements actually are.

Far, far more distinctive will be the Liberal answer to the question: "What entitlements should the state give to its citizens?"

Our answer is: "Those that empower and liberate each and every citizen."

We see the state as removing the obstacles to individual prosperity and flourishing. The Liberal state is an enabling state - a creative state- a state that celebrates and nurtures the potential of its citizens.

Contrast that with the Conservative model, which sees the state in a negative fashion - as there simply to restrain the most socially disruptive aspects of individual behaviour and egoism.

Contrast it too with the socialist model that views the state as a device capable of controlling and constructing the destiny of its citizens. The Blairite nanny state.

Conservatives tend to view the action of the state as constraining, socialists view it as controlling; Liberals see good governance as liberating. Its about freedom.

For all these reasons we believe all citizens should be properly involved in the work of government (not just at election time) and the government naturally should work for all without discrimination or favour.

This concept of what an engaged and engaging government should be begets two central Liberal themes: a concern for equitable and fair treatment under law -the Liberal passion for civil rights; and the stress on civic duty and personal responsibility - emphasised currently in the doctrines of 'tough liberalism', 'active citizenship' and our rejection of the 'nanny state'.

The state though cannot hand out entitlements to some citizens and ignore the fact that this in fact imposes obligations on itself and indeed other citizens - even if only as taxpayers.

You cannot simply enable some and disable and burden others unless it can reasonably be argued that the result is to create a better, fairer, more potential-laden world for all.

This is a significant hurdle for any form of public service or provision to get over.

Gladstone recognised this, and it was recently underlined by Charles Kennedy, and linked 'retrenchment' to 'reform' - social policy to monetary discipline. This is sometimes seen in terms of an indulgent or not so indulgent state treasury financing a wish-list of social improvements. This is a false picture so far as Liberals are concerned.

It is more a question of seeing benefits in a balanced way and ensuring that shackles sprung in one place are not needlessly imposed in another. Hence the drive for a fair, transparent and overtly defensible tax system. The circle of social reform and fiscal prudence not only can be squared, but for serious Liberals must be squared.

Equally the blessings a state aspires to confer must be of the kind that would not ordinarily arrive any way through free exchange between individuals in an open market.

Further if it is 'about freedom', government must ideally be neither remote nor excluding - hence our support for as much local accountability and variation in public services as is consistent with the state's overriding obligation to deliver understood entitlements fairly and efficiently.

We may thus sum our Liberalism up in four propositions:

Liberalism is about the removal of obstacles to individuals' pursuit of happiness

It is carried out through the state delivering entitlements by acts of regulation and provision designed to liberate and empower its citizens

Such entitlements should be fairly and efficiently delivered to the ultimate disadvantage of none and benefit of all

This can only be done through incorporating and involving citizens in the actions of the state - through a healthy, meaningful and engaging democracy

It thus a fallacy to suggest there are two kinds of Liberal - social and economic liberals. There is a common Liberal credo to liberate the energy, potential and talents of individuals and communities.

Our business is the development of the human spirit - no less.

John Pugh is Liberal Democrat MP for Southport and a member of the Beveridge Group.



***Happy Winterval / Season's Greetings and a Liberal New Year to all readers
The next Liberator will appear in February 2006.***



CURSED BY WEALTH

Rwanda is recovering from genocide, but is a fortunate place compared with its neighbour Democratic Republic of Congo, says Becky Tinsley

In a bustling, dirty town in the armpit of Africa I met Dirk, a “geologist”, as he described himself. He arrived uninvited at my wobbly table in a ratty little café in Cyangugu (sounds like Chan-goo-goo), on the shores of Lake Kivu in Rwanda, one hundred yards from the Congo border.

Dirk was stocky, with bleary blue eyes and a flushed face. He smiled as he pulled out a bottle of the lethal local hooch and tipped it into his coke. On the wall of the bare, ugly café a screen pulsed rap music from a French station in neighbouring Congo (formerly Zaire).

Dotted around the room, beneath the flickering lights bulbs, were tough-looking Arabs in traditional dress, staring blankly at the TV, and a sinister Lebanese in a tracksuit who was having a loud argument with a heavily made-up, scantily-dressed local woman unlikely to be his wife.

Dirk claimed to be a South African in business across the border in Congo, but with commercial interests in Rwanda and Tanzania. The drunker he became, the more unlikely his stories sounded. He managed to be both boring and scary at the same time. Like the noisy Lebanese and the silent Arabs slouching morosely around the sordid café, Dirk is actually a diamond smuggler. He deals in gold too, buying it from the warlords who are tearing eastern Congo apart, leaving an estimated three million people dead since 1998.

Human Rights Watch recently described the mineral wealth of Congo as a curse on that desperately poor, violent country. The warlords and their armies of drugged-up teenagers go from village to village, terrorising people and stealing all they own. They murder, rape and mutilate, and they force people to mine and then hand over Congo’s mineral wealth.

Their dirty secret is that some of them are armed and supported by greedy African governments that at the same time receive generous aid from America and Europe. Indeed, two of the implicated governments are currently darlings of the UK’s Department for International Development. Our dirty secret is that western companies trade in the blood diamonds smuggled across the border by the shoals of sharks like Dirk.

The road going north along the edge of Lake Kivu had been washed out, but there was a tiny boat to Gisenyi, a comparatively quiet town just inside Rwanda, at the northern tip of the massive lake. Across the national border from



genteel Gisenyi is Goma, another ‘armpit of Africa’ where Congo’s wealth is parcelled up and traded away by dubious and shady characters from B movie scripts.

Chugging north up the lake there were only a handful of fishermen on the water. On the eastern shore were the towering green mountains of Rwanda, plunging into the lake, as spectacular as anything Norway has to offer. To the west were the mountains of Congo, under a permanent, ominous swirl of black cloud. As the light faded, a continuous electric storm thundered and flashed across the sky without pause for three hours. Once it was dark, the simple little boat navigated solely by the fiery glow of the volcano straight ahead to the north.

The volcano above Goma erupted in 2002, swamping the city in broad rivers of lava like deadly black porridge. No one knows how many people died because no one knows how many lived there before. In much of eastern Congo there is no evidence of any government or organisation: no schools, or hospitals, or post offices. But there are legions of people like Dirk the geologist, straight out of the pages of a Graham Greene novel.

In our first hour in Goma we were stopped three times by police and other men with guns who shook us down for two or three dollars. They pointed to the license plate on the jeep, saying, “You must be rich because you are from Rwanda.” In rural Rwanda a family makes perhaps \$40 a year from their tiny plot of land, beyond what they grow to survive on: this makes them wealthy by Congolese standards.

Eastern Congo is the Wild West: no rules, no infrastructure. Arguments are settled by guns, might is always right, and the best-armed militiamen steal as many diamonds as they can carry in their baggy fatigues. There is a United Nations peacekeeping mission, but Congo is the size of western Europe, and the roadblocks re-appear seconds after the UN vehicles have passed by. Locals also claim the already discredited UN peacekeepers are implicated in the smuggling business.

We wanted to drive up the slopes of the volcano to the crater, still bubbling like Hades. But the driver pointed at an innocent-looking wooded hill ahead and shook his head. A warlord and his army of psychopaths were known to be in residence just two kilometres from Goma, poised to sweep down, raping, looting and killing, at will.

Back in what was once a built-up city, camped out on a stark lunar landscape, people were cutting lava into building blocks to make homes. Women had set up manual sewing machines and shoe repair kiosks beneath canopies of plastic



sheeting. They painted murals of famous pop and rap stars to advertise their make-shift hair salons. Their men looked ill-at-ease when they saw us, and the children ran beside our jeep screaming, “Muzungu (white person) – give me money.”

Back in leafy, lush Rwanda, just across the border, we found the children shy and gentle, by contrast. Their worn clothes suddenly seemed less ragged than we had remembered them, and their faces were rounder.

Rwanda is recovering from a genocide that claimed almost a million lives in 1994. Many people in the west have now heard about Rwanda’s nightmare. Congo is still in the grips of its eternal darkness, and no one seems to know or care. Every day in Congo twice as many people die as are dying right now in Iraq. When will someone challenge the impunity of the warlords, the smugglers and their ‘respectable’ enablers in western companies and capitals?



Becky Tinsley is director of Waging Peace and was the Liberal parliamentary candidate in East Hampshire in 1983 and Stamford and Spalding in 1987.

YOU GOTTA HAVE FAITH

‘Faith schools’ are bad in both principle and practice, and the Liberal Democrats are wrong to support them, argues Simon Titley

When historians look back on this decade, one of the political curiosities will be why the Blair administration chose to hand over control of large chunks of the state education system to religious bodies, in an age when religious faith has fallen through the floor.

And as a footnote, they might ponder why the Liberal Democrats chose to endorse such a perverse and illiberal policy. Charles Kennedy, in a lecture to the religious group Faithworks (3 February 2005), said that he was in favour of faith-based welfare and thought that religious bodies should play a larger role in public life.

Kennedy added, in an interview with *Muslim News* (21 January 2005), that the Lib Dems would come up with a “package” of measures in which they would consider giving further privileges to religion. He also said that he would not oppose a growth in the number of state-funded Muslim schools.

Meanwhile, in a speech to the Catholic Association of Teachers, Schools and Colleges (2 February 2005), the party’s education spokesman Phil Willis assured his audience that, “We have no proposals whatsoever to close Church schools or to prevent the establishment of others – indeed it is a Liberal Democrat Council in Islington that has jointly sponsored the St Mary Magdalene Academy, the first Church of England Academy in the country.”

Both speeches read like a nervous pre-election pitch for an imagined ‘religious vote’. This pathetic attempt to appease a dogmatic and vocal minority left Britain’s majority of non-religious voters with no choice at this year’s general election; a situation where all three main parties were supporting ‘faith schools’. It is truly bizarre that the number of such schools is already over 7,000 and rising when Britain is one of the least religious countries in the world.

Following the general election, the Liberal Democrats appeared to back-pedal somewhat. A press statement (23 August 2005), in response to a Guardian opinion poll (of which more later), said that the party would not want to see any more faith schools in the country as they could foster divisions in society. An unnamed spokeswoman said the party would not seek to close any existing faith schools but would not like to see any new ones emerge. She said the party did not believe in “segregation in education” – a position apparently at odds with Willis’s clear commitment in February.

So the Liberal Democrats are at sixes and sevens – no change there. Given the obvious muddle, what ought to be the party’s position?

The Liberal Democrats have rightly recognised the paramount importance of education because of its capacity to liberate the individual. But education is also fundamental to the enlightenment project. In a year in which ugly religious intolerance is back in fashion – from the fanatical protests against the Sikh play *Bezhvi* and Jerry Springer – *The Opera*, through to the July 7 bombings – enlightenment values are at risk. As if that were not bad enough, Britain’s education policy has been entrusted to a member of the extremist cult Opus Dei. In such dangerous times, Liberals would do well to remember Victor Hugo’s maxim, “There is in every village a torch – the teacher; and an extinguisher – the priest.”

It is obvious why the churches want more ‘faith schools’. But why should anyone else? Such schools are allegedly ‘popular’ and ‘successful’ but both claims turn out to be bogus. In any case, the notion of ‘faith schools’ is fundamentally wrong in principle.

The first principled objection is a belief in the secular state – indeed, it is fundamental to civil society, which can function properly only on the basis of pluralism and rational debate. Liberals, whatever their personal religious views, must accept this principle because only individuals can have religious faith and the inanimate state cannot ‘believe’. Further, religion must remain a personal matter because all religions have at their heart a dogma that necessarily precludes other beliefs. When religion is established within the body politic and there is only one ‘truth’, it leaves little room for argument.

Opposing ‘faith schools’ should be all of a piece with opposition to an established church, to blasphemy laws and to the proposed ‘religious hatred’ legislation. In a Liberal society, no-one should suffer discrimination or oppression for their religious views but, equally, no religion should enjoy any statutory privilege or state subsidy.

State funding for ‘faith schools’ is tantamount to spending taxpayers’ money on religious proselytising. The state should not ban religious schools but there is no reason why the state should subsidise them.

The second principled Liberal objection to ‘faith schools’ is that, far from promoting ‘diversity’ as their defenders claim, they enforce sectarianism by segregating children according to their parents’ superstitions. They pin religious labels on children too young to be capable of making any meaningful choice. The disastrous experience of segregated education in

Northern Ireland appears to have taught the British political establishment nothing.

Sectarianism is not confined to Ulster. Lord Ouseley's report into the Bradford riots of 2001 warned, "There are signs that communities are fragmenting along racial, cultural and faith lines. Segregation in schools is one of the indicators of this trend. There is virtual apartheid in many secondary schools."

After riots the same year in Oldham, there was another official investigation and another warning. David Ritchie (chair of the investigation) warned in his independent review that local 'faith schools' were "contributing institutionally to divisions within the town."

If parents genuinely wish to provide religious education to their children, and if churches wish to offer it, that is their right. But it should not be done at the taxpayers' expense. Nor should the state endorse segregation as public policy; publicly funded education should be secular and open to all children regardless of their parents' beliefs.

The third principled Liberal objection to 'faith schools' is that of choice. Promoters of 'choice' within the state education system hold out the prospect of a veritable smorgasbord of educational options. Instead of the 'bog standard comprehensive', you may choose from dozens including a Catholic school, a Shi'ite grammar school, a Vegan secondary modern or a City Academy specialising in macramé.

In reality, even in densely populated urban areas, parents are unlikely to find more than two or three schools within convenient reach. In rural areas, there is unlikely to be more than one. To hand over control of state schools to a management with a religious agenda inevitably restricts available choice for the majority of parents who would prefer something a little more impartial.

What's that? Did I say "majority"? Don't most parents like 'faith schools'? Actually they don't. An opinion poll published by the *Guardian* (23 August 2005) found that 'faith schools' are opposed by almost two-thirds of the public. 64% agreed with the proposition that "the government should not be funding faith schools of any kind". A MORI poll for the TES in November 2001 produced similar results.

Little wonder. It turns out that almost half the government's planned new flagship city schools are sponsored by religious organisations. Over 40% of the sponsors for the 'academies' due to open over the next two years are faith-based charities, Church of England figures or well-known evangelicals.

At least one of this next wave of privately funded city academies is a school planning to teach children creationism. The Grace Academy, due to open in Solihull this year (with another to come in Coventry) is sponsored by millionaire car dealer and born-again Christian Bob Edmiston, founder of the evangelical broadcasting organisation Christian Vision. He has reportedly dismissed evolution as a theory that "came from one guy called Darwin".

In a democratic and pluralist society, people are free to hold whatever beliefs they like. But 'creationism' – the dogma that the world was created 6,000 years ago – is demonstrably false and bad science, and it would be professional malpractice to teach it in school science lessons.

But in Blair's Britain, this seems not to matter. If you've got a nutty idea or an axe to grind, a state school can be yours for just two million pounds. In an age when only about 7% of the population regularly attends any form of worship,

the church seeks to impose by force what it cannot win by argument.

But let's leave aside religion for one moment. Who would want to dismantle the best schools in the country? Aren't 'faith schools' supposed to be better? Isn't this why they are popular, despite parents' lack of religious faith?

The government and many parents are wedded to the idea that 'faith schools' achieve superior results. At first glance, the league tables of examination results seem to bear this out. We should examine these statistics more closely.

The right-wing think tank Civitas did just that. Supporters of 'faith schools' tend to attribute the superior performance of these schools to the educationally beneficial effects of their having a religious ethos. Civitas found that 'faith schools' achieve superior results for one simple reason: they cream off the best and the brightest middle class children and tend to reject the less intelligent, the less motivated and the poorer children who would require more work.

In other words, there is 'choice' but it is the schools rather than the parents who are doing the choosing. And even then, 'faith schools' are not all they are cracked up to be. The Civitas pamphlet *Faith in Education*, published in 2001, reported on standards in Roman Catholic and Church of England schools and found "staggeringly large" variations in average standards between the best and the worst. It added that the problems of bad teaching, low standards and low morale are just as acute in the worst church schools as they are in the worst state comprehensives.

Overall, 'faith schools' on average performed only slightly better than conventional state schools, and the extent of under-achievement was still on the rise. 'Faith schools' are clearly not centres of excellence and do not warrant the disproportionate support they receive from the government or the ill-informed enthusiasm of some parents.

When you factor in the selective policies of these 'faith schools', it is clear that they are under-performing. But it is also clear that these schools have little sense of any Christian charity. Bring me your poor? Not if it affects their league table rankings.

Janet Dobson, writing in the *Guardian* (29 November 2005), remarked, "Church schools that select their pupils carefully from a wide area have exceptional exam results and parents queuing down the street; those that fulfil their Christian mission by recruiting from the bottom of the social pile, do not."

Each person should be free to pursue his or her religious beliefs but one's faith should be a matter of private conscience, not state policy. Charles Kennedy and Phil Willis, in their statements earlier this year, placed their party on a slippery slope, in what appeared to be an ill thought-out piece of shabby populism.

The party would do better to oppose strongly the government's massive expansion of 'faith schools'. It would be a popular policy, it would be distinctive and, more to the point, it would be right. All it needs is some testicular fortitude on the Liberal Democrat front bench.

Simon Titley is a member of the Liberator Collective.
Weblog at <http://liberaldissenter.blogspot.com>

BROWNE'S BLUES

Jeremy Browne defends his role in the Reform think tank

Liberator 306 criticised me for being involved with a think tank called Reform.

It is true that many of the people associated with Reform are linked to the Conservative party. Although this was quickly glossed over, there are also some Labour associates.

I am more interested in opportunities for the Liberal Democrats. Let me explain.

I do not start with the assumption that liberalism is such a feeble creed that it is inevitably harmed by exposure to any other forms of thinking.

I want us to be a bold and ambitious party. We should be looking to push our ideas into new territory. If we can be adventurous and colonise new territory then we will give ourselves the potential for greater growth.

Our opponents want us to always be meek and humble. That is not my approach.

I do not agree with all the opinions held by other people in Reform. It is a think tank, not a cult.

I bring a distinctive Liberal Democrat perspective. The alternative, which is to be absent from an interesting political forum, is the choice of a party that prefers being marginal to being mainstream.

We always venture our desire to “work with people from all parties and none”. We should not be afraid to practice what we preach.

Let us look at the two core areas explored by Reform: tax and public services.

There has been a huge increase in taxation under Labour. For every £10 raised in tax in 1997, allowing for inflation, £14 is raised today. Public spending now accounts for £580bn annually.

I think it is legitimate for any Liberal Democrat to ask two questions. Is this money being spent efficiently? Do we wish to see the state play a greater role in society?

There are some people at Reform who favour a flat rate tax. I do not share this view. In a mature economy the main effect of moving to a flat rate tax would be a large transfer of wealth from people on middle incomes to people on high incomes. Those on low incomes would potentially benefit, depending on where thresholds were set, but their gains would be small compared to the new wealth accrued by the richest people.

I do, however, think taxes should be simpler. There is a strong case for reducing the overall burden of taxation by raising thresholds at lower income levels.

The bottom fifth of earners pay a larger proportion of their income in tax than the top fifth. They are also increasingly clients of the state, compensated for the tax they pay with an elaborate system of credits and benefits. The money is transferred from citizen to state and back again, with some leakage in the process, and a huge and inefficient system of bureaucracy is created to manage the process.

Liberal Democrats should be willing to question this. Are we really saying that Gordon Brown's bigger and more centralised government represents the liberal ideal?

That leads me on to the other area for consideration: public service reform.

There are Conservatives that like to pretend that the extra money spent on public services since 1997 has made no difference. They are wrong. It clearly has.

But has it made enough of a difference? And can the delivery of public services be improved? Is it beyond the pale for Liberal Democrats to ask these questions?

We live in a world which is ever more consumer orientated and where choices proliferate.

I think our public services need to respond to these changing circumstances. If the public services make no attempt to satisfy the rising desire for greater consumer responsiveness they will slowly lose touch with the people who use those services and pay for them through their taxes. Then we will reach the truly divisive point where anyone who can afford to do so buys their way out the public services and they become just a safety net for the poor.

Take an example: why should people be satisfied with failing schools? It is not just about money; the government is spending more than ever before.

We have a duty to explore how those schools can improve dramatically. Every child deprived of a decent education becomes an adult who is insufficiently educated to enjoy the liberal ideal of a life free from poverty, ignorance and conformity.

There are many good schools. But there are also some very poor schools and there are far too many that are merely adequate.

Some people will say, “mustn't grumble”. But why should parents and pupils be passive recipients of inadequate services? Why shouldn't they be empowered citizens with the ability to raise standards and demand improvements?

Instead the government seeks to impose this pressure on the public sector through layers of inspection and auditing. There are centrally determined templates for public service standards, which are maintained by an expensive army of employees of the central government.

Individual choice is discouraged. Local decision making is quashed. Conformity is institutionalised. Innovation is stifled. Creativity is suspected. Consumer responsiveness is suffocated.

After Gordon Brown there will be a more liberal government. Whether that government is composed of Liberal Democrats is another matter.

We should never marginalise ourselves. We should be engaged. We should be leading the arguments, not turning our backs on them. Our historic function is to be the enlightened liberal force in British politics.

Jeremy Browne is Liberal Democrat MP for Taunton

COUNTING TRIDENT'S COST

Has the government covertly decided to waste billions on superfluous nuclear weapons, asks Kate Hudson

Nuclear weapons are back on the political agenda in Britain. The Trident nuclear weapons system reaches the end of its service life by 2025. Given the time taken to develop such a system, a decision on any replacement needs to be taken in this parliament.

Despite the best efforts of the government to avoid any real public or parliamentary debate, the issue has been forced out into the open by campaigners and concerned MPs. So how is the debate shaping up, and how can we help ensure that we will get a genuine and open debate on such an important issue?

The prime minister is quite clear. He says Britain needs nuclear weapons. Some analysts believe he has already taken a decision to go ahead with a Trident replacement, and that the current discussions are merely cosmetic. This would be a great mistake on the part of the government if true.

A recent poll shows that a majority of the population (54%) opposes the replacement of Britain's nuclear weapons, when it is made aware that this could cost up to £25bn. The poll also showed that 87% would oppose the use of a nuclear weapon against a non-nuclear weapons state. Worryingly, Britain would currently be prepared to use one under just such circumstances. Our government is shamefully out of step with the British people on these matters.

Debates about whether Britain actually needs nuclear weapons have been raging for decades. But with the Cold War over, more and more people are coming to the view that there is no conceivable purpose in having them. We do not face a nuclear super-power rival, and even Mr Blair agrees that they are no use against the threat of terrorism. Neither those attacking New York on 11 September, nor those bombing London on 7 July, were deterred by nukes.

So if they don't meet our most urgent security purposes, what is their point? Defence secretary John Reid argues that irrespective of current security issues, Britain faces a long-term more traditional type of nuclear threat and that we need to plan accordingly. Reid seems to be playing on people's fears that either Russia will re-emerge as a nuclear opponent, or that another nuclear armed super power will emerge, possibly China.

If this were a genuine concern, then rather than preparing for a rerun of the Cold War period, surely it would be better to start working now towards nuclear disarmament? Britain could be playing a role in promoting disarmament, as required by the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, to which we and the other nuclear weapons states are signatories. Abolition of nuclear weapons is the only way to ensure that they aren't used. The idea of knowingly and willingly entering into decades of nuclear arms race and the massive waste of

resources that entails – combined with potential destruction of the planet – seems irresponsible in the extreme.

So how much money have we, the British taxpayers, already spent on this weapons system that cannot defend us against the threats we really face? It appears that the original procurement costs for the existing system were around £12bn, and that each year, taking into account associated costs, the Trident nuclear weapons system costs us around £1.5bn. The rebuilding of the Plymouth dockyards to allow for submarine refitting cost around £1bn. Additional billions have been given to the Aldermaston Atomic Weapons Establishment for the development of buildings and facilities, we assume for the development of the planned Trident replacement.

The full cost of developing a replacement, including missiles, submarines and base facilities is estimated to be as much as £25bn. This same sum of money is the equivalent of building about 1,000 new schools at today's costs, or the cost of scrapping student top up fees for the next 10 years. And that's before we pay for its regular upkeep.

So what else could our money buy for us, if we didn't choose to spend it on weapons of mass destruction?

The £25bn could pay for 120,000 newly-qualified nurses every year for the next decade, or 60,000 newly-qualified teachers every year for the next 20 years. Consider what could be done to enhance state pensions, or to alleviate global poverty and inequality. The sum would protect 900m acres of rainforest, or could meet the UN Millennium Goals aid target of 0.7% of GNP every year for the next six years. These are choices that should be made by the British people about our spending priorities, and not behind closed doors.

Opposition to replacing Trident is now considerable, and stretches across the political spectrum. Former Tory defence secretary Michael Portillo opposes it, as do a number of retired senior figures from the military who have spoken out strongly against nuclear weapons, feeling that money should be spent on conventional forces, which otherwise face cuts.

Plaid Cymru, the SNP and the Greens oppose it. We very much welcome the debate in the Liberal Democrats about Trident Replacement, and hope that after considering all aspects of the issue, you will conclude that Britain's real security – and global peace – is not best served by a new generation of weapons of mass destruction.

Kate Hudson is chair of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

COHESIVE COMMUNITIES

How can communities succeed when governments refuse them freedoms and funds, ask David Boyle and Jonathan Calder

Since the foundation of the Liberal Party in the 19th century, Liberal thought has recognised that people achieve their goals in life by working together for the local good, that their understanding of local needs makes them the experts in their own administration, and that good government is underpinned by neighbourhoods working together.

When these truths are forgotten the rift between government and governed becomes a dangerous gulf, and the administration and cost of public services become unmanageable.

Liberal Democrats believe that administration is best carried out by the people closest to those that it affects, and that the right to work together locally to manage things differently is a guarantee of liberty.

Recent research, particularly in the USA, has pinpointed cohesive communities as the key missing ingredient to a whole range of intractable policy issues that are undermining the ability of governments and their welfare systems to struggle on.

The biggest and most expensive study in the history of criminology, carried out by the Harvard School of Public Health, which reported recently, found that by far the most important influence on local crime is the willingness of neighbours to act for each other's benefit – and especially for the benefit of each other's children.

This and the research known as 'Broken Windows', which was the inspiration for the major reduction in crime in New York City, demonstrates that it is often very little things that make the biggest effect on local life, among which is a range of equal partnerships between local neighbourhoods and local police, often instigated – as in Boston – by the churches. This makes cohesive communities not just a stand-alone outline of policy in a narrow area, but a central idea in Liberal thinking in health, crime, social policy, family policy and a range of other areas.

The problem

The constitution of the Liberal Democrats tells us that we exist "to build and safeguard a fair, free and open society, in which we seek to balance the fundamental values of liberty, equality and community".

When the Liberal Party committed itself to 'community politics' in 1970, it was clear that this approach represented something radically different. It was different both in its content – representing a reaction against the narrow economic concerns of government in that era – and in its campaigning style, representing an attempt to energise the

political process by involving people more directly in it where they lived, and to work alongside them to improve their lives.

Today we face a different problem. The word 'community' is used so widely as to be almost meaningless. It is used as an adjective to cast a warm glow over the, often disreputable, noun that follows. So the poll tax was officially described as the Community Charge, and today people talk about "the intelligence community" as though spies babysit for one another and organise jumble sales together.

One of the greatest threats to community life is economic change. It is traditional to laugh at the Luddites, but it remains a fact that those who suffer the costs of economic change are rarely the same as the people who reap its benefits.

Individual communities and ways of life are rooted in particular economic forms, and when those forms collapse they collapse with them. This phenomenon can be seen dramatically in the fate of the pit villages after the closure of coal mines in the 1980s. It also operates more gradually: the decline of the Romanies in Britain arises from the fact that 50 years ago there was a need for a casual agricultural workforce and today, because of changes in farming brought about in part by government and EU subsidies, there is not.

The combination of monopolistic retail practices and damaging government policies have stripped many neighbourhoods of the basic necessities of local life:

Twenty per cent of corner shops, grocers, high street banks, sub post offices and local pubs disappeared from British villages and high streets between 1995 and 2000 and a further 28,000 outlets are expected to be lost by the end of next year. There is an equivalent stripping of local green space and playing fields – the equivalent of seven Hyde Parks in London alone since 1989.

These losses undermine the ability of communities to sustain themselves economically or socially, or to determine their own economic lives, and lead to a tipping point where complete collapse is inevitable, and go against the expressed wishes of the people who live there.

Our Liberal Democrat embrace of liberty, equality and community echoes the Jacobin slogan *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*. Perhaps the idea of 'fraternity' is irredeemably sexist, but it does convey a warmth and spontaneity that are often absent from 'community' as it has been understood by governments of either Labour or Conservative. Certainly, they are absent from the idea of community held by New Labour communitarian theorists.

Insofar as communitarianism reminds us of the point we note above, that communities are rooted in particular forms of life, then it act as a useful corrective to the varieties of liberalism that consist of nothing but free-floating rights. But there are strong objections to the sort of policy measures that communitarianism has inspired in Britain. They are often simply authoritarian, have little sense of tackling causes, and have in general been directed against particular social groups who are singled out as a problem.

The debate on anti-social behaviour, for instance, assumes that problem always occur on 'estates' and that the solution lies in threatening to take away the tenancies of the perpetrators or their parents. This is factually wrong, in that home owners are quite capable of being anti-social too, and should alarm Liberal Democrats in that it makes one section of the community (council tenants) liable to penalties (the loss of their homes) that do not apply to anyone else.

Another group singled out by communitarian policies are children and young people – a fact seen most clearly in the introduction of general curfews for particular age groups. Some will object to these policies because they violate children's and young people's rights, but even if one is sceptical of the existence of such ideas, there are still good reasons for being alarmed by policies of this kind.

The first is that much of the impetus for the introduction of curfews arises from a lack of contact between the generations. Groups of teenagers hanging around on street corners can seem threatening to older people, but if communitarian policies and blanket restrictions lead to less contact between the generations, then such groups will come to seem even more threatening and there will be calls for curfews to be made even more restrictive.

The second objection is that such policies undermine communities' faith in their ability to police themselves. Research in the USA shows that this ability is the most important determinant of the local crime rate. British communitarian policies simply require people to hand over the problem to the police, the council or their local community safety officer.

Perhaps the clearest distinction between communitarian and Liberal outlooks can be seen when we consider the idea of the gated community. To Liberal Democrats, this represents the ultimate failure of community, but David Blunkett recently called for their extension to "the many not the few".

Some solutions

Neighbourhoods traditionally worked together, pooling time and resources, when they were threatened in some way, and often when they were extremely poor. Folk memories of these places and periods are warm and nostalgic, despite the poverty, although they are also sometimes remembered sometimes as intolerant and intrusive.

But the ability of neighbourhoods to work together to improve their lives – and stand up to government or officials if necessary – has been severely compromised in recent generations, and that leaves them increasingly prey to rising crime, isolation, loneliness and ill-health, all of which research has shown to be linked to a lack of community cohesion.

It would be impossible to turn the clock back to the communities of the past, even if it were desirable. But achieving Liberal Democrat aims in government relies partly

on reviving people's ability to work together locally – building a new kind of inclusive and caring communities – and that means confronting the forces that make this difficult.

Crime and the fear of crime are probably more destructive of cohesive communities than anything else. Even the sense of dislocation caused by the constant experience of quite mild disorder and vandalism can confine older people increasingly at home and add to the sense of hopelessness among people who live locally – and this can be a problem in predominantly owner-occupied neighbourhoods as much as public housing.

But research, notably by the Harvard School of Public Health in Chicago, demonstrates that a sense of local trust – and a preparedness to intervene when young people are misbehaving – is more important than income or class to whether a neighbourhood has a high crime rate. The most important factor in driving down local crime is an active community that can work alongside the police, and set joint goals with them to jointly tackle the issues they believe are important.

That is the cornerstone of the Liberal Democrat approach. We will also:

- make sure there is no community without a local community police officer who is committed to them.
- use Community Support Officers and Neighbourhood Wardens to reduce anti-social behaviour, co-ordinate the removal of graffiti and litter, and provide more visible uniformed community safety staff on buses and trains.
- use tough and intensive community sentences, with offenders doing work that is genuinely useful to pay their debt to the community, rather than entrenching criminality with automatic prison sentences.

There are few areas of policy so central as community cohesion to the real concerns of people, and yet so intractable to governments that refuse to trust local authorities or local people with freedom and funds. The Labour government is increasingly distrustful, even to the extent of finding ways to stop people looking after the children of next-door neighbours.

Liberal Democrats recognise that creating this cohesion is a shared responsibility between local government, local people and the voluntary sector, but their efforts can be enabled or disabled by central government and public service professionals and managers.

Liberal Democrats believe that the local staff and clients of public services are critical forgotten assets, sidelined by successive governments – a direct cause of the failure of current public service reform. Community cohesion, on the other hand, makes it possible to bring these assets to work effectively.

David Boyle is a member of the Meeting the Challenge policy review group. Jonathan Calder is a member of the Liberator Collective. This article is abridged from their contribution to Passports to Liberty 6. For details see advertisement page 21.

NOBODY ASKED US

Dear Liberator,

In Radical Bulletin (Liberator 306), you say that “Sarah Ludford, the MEP on the FPC, appears to have played little part in proceedings at the crucial stage” of preparation of the Europe motion debated at conference.

That is true, but it was not for want of trying.

Despite repeated requests, I could not get hold of a draft until the night before the Federal Policy Committee meeting in June. I was told it was being prepared not by the Cowley Street Policy unit but by the Westminster Foreign Affairs team and specifically by Nick Clegg (so I am intrigued and mystified at your report that he also feels he was not fully consulted)!

When I did get the draft on the Monday night before the Tuesday FPC, I immediately circulated it to my MEP colleagues, and we submitted amendments during the Tuesday. I could not attend the meeting to lobby for our amendments, as I was in Strasbourg for the European Parliament plenary.

I was ill during the whole of September and was therefore unavailable in the run-up to the Blackpool conference and was absent from it.

But far from following Sarah Teather’s injunction to be ashamed of him, I am proud of my delegation leader Chris Davies MEP for his energetic and successful campaign to secure a more realistic motion.

Perhaps a compromise could have been found if we had had a week or so to consult before the motion’s adoption by the FPC, but only if the FPC was willing to stand up to stubborn MPs, as it did when I was vice-chair a decade or so ago.

Sarah Ludford

Liberal Democrat MEP for London

NOT RIGHT, NOT LEFT

Dear Liberator,

I don’t always agree with our leader/chairman, but Charles Kennedy’s dismissal, in his Blackpool conference speech, of the left/right/centre labels used to describe political principle and policy, is surely correct.

The terms are clichéd, outmoded and confusing; they are not what the non-political voter talks about (I could

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count on the fingers on one hand the number of doorstep conversations I’ve had which have used the terms ‘left’ and ‘right’); they are also convenient terms, regularly used by opponents of liberalism, to position us adversely and therefore try to dismiss our cause.

If we need a verbal schematic to define the political divide, let’s at least choose our own – how about central/local; and elite/individual?

And yet, the columns of your enlightened publication are regularly and loosely laced with left/right references, often it seems in an attempt to describe differing strands of thought within the Lib Dems.

Of course, I wouldn’t be so illiberal as to say the ‘left/right’ vocabulary should be banned – but I think it fair and reasonable to ask those who use it to answer the following questions, perhaps as part of their next article: what does the writer mean by the terms ‘left’ and ‘right’ in today’s context, and why is it advantageous for advancing liberalism to keep using the terms ‘left’ and ‘right’?

I hope to look forward to further enlightenment.

Keith Sharp
Islington

BROKEN CYCLES

Dear Liberator,

I enjoyed Simon Titley’s article “No More Mindless Activism” (Liberator 306).

He’s spot on that people “work[ing] longer hours in more insecure jobs... seek[ing] solace in materialism” results in a cycle that is “unsustainable – not just environmentally but also socially, economically and psychologically.”

But that’s why the party should be prepared to be more openly critical of European expenditure.

We should call for EU budget reform because reducing EU spending will make it slightly easier to break the destructive ‘work and consumption’

cycle that Simon identifies. Wouldn’t that be precisely the effect of, for example, transferring some money now paid to the EU to our state pension fund?

The deep tragedy of Blackpool’s Europe debate was the failure of compromise between the merits of a cap and the valid arguments of MEPs and councillors whose communities receive EU grants. Scores of potential compromises are imaginable, such as “a 1% cap achieved by means other than cuts to grants to poor areas”.

Liberator suggests that our MEPs’ representative to the FPC, “played little part” before conference. Frankly, if organised and staffed parliamentarians (of all types) won’t bother to voice any objection to motions at FPC (or FCC) prior to conference perhaps they should, in those cases, lose their right to make objection at conference. Such a strict rule would be novel but it would encourage better transaction of party business.

Antony Hook
Deal

A SURVIVOR WRITES

Dear Liberator,

I would like to add an extra perspective to your demolition job on Blackpool (Liberator 306).

I found my hotel quite acceptable and had no complaints. In fact, one of our new MPs was there.

I found the people running the hotel very realistic about Blackpool’s appeal and situation.

They knew exactly what some of the other hotels were like. They knew exactly what the Liberal Democrats would think of them. They knew exactly what the Liberal Democrats would think of Blackpool’s ‘facilities’.

John Pindar
Streatham

ROSA PARKS REMEMBERED

Dear Liberator,

In a world where there is seemingly so little good news, we would do well to pause for a moment and remember the shining example of Rosa Parks, who has died aged 92, and the lessons she taught us.

The woman who sparked the American civil rights movement when she refused to give up her seat for a white man on an Alabama bus is proof once again, if it were needed, that the conscience of one person can change the world for the better.

We should ponder the fact that she was no rebellious youth when she made the protest that led to the Montgomery bus strike, eventually taken up by 50,000 black residents, who walked to work for weeks rather than face the daily shame of segregation. She was a mature, determined and thoughtful woman of 42.

Those of us sliding comfortably into an acquiescent middle age should take note.

Let us also recognise that the will to resist was impressed upon her in her childhood by her grandfather, Sylvester

Edwards, who demanded that his descendants never put up with mistreatment. This courageous man daily risked his very life by the simple act, for example, of insisting on calling white men by their names, rather than merely 'mister'.

Those of us with children and grandchildren carry a heavy burden of responsibility to teach them right from wrong. Who knows when they will need to follow our example in their lives?

And let us also acknowledge the role played by her secondary school, run by white women from the north, determined to deliver a decent education to the poor blacks of the south, and also the example of those whites who worked with her in 1955 at a 10-day workshop in implementing integration at the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee.

The downtrodden demand and deserve the active intervention of those in the ruling class who perceive the injustice of their station in life. We must not pass by on the other side.

Of that momentous day when she finally refused to give up her seat after half a lifetime of humiliation, it has been said that she was merely tired, and

that activists then escalated the case against her will. But Rosa Parks herself said:

"People always say that I didn't give up my seat because I was tired, but that isn't true. I was not tired physically, or no more tired than I usually was at the end of a working day. No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in."

Rest in peace, Rosa. We will never forget what your life revealed.

Stephen Yolland
Melbourne

'A Different Country Now'

A new booklet in the '*Passports to Liberty*' series on liberal ideas

This new edition (volume 6) includes two essays:

'Spin' by Adrian Sanders MP

and

'Cohesive Communities' by David Boyle & Jonathan Calder

Available by post (price £3.50 each including postage - make cheques payable to 'Liberator Publications') from:

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

Granta 91
Granta 2005 £9.99

What attracts the casual reader most to this Granta is Alan Bates, more specifically Simon Gray's memoir of him.

It is a frustrating memoir, slobbering out in Barbados, hence the collage on the cover I suppose. It is 15 pages before Bates gets a decent mention; but there are gems when they arrive. You want to see his Claudius – all too much of it is stage and the only tragedy of that is that it is thus no more.

Elsewhere, Said Sayrafiezadeh tells us why socialists are such miserable bastards. But he doesn't seem aware that the Socialist Worker party (the American parent) was set up by the FBI to subvert the influence of the Communists. Consider how they behaved when they first broke out of Nottingham in the early 70s; consider how they still behave – in or out of Respect. Comrade Trotsky was, of course, wise to these petty-bourgeois influences.

It is a long time since *Liberator* reviewed Granta – it's still a good read.

Stewart Rayment

The Condor Years
by John Dinges
New Press 2004
£17.95

The horrors perpetrated by the military juntas in South America in the mid-1970s are a sledgehammer reminder of what can happen when governments tear up the rulebook to fight terrorism and subversion.

No-one of course remotely supposes that the current assaults on civil liberty in the 'war on terror' will lead governments in Europe and North America into the sort of mass murder carried out by the juntas.

But then hardly anyone in South America thought that the military governments that emerged in the mid-1970s would destroy long established democracies in Chile, Uruguay and (more or less) Argentina with such unprecedented brutality.

Condor was the coordinating system established by the Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet's intelligence chief Manuel Contreras.

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Under this, these three juntas, together with the military strongmen who ruled Bolivia and Paraguay, collaborated closely to torture, murder, jail or exile tens of thousands of people.

Anyone connected with even centrist politics was at risk, with moderate reformists just as vulnerable as Marxist guerrillas.

Condor was assisted by the Brazilian junta, which governed behind a facade complete with a permitted 'opposition' party and kept its distance from the worst repression.

More importantly, Condor enjoyed the enthusiastic backing of US State Department under Henry Kissinger, who, despite the heroic efforts of some American diplomats to halt the slaughter, zealously supported the juntas even after the Chileans

assassinated a political opponent with a car bomb in the middle of Washington.

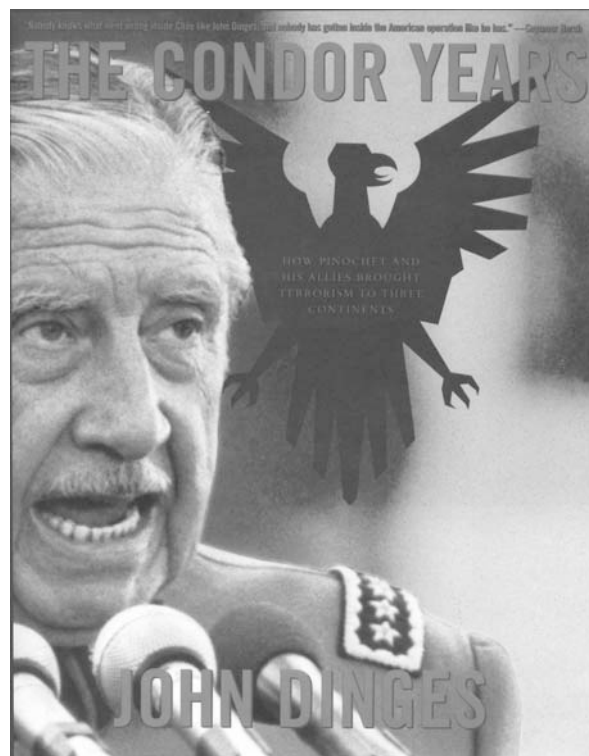
America at best saw what it wanted to and at worst was directly complicit, until Jimmy Carter's arrival in office put a stop to its involvement.

Despite his notoriety, Pinochet was not the worst villain. That dubious honour goes to the Argentinean junta led by Jorge Videla, whose victims are thought to total some 30,000, about 10 times the number murdered in Chile.

The repression slackened by the late 1970s, apart from Argentina. The men behind Condor took the precaution of imposing amnesties for themselves on the civilians who succeeded them, and must have thought they had got away with their crimes.

That they do not enjoy undisturbed old ages is due in large part, and rather surprisingly, to the Paraguayan army.

In 1989 it overthrew the 35-year-long Stroessner dictatorship



and ushered in democracy. With no amnesty to worry about, the new government turned over vast documentation on Condor crimes to human rights lawyers and campaigning judges both in Europe and in neighbouring countries, where they were increasingly able to find ways round the amnesties.

This process led to Pinochet's imprisonment in Britain in 1998, charges against the Argentinean and Uruguayan criminals of the 'dirty war', and international warrants that effectively prevent many others responsible from travelling abroad.

The junta leaders were brutes, but, unbelievable as it seems now, genuinely believed that they faced a continent-wide uprising by Marxist terrorists, a fantasy the well-organised and financed guerrilla groups did little to dispel.

In such a viciously polarised situation democratic politicians of all persuasions found no space, apart from Brazil's fake party politics.

Governments can convince themselves that they face threats that can be defeated only with repression. Condor is what lies at the extremity of that route.

Mark Smulian

Hearts and Minds: Human security approaches to political violence by Scilla Elworthy & Gabrielle Rifkind DEMOS

Think tanks – and this one in particular – do not seem to come up with regular fodder for the average Liberator reader. This pamphlet, however – mostly written before the July terrorist attacks, - is well worth scrutiny by Liberals, for two reasons.

Firstly, its subject matter (the argument that the aggressive pursuit of revenge against terrorism is futile and counter-productive) is timeless. Its practical suggestions, written by veterans of Middle East analysis and web-based campaigns such as the Oxford Research Group, are worthy of further attention as alternatives to the ‘Washington consensus’.

Moderately argued, it highlights the gradual escalation of tensions that started sometime in the Cold War and end (for now) with the Falluja disaster.

Arguing a human - not political - based response, the authors suggest non-violent solutions to the active causes of modern-day terror and some solutions to unpick it where it already exists.

Gareth Epps

Rough Music by Tariq Ali Verso Books

A possible sign of how brittle the coalition of anti-war Lib Dem support might be? The old revolutionary, of course, voted for Lynne Featherstone to win Hornsey and Wood Green this May. Two months later and bombs rip the Tube apart.

Unsurprisingly, and correctly, Ali blames this firmly and squarely on Blair; and by the second paragraph, it is Blair’s take on free-market capitalism in the firing line.

The cruel irony of the UK’s hosting G8 at the luxury Gleneagles resort, and the even crueller veneer provided by Bob Geldof’s brown-nosing which effectively – and shamefully – gave Blair the safety-net he needed to get through the summit without any meaningful commitment to tackle poverty.

Ali does throw some interesting light on the ‘Washington Consensus’; although the book fails to avoid a strong anti-Americanism, it accurately reflects the adoption by stealth by New Labour of the neoconservative agenda, and the surprising absence of rebellion within the Labour Party. He forswears analysis of Al-Qaeda in favour of a critical examination of the de Menezes shooting.

Despite his support for Featherstone (and anti-Labour tactical voting, and a healthy critique of the voting system) Kennedy is ‘weak’ and the Lib Dems spineless.

Calls for a radical, independent UK foreign policy and drastic changes in (for example) civil rights policies will find sympathy among many Liberator readers; however, reflection on the extent to which the Liberal Democrats in Parliament have been thorough in articulating the civil liberties point may leave some readers in sympathy with Ali.

All in all, a rant – largely unsurprising but satisfying in a way.

Gareth Epps

Rough Crossing by Simon Schama BBC 2005 £20

Schama describes what has been referred to as the American War of

Independence’s dirty secret. During the conflict, large numbers of plantation slaves attempted to escape and made their way towards the British lines where they were offered freedom if they fought for the crown. This policy began as an act of desperation by the last colonial governor of

Virginia. The idea was taken up by the British generals Howe and Clinton and later by Clinton extended to black women and children who crossed the British lines.

Washington described Lord Dunmore, the Governor of Virginia, as “that arch traitor to the rights of humanity”, for promising to free slaves and indentured servants. While a few black people fought on the side of the rebels, the state militias were very reluctant to recruit blacks fearing to put guns in their hands, even in the case of free blacks.

Schama also describes the development of the anti-slavery movement in Britain particularly the actions of Granville Sharp and the

famous Mansfield judgement ruling that a runaway slave should not be shipped abroad to the plantations.

Although Justice Mansfield said it was not to be taken as a general ruling on slavery, it gave rise to a perception that Britain was the land of the free when educated blacks spread the word back to the Americas and King George was seen as the granter of freedom, rather than George Washington. There was considerable apprehension amongst the black loyalists about the impending settlement. Clinton and his successor Sir Guy Carleton insisted that anyone who had enlisted would have the pledge of freedom honoured but a cut off date was established from the date the peace talks began and anyone crossing the British lines after that date was to be returned. Slaves owned by white loyalists were not freed.

There was a scheme for compensating loyalist refugees but it was based on loss of property so only a few well off blacks who had been freemen received any payment and former slaves having owned nothing were expected to be grateful for their freedom. Many settled in Britain and were destitute.

The bulk of the black loyalists were evacuated to Nova Scotia along with the Empire Loyalists but the former ended up with plots of poor land, being cheated out of the better plots, and their presence was resented by local slave owners. There were attempts to establish self-governing colony from Ex-slaves from both Britain and Nova Scotia settled in Sierra Leone although Sharpe supported it for altruistic reasons it was partially motivated by concern about a growing destitute black population in London.

The colony was controlled by a company. A second attempt was made to form a self governing colony and black ex-slaves were encouraged to emigrate.

Schama has brought to a wider public an area of history that has been almost air brushed owing to the embarrassment it has caused to Americans including some African Americans. Figures such as Sergeant Thomas Peters will hopefully receive their place in the black history hall of fame.

Andrew Hudson

Monday

To Hampton Court. Although I had not been asked to take part in the summit in so many words, I felt sure that the leaders of the European Union would be grateful if I were on hand to offer them the fruits of my considerable experience of international affairs. And what a good thing I came! I arrived this morning to find the place in uproar. It transpired that, against all advice, our own prime minister had entered the palace's maze *without Peter Mandelson at his side* and was as a result quite lost. One heard cries of "Keep turning left, sir," "Look, I am sure this is the same hedge I saw half an hour ago" and "Couldn't we ask the RAF to bomb it slightly?" It happens that I know a thing or two about mazes, having a fine example of my own at the Hall. Planted with the fast-growing *Rutland leylandii* – if one ponders too long which path to take, both may disappear – it has proved a firm favourite with visitors, particularly since I hit upon the idea of charging them to leave the thing rather than enter it. Given this experience of mazes, it was the work only of a few minutes to lead a pathetically grateful Blair back to the outside world. Later I receive a intemperate telephone call from a Scotsman at 11 Downing Street (he reverses the charges) complaining that I did not leave him in there.

Tuesday

At Leicester London Road railway station I purchase a copy of *Socialist Worker* from an unkempt young lady – I am house-training a setter puppy and it uses a wonderfully absorbent newsprint. My glance happens to fall upon a reference to "Respect" on the front page. I enquire what this may be, and am told that the SWP has thrown in its lot with that fellow Galloway, who was so fond of the old Soviet Union, and the more thoroughgoing sorts of Muslim. "Take my word for it, my dear," I reply, "no good will come of this. It never does to weaken your party by joining people with whom you have nothing in common philosophically. You are too young to remember it, but the Liberal Party once got itself involved in something called 'The Alliance Party' – and look what happened to us." I pass on my way, shaking my head dolefully.

Wednesday

I hear that one of Pakistan's leading leg-spinners is in the jug for roughing up the pitch in the second test. One should not rush to judgment: perhaps he was practising his foxtrot in the hope of emulating Mr Darren Gough on the electric television? Besides, people can be so suspicious. Here on the Bonkers Hall estate I have long practised the rotation of crops: clover one year, wheat the next, then turnips, then a cricket pitch and then back to clover. So it was that during the tea interval of my XI's last match of the season I gave orders for the pitch to be ploughed up. There were one or two raised eyebrows when we went on to bowl the other side out cheaply, but I am sure all my readers will understand that my actions were motivated purely by a concern for the principles of sound agricultural management.

Thursday

I spend the early evening writing letters of congratulation to the Greenpeace activists who scaled Mrs Presscott's hairdo in order to protest against... well, something or other – you know what these fellows are like. I then hurry to the *Bonkers' Arms* to enjoy the arrival

Lord Bonkers' Diary

of 24-hour drinking in the village. My favourite hostelry has long enjoyed the services of a fearsome landlady, with the result that there is rarely trouble of any sort, even though she does insist upon keeping the dreadful gassy Dahrendorf lager in addition to the celebrated Smithson & Greaves Northern Bitter. Come eleven o'clock, the landlady draws the curtains, locks the door and continues to serve us. A few days ago she would have drawn the curtains, locked the door and continued to serve us. How times change!

Friday

As the scientists amongst us will know, these days "peer review" is all the rage; it works along these lines. If a chap believes he has come up with something juicy in the scientific line, he writes it down and posts it off to a member of the House of Lords. I have a skim through it and write something such as "Splendid," "Terribly Clever" or "Sounds a bit far-fetched to me" on the bottom, before sending it on to the editor of one of our leading journals. Occasionally, if it has lots of those Greek letters and equations in it, I will recommend inviting the Department of Hard Sums at the University of Rutland at Belvoir to have a look at it too. Some may ask why the landed aristocracy should play so central a part in British science, but I would argue that there is virtue in the solidity and consistency we provide.

Saturday

High excitement at the Bonkers' Home for Well-Behaved Orphans as Charles Kennedy comes to read the little mites a bedtime story. "It's one Vincent Cable wrote for me," he confides as they gather round, smelling strongly of toothpaste. It turns out to involve a little girl called Goldilocks who breaks into a house belonging to three bears and helps herself to their porridge. (I wonder whether this is the sort of thing one should be relaying to young ears, but decide to hold my peace.) The first bowl was too hot, the second too cold and the third just right. You might expect the aforementioned Goldilocks to tuck into this, but then two medium-sized bears come along and start discussing the optimum level of personal taxation in a market economy. I would tell you how it all turns out, but unfortunately I fell asleep at this point.

Sunday

To St Asquith's for Divine Service. The Revd Hughes preaches on the parable of The Man Who Refused to Carry an Identity Card – a new one on me, I must admit. It is all about a brave chap who refused to have one of those beastly cards and went to prison as a result. Everyone said what a splendid fellow he was, and when he came out they agreed that he had much more go than that dreadful Scotsman and was not a wet blanket like the member for Winchester. As a result he became leader of his party and everyone loved him. I wish I had paid more attention in Divinity.

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