

liberator



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COMMENTARY

FIRST SHOTS OF SPRING?

Nick Clegg is to be congratulated on his criticism of the Israeli assault on the Gaza Strip. While leaders of the other parties were indulging in the usual hand-wringing platitudes in an effort to appear ‘even-handed’, Clegg spelt out a clear moral stand.

In an article in the Guardian (7 January), he argued that “Israel’s approach is self-defeating: the overwhelming use of force, the unacceptable loss of civilian lives, is radicalising moderate opinion among Palestinians and throughout the Arab world. Anger in the West Bank will make it virtually impossible for Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian Authority president, to continue to talk to Israeli ministers.”

Clegg also called for a halt to British and EU arms exports to Israel. His no-nonsense approach was echoed by both Ming Campbell and Ed Davey in parliamentary debates. None of them seemed the least bit deterred by any threats from the pro-Israel lobby.

A few days later, in an interview in the Financial Times (20 January), Clegg had the courage to say what few other leading politicians will admit, when he argued that Britain must prepare to ditch the pound and join the euro, to salvage the public finances and prevent the “permanent decline” of the City.

In the same interview, Clegg attacked leading figures in the City and the “shameful elevation of greed and corporate overreach”, with chief executives hypnotised by the “vain belief that size matters”. Clegg added, “It makes you livid, it beggars belief that the one industry that is supposed to count your money in and out cannot say how much money it has lost.”

Until now, Clegg has tended to make bland, media-massaged statements full of clichés about ‘struggling families’. The advice of the conservative PR men in the bunker clearly predominated and there seemed to be an overriding fear of causing offence to the Daily Mail.

Clegg is rumoured to have spent his Christmas holiday agonising over the concocting of a new set of ‘core messages’. Our advice is not to bother. He has more impact when he trusts his liberal instincts. His recent statements on Gaza, the euro and the City are morally right, clear and distinctive. The party needs more statements like this and less of the PR twaddle.

BLUES UNDER THE BED

How much longer will the Liberal Democrats continue to tolerate acts of subversion within their party?

There have been intense efforts in recent years to convert the Liberal Democrats from a social liberal party into a classical liberal or even libertarian party. The latest example is Mark Littlewood’s fringe group, Liberal Vision. But the plotting began at the beginning of the

decade when some new converts from the Tories joined Mark Oaten and others to move the party to the right.

The first manifestation of this trend was the launch by Oaten in 2001 of the Peel Group, whose stated aim was to attract defectors from the Tories by making the Liberal Democrats more like the Tories.

Defectors from other parties are always welcome provided they are attracted by the values and policies of the Liberal Democrats. What is not acceptable is to do what Littlewood and his allies have done: defect from the Tories, find the Liberal Democrats uncongenial and so set about trying to turn the party into something else.

At the root of this problem is the fact that classical liberals in Britain do not have a party of their own. In the late nineteenth century, liberalism underwent a schism because of fundamentally different ideas of what constitutes ‘freedom’. Classical liberals believe only in negative freedoms and the primacy of property rights. Social liberals believe also in positive freedoms, that individuals cannot be free without positive rights such as education and health-care. These two philosophies cannot co-exist in one party because the differences – in particular over whether social justice is a legitimate political goal – have such profound implications for policy.

The *Orange Book* travestied political history by claiming the party had somehow been ‘stolen’ from classical liberals and that they wanted it back. This was a bogus narrative and the authors knew it.

The Liberal Democrats belong firmly to the social liberal camp. This is unambiguous in the preamble to the party’s constitution, which includes the aim, “no-one shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity”.

The derisory 6% vote for Liberal Vision’s Chandila Fernando in the party’s recent presidential election suggests that classical liberalism has little appeal. No wonder Liberal Vision seeks to abolish party membership and all internal democracy. But while these right wingers are unlikely to succeed in their objectives, they are capable of causing a great deal of instability in the party.

So here’s a challenge to the people in and around Liberal Vision. Have the honesty and the guts to propose a constitutional amendment to the party conference, which calls for the deletion from the preamble of the words “and in which no-one shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity”. That’s what this argument is basically about, so let’s just cut to the chase.

Then when the debating and voting are done, accept your defeat and clear off.

RADICAL BULLETIN

DECKCHAIRS, TITANIC

The Liberal Democrat shadow cabinet reshuffle, a secret to which only a planeload of the general public and the readership of the *Sunday Mirror* were previously privy (RB, Liberator 330) was sufficiently limited to make people wonder what the fuss was about.

Its main motivation appears to have been to find Simon Hughes something to do on ceasing to be party president, and the main side effect of the musical chairs involved has been to shunt Jenny Willott off to the non-job of Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

If Nick Clegg has any specific role in mind for her there, this was not revealed among the reshuffle announcements. Buried in these though was the news that John Sharkey, Clegg's old mate from the Hansard Society, would be deputy chair of the general election campaign.

Sharkey comes from the advertising industry, and his undisputed skills there should surely be deployed in finding ways in which to communicate the party's political messages, not in deciding on the messages themselves.

There is some unease in senior ranks of the party among those who think that Sharkey is responsible for dissuading Clegg from saying much that is either interesting or memorable for fear of offending some section or other of the electorate, with the result that the party also fails to inspire any of them.

The reshuffle announcements also included the formation of something called the 'economic recovery group'. This comprises 15 parliamentarians, all in roles that they were carrying out anyway, and its purpose remains obscure.

Whatever the aim is, the group has hardly drawn on fresh thinking. It omits (with three exceptions) the talent available in the Lords, and ignores entirely both Lib Dems in local government, who are already delivering practical action to support their local economies, and party members who have relevant professional expertise. Maybe it was just done to grab a headline.

EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

The Bones Commission's recommendations may have been diluted somewhat by a combination of the English party executive putting its foot down and Cowley Street inertia, but the proposal to create technology, capability and finance boards has gone ahead.

These were to be chaired respectively by the former MP Richard Allan, party donor Marcus Evans and party treasurer Tim Clement-Jones.

Protests that the posts should be advertised were greeted with derision and claims that "we need to get on with it".

This was too much even for the normally craven Federal Executive, when confronted with the idea that no board would have a female chair and that an unexplained process had been used to pick the three chairs.

Objections from the FE led to Hornsey MP Lynne Featherstone replacing Allan, but left wide open the question of who will be on these boards. Nothing prevents the three chairs from simply filling the board places with their mates.

Featherstone has at least set out how she intends to do the job and operate her board in an inclusive manner. The other two boards will respectively control the 'leadership academy' for front-rank candidates and the party's money. But who will be on them, and why?

TRUMP CARDS

The extraordinary disputes within the Liberal Democrats in Aberdeenshire have not been stilled by the Scottish Government's decision to allow developer Donald Trump to build his golf resort.

In November, Debra Storr, a party member of 25 years' standing, was expelled from the council group for the crime of, er, proposing a motion agreed by a group meeting. She submitted an appeal to the Scottish party, which was pending as *Liberator* went to press, but has said that whatever its outcome she will not rejoin the group while leader Anne Robertson remains in office.

Aberdeenshire is a Lib Dem and Tory joint administration. It has been in turmoil since the casting vote of infrastructure services committee chair, Lib Dem councillor Martin Ford, saw Trump's project denied planning permission in November 2007. The council then thrashed around for ways to overturn this, and the government later intervened to grant permission.

Ford insisted that he merely applied establish council planning policies, but was for his pains attacked by other Lib Dems including Robertson, who support the project.

He was later removed from his committee chairmanship in a vote in which most Lib Dem councillors abstained when their colleague was under attack from other parties (*Liberator* 326 and 328).

Another Lib Dem councillor, Paul Johnston, last summer publicly questioned the planning gain secured by the council from Trump and found himself accused by Robertson and others of a serious breach of the councillors' code of conduct.

He referred himself to the Standards Commission (the equivalent of the Standards Board for England), which subsequently cleared him.

At an October council meeting, opposition parties prepared to attack Johnston, and Storr moved a motion

that noted that no action was needed as the commission was at that point still investigating the matter.

Storr was expelled from the Lib Dem group for breaking standing orders, even though the group had a few days previously agreed a similar position to the one she tabled. She argues that her line was reasonable in the circumstances and in line with party principles, and has now asked the Scottish party executive to investigate Aberdeenshire.

Matters did not improve at the January council meeting, at which Ford proposed a motion to append a note to the minutes of the 2 October meeting to record that Johnston had been exonerated.

Robertson proposed no action, on the grounds that this would be too difficult to do, despite officers telling councillors when asked that it was possible to make such amendments on the council website, in libraries and other locations where minutes were regularly sent out.

Robertson's amendment was taken before Ford's motion. Most Lib Dems and Tories voted with her and the opposition SNP and independents abstained.

New Scottish party leader Tavish Scott is understood to be exasperated with the whole thing, but it may need someone from outside Aberdeenshire to get a grip on it.

SLIGHTLY FOXED

Any hopes that Nick Clegg might have been prompted by the economic crisis to end his dalliance with the party's hard right were dashed in December when it was announced that Chris Fox had been appointed to the post of director of policy and communications.

The party's senior communications post had been vacant since the departure of Jonny Oates last September. Indeed, Fox's appointment was described as the culmination of a "six month search" (Oates resigned in June), a delay that is somewhat odd given that the party's membership is not exactly short of people working in public relations.

Fox's professional skills are not in any doubt. His ideological sympathies are more questionable.

Fox was chair of the advisory board of Liberal Future, the right-wing ginger group founded in 2001 by Mark Oaten but disbanded in 2005 after its leading members fell out with Oaten (RB, *Liberator* 306 and 309). Most of Liberal Future's luminaries appear to have wound up in Mark Littlewood's latest venture, Liberal Vision (RB, *Liberator* 329).

An indication of just how right wing Liberal Future was is this quote from the organisation's website, which implied a desire to return to the nineteenth century Combination Laws:

"Liberalism is not collectivism. Collectivism is a group of people acting towards a common goal. Interest groups are a form of collectivism, whether they be Trade Unions, the CBI and even environmental groups."

Fox was also a member of the advisory board of another now-defunct right-wing wheeze, the Liberal Democrat Business Forum (RB, *Liberator* 296 and 299). This body was set up to harvest donations from wealthy business figures in exchange for influence over policy, but was eventually disbanded after it lost money (RB, *Liberator* 322).

Fox has also been long-time chair of Liberal Democrats in Public Relations and Public Affairs, ostensibly an organisation intended to mobilise party members who work

in PR, but exposed some time ago as a right-wing front (RB, *Liberator* 300).

Many Lib Dems will want to know whether Fox is prepared to abandon such dubious activities now that he holds such a sensitive and influential post on the party's staff.

And even assuming Fox maintains the necessary self-discipline, the symbolism of this appointment still suggests poor judgement by Clegg and chief executive Chris Rennard.

ANYTHING ON THE TELLY?

Channel S, a Bengali-language satellite television station, was fined £40,000 by regulator Ofcom in December for broadcasting advertisements last April in support of Lib Dem London mayoral candidate Brian Paddick and Jalal Rajonuddin, the party's candidate for the London Assembly City and East London seat.

Jalal was a Labour councillor during and after the period of Lib Dem control in Tower Hamlets from 1986-94 and his sudden appearance in the Lib Dems in 2004 surprised some party members who remembered his earlier career.

Ofcom found that Channel S had breached the TV advertising code by transmitting these advertisements on 44 occasions. As it acidly noted, this was "sufficiently serious to attract a sanction, including a financial penalty" for breaching regulations on party political advertising on television.

Fines were levied against Channel S World, Channel S Plus and Channel S Global, and they were also required to broadcast a statement of Ofcom's findings.

Intriguingly, its report said Channel S "alleged that a representative of the Liberal Democratic Party had approached them directly and this representative had said that the advertisement had been approved".

It added: "Ofcom has no evidence whether this is the case. The licensees also stated that it was broadcast on other channels. The licensees said that, as a result, although compliance procedures had been in place they were undermined by what the Liberal Democratic Party representative had told them."

An Ofcom probe though found "no evidence that this material was transmitted on other licensed services".

Part of Channel S's defence was that it claimed to have received no payment from the Liberal Democrats, and considered the transmissions a community service. The channels ceased transmission of the advertisement when they became aware of Ofcom's concerns.

So who paid for the advertisement? Indeed, what 'Liberal Democratic representative' asked Channel S to transmit it and by whom did they suggest it had been 'approved'?

The rules that forbid paid political advertisements on television are of considerable benefit to the Liberal Democrats, since they create a level playing field in a medium that would otherwise be dominated by better-funded parties, as happens in America.

Given this, and their presumed knowledge of the regulations, would anyone from Cowley Street have sanctioned such an advertisement, let alone financed it?

It seems unlikely that the Paddick campaign would have been involved – not least as he was running on a platform of upholding the law given his former role in the police.

Even if he had been prepared to commit such a breach, why create an advertisement that referred only to such a hopeless seat as City and East London where, apart from Tower Hamlets, the Lib Dems barely exist?

It was beyond Ofcom's remit to track down the culprit, but the party should do so, and act accordingly if they prove to hold any office or position, or to have been incited by anyone who does.

DON'T SAY THAT WORD

One MEP smilingly told *Liberator* that the Lib Dem campaign at next summer's European Parliament elections "will at least mention Europe", something that ought to be about as surprising as a local government campaign mentioning the council concerned.

The reason for his pleasure was that this represents a step forward from the political cowardice that was the hallmark on the 2004 campaign, when the party was so scared of offending eurosceptics that it fought on pretty well every issue except Europe, and was duly rewarded with fourth place behind UKIP.

UKIP might be mad and bad but at least it campaigned for what it believed in, unlike the Lib Dems who treated their pro-European stance as something shameful to be hidden if possible.

It is true that opinion polls show a majority of voters hostile to the European Union to varying extents, but they also show about one-third are pro-European, and no other party seeks to reach them.

Will Cowley Street's campaigns department lift its eyes out of the local drains and pavements long enough to run a campaign that exploits the party's distinct position on Europe rather than treats it as an embarrassment?

European campaign vice-chair Willie Rennie made some welcome comments when he announced in January that he would focus the campaign on "a real and significant threat to the prosperity and safety of the UK from international isolation as presented by the Conservatives".

He added, in a piece on *Liberal Democrat Voice* (8 January): "I don't want to spend the whole of next May rebutting Tory attacks on the European Union. We need to take the campaign to the isolationists. And the isolationists have got a lot to answer for whether it's international crime, tackling climate change or dealing with the economic crisis. We need to spell out in bold terms that isolation could result in more criminals on the streets, further damage to the planet and more job losses."

Soon after came Nick Clegg's *Financial Times* interview (20 January) in which he reopened the possibility of the UK joining the euro, only four months after he and Chris Huhne tried to prevent the party even mentioning this subject. How times change.

RIGHT HAND MAN

We tried and so did others. RB (*Liberator* 330) warned Lembit Öpik that, after his humiliating defeat in the contest for party president, a period of hard and low-profile graft was needed to rebuild his political credibility.

Instead he has chosen to become a political columnist for tit-and-bum rag the *Daily Sport*.

Its readers will presumably be able to benefit from Öpik's political insights if they can free up their right hands long enough to hold the relevant page open.

Curiously, Öpik is not the first Lib Dem luminary to contribute to this organ. When launched as the *Sunday Sport* in 1986, it had some faint pretensions to being a serious publication. A page in the first issue carried 'KGB spies work the honeygold love trap', an advertisement for the *Sex Maniacs' Diary*, and an erudite article on political topics from David Steel.

A GENERAL ELECTION WITHIN 15 MONTHS?

It seems smaller local parties are finding it hard to cope with a well-intentioned change to the Lib Dem candidate selection rules, under which selection committees must include a suitable balance of non-executive members, and be representative of ethnic, gender and geographical diversity.

Fine for seats with large memberships to draw on, but a bit awkward if you are Ilford North, a small local party from which *Liberator* has received complaints that it has been kept waiting months to select because the party will not approve its selection committee.

Members were alarmed to hear from returning officer Darren Briddock that another constituency has been stalled in its candidate selection for 18 months because it cannot find a female member willing to serve.

They were also alarmed to discover that, while the approved list is quite extensive, many people on it wish to fight only their local seat, or don't want to fight anywhere and treat approved PPC status as an end in itself and something to burnish their CV.

Were they asked during the approval process: "Do you actually want to fight a seat or are you just doing this to pass the time?"

HISTORY REWRITTEN

Readers of the *New Statesman* may have been surprised to see a piece by Peter Hain in which he described how George Orwell's *Homage To Catalonia* contributed to his becoming politically aware.

Referring to his family's activism in South Africa, Hain noted "my belief in socialism really crystallised several years later – around 1968-69".

That would be about the same that he joined the Young Liberals, of which he became chairman in 1971 and president in 1975, before joining Labour in 1977.

TOP TWADDLE

A Liberal Democrat joint administration has received an award but it is not one it may wish to brag about.

In the *Financial Times* (5 January), columnist Lucy Kellaway handed out awards to "the world's top purveyors of business twaddle for outstanding achievement during the past 12 months."

The new category of 'Treating Your Employees Like Animals' was awarded to Brent Council for treating its people like pets. It told staff to turn off computers at night, arguing that it "can save dramatic amounts of energy and may earn you a chocolate treat".

PEACE FROM GAZA'S WRECK?

Israel's real friends must admit that the Middle East conflict cannot have a military solution, says Jonathan Fryer

As Israeli forces withdrew from Gaza, a traumatised local population mourned its dead. More than 1,200 Palestinians were killed and many more disabled, an unconscionable number of them children. Countless livelihoods were destroyed. The psychological effects among both young and old will take years to gauge.

The physical destruction produced by the Israeli onslaught bears graphic testimony to the disproportionality of the operation. Of course Israel has a right to defend itself, and Hamas was both wicked and foolish to sanction rocket barrages against indiscriminate civilian targets in Israel. But the mercilessness of the invasion has guaranteed not only a new generation of Palestinian hatred, but outrage across much of the world.

The Israeli Defence Force is claiming victory, but on what grounds? Hamas has not been vanquished, even if some senior figures have been killed. If anything, its status has been enhanced, rather as Hezbollah gained credibility in Lebanon for being seen to stand up to the Israelis during the 2006 invasion of Lebanon. The shaky Middle East peace process has been set back disastrously and Turkish-led efforts at reconciliation between Israel and Syria have been undermined.

The United Nations estimates that the reconstruction of Gaza will cost billions of dollars. But where will all that money come from? King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia has pledged \$1bn, and some emergency funding might be found in various UN budgets to tackle needs such as food, medicine and temporary shelter. The European Union will doubtless be approached for assistance, just as in the past it has helped finance many infrastructure projects on the West Bank (sometimes later to see them blown up by Israeli tanks and aircraft).

A strong case exists to seek war reparations from Israel, which may also find itself being charged with war crimes. The United Nations is incandescent about attacks on UN schools, in particular, and even the normally reticent Red Cross has spoken out against the use of warfare inappropriate in highly populated areas.

The timing of the Israeli operation was doubly cynical. Firstly, it was clearly aimed at influencing the outcome of the Israeli general election, with both Kadima and Labour wishing to portray themselves as being as hawkish as Likud. Secondly, there was an obvious strategy to pull forces out before Barack Obama's inauguration in Washington, thereby neutralising the possibility of uncharacteristic condemnation by the incoming US administration. President Obama is thus presented with a dilemma about what exactly he should do. I am tempted to suggest that he should divert some of the funds usually

channelled as aid to Israel to Gaza instead, but I can't honestly see that happening.

So where does that leave Britain and the EU? As so often in foreign affairs, the EU has shown itself lamentably disunited. Unfortunate serendipity meant that the six-month rotating EU presidency is currently in the hands of the Czechs, who virtually gave the Israeli assault their benediction. But few EU leaders came out of the past few weeks smelling of roses. As for Gordon Brown, as Nick Clegg so aptly said, he sat on his hands and talked like an accountant.

In contrast, Clegg was forthright in his criticism of the brutality of the Israeli action, while also rightly blaming Hamas for its role in the humanitarian catastrophe. Once again, as with Iraq, the Liberal Democrats are the only mainstream political party in Britain to have seized the moral high ground.

Of course, in this instance there will be some fierce opposition to the leadership's position from those Liberal Democrat Friends of Israel who believe that the operation was regrettable but necessary. This should not deter Clegg from holding his line and from moving on to broaden his focus from Gaza's tragedy to the situation in the West Bank. The occupation of Palestinian territories for more than 40 years, the expansion of illegal settlements, the construction of the Security Wall, the demolition of houses, the uprooting of Palestinian olive trees and the daily impoverishment and humiliation of the Palestinian population cannot legitimately be tolerated, let alone condoned.

True Friends of Israel, I believe, must acknowledge that there can never be a military solution to the Israel/Palestine conflict. Violence only begets violence and hatred. The only way forward, as the rebuilding of Gaza takes place, is for both Israel and Hamas to swallow their pride and to talk.

We are well past the eleventh hour for a peaceful transition to a two-state solution, in which a viable Palestine can live side-by-side with a secure Israel. And that outcome will never happen unless there is good faith and compromise on both sides, an end to the occupation, Israeli withdrawal to 1967 boundaries, and a permanent cessation of Palestinian rocket attacks and suicide bombs.

Jonathan Fryer is a prospective European Parliament candidate for London and chair of Liberal International British Group

EYEWITNESS IN GAZA

Chris Davies was one of the very few observers to gain access to the Gaza Strip during the recent Israeli assault. This is his eyewitness account, written immediately after his visit on Sunday 11 January

We travelled up from Cairo through the Sinai in a coach with an Egyptian police escort. Assembling our team of eight MEPs took a long time at the airport and, what with confusion about where to stay, we didn't put our heads down till past 3am. More confusion in the morning delayed us getting to the Rafah crossing till just before noon. It didn't seem to matter; UNRWA had already called to tell us that the Israeli Defence Ministry was not prepared to let their vehicles meet us. A series of telephone calls had produced conflicting stories but the result was the same: "No way are you getting in!" This fact-finding trip was going to prove nothing more than a gesture.

I've been to the Rafah crossing before but last time approached it from within Gaza. It's a modern border control complex, a smaller version of the Channel Tunnel vehicle entrance, all paid for with EU money. There are passport control offices, a cafeteria, even a duty free shop – but it's a fiction, they are all empty and covered in dust. The Israeli siege of Gaza has kept the flow of goods and people to Egypt to a minimum.

Escorted by the mayor of the Egyptian town of Rafah, we climbed onto a rooftop platform to look across at Gaza City. All was quiet; "bombing is at night," we were told. Returning to the ground, we talked to Egyptian ambulance drivers, waiting to take the injured coming out of Gaza. They were all lined up with nothing to do, it seemed. We chatted to various journalists, all of them frustrated at not being able to cross into the Gaza Strip.

Then a flurry. "Get into the minibus, GET IN, GET IN!" For unknown reasons, a window of opportunity had opened. It was 2.20pm and the 'ceasefire' lasted till 4pm. We passed through the gate to be met by UNRWA's director of operations John Ging and three bulletproof (really heavy doors) UN Range Rovers. We transferred and drove into the Palestinian town of Rafah (yes, there are two Rafahs), passing a few bombed buildings on the way, probably ones that had cloaked entrance/exit routes to tunnels across the border. In so doing, we may have become the first 'observers' to cross since the assault began 16 days ago.

It's a funny thing about a bombed building but I always find that, even though they may have been destroyed by a devastating explosion just yesterday, they look as though the incident took place a year or two ago. And maybe, their

appearance suggests, it wasn't a bombing at all but a demolition job by a firm that went into liquidation just after the work commenced. So long as it is not your own building, it somehow diminishes the impact.

The journey was short, just a mile or so. There were lots of people on the streets taking advantage of the ceasefire – "The streets are deserted except during these periods," explained our UN security guide – but very few vehicles except the occasional cart pulled by a donkey. We turned into the compound of a UN distribution centre. There was time only to look at the devastation of a former police station opposite, and exchange a few words both about the damage to the UN buildings and the distribution operation with John Ging. I asked him about the Israeli defence for civilian casualties being that Hamas uses human shields to cover its operations. His response was dismissive and, when you looked around at the context of a war in the midst of a living community, you could see why.

Suddenly there was a huge bang; the ground shook and so did my stomach. An Israeli blast during the ceasefire. It may have been 600 or 700 metres away but it felt bloody close! What must this be like for people who really are close? Allegedly, we learnt later, it was a response to Hamas rocket attacks.

Back in the vehicles, we drive a short distance through back streets to a primary school being used as a shelter. "The UN has 71 'shelters' across Gaza and we have 30,000 people in them whose homes have been bombed or are at risk," said John. "Some of them, just like this, have been hit nonetheless as you will know." It seemed to me that most of the residents were children, and they were hugely enthusiastic to see us. (At least our presence changed the routine a bit).

Another Israeli blast, and again the ground and my stomach shook. Smoke rose between buildings a few hundred metres away. The kids weren't fazed; "Too far off" I imagine they were thinking.

Pushing through their numbers, shaking lots of hands and smiling hard, (some of our team shed tears as soon as they had privacy), we met in a side room to hear about the distribution arrangements ("We need more than just food and medicines; it's all the essentials of family life, like bedding for displaced families, and nappies").

It was 3.15pm. "We need you to go NOW," said John Ging. "I am so pleased you have been here to see this for yourselves. Just take back the message that the people here

need protection. The violence has got to stop. The UN has got to back up its words about a ceasefire with some real action and pressure.”

We walked out of the building into the throng of excited kids, mostly 7-11 year olds. I was struck by how many made ‘V for Victory’ gestures with their fingers. Do the Israelis really believe that bombing urban communities and terrorising their populations is going to bring them security? What about the next generation that even now starts to merge with the existing one?

The streets were still busy but very few people had anything in their hands. Not much to buy, I suppose. I asked the UN driver about casualties at the hospitals. “We’re approaching 900 dead and more than 3,000 injured,” he said. “From what we hear, it is mainly ordinary people. Amongst the numbers, there do not seem to be that many young fit men of fighting age that would fit the ‘combatant’ category.”

We get back to the crossing and leave the UN vehicles. Back in the Rafah compound, it’s interview time, and we watch also as a succession of Israeli F16s cross the sky dropping white flares of some kind. Donkeys pulling carts in the streets and twenty-first century killing machines in the air.

Then the explosions start. One of them close enough so that journalists and we start to move quickly away. Twenty or thirty minutes later, the crossing complex starts to get really busy. Ambulance after ambulance arrives from Gaza, and their occupants are transferred to Egyptian ambulances.

Our coach sets off in the direction of Cairo just before sunset. Ambulances race past on the road south.

REFLECTIONS TWO DAYS LATER

Back in the peace and safety of my Strasbourg office, questions come to my mind.

How did we get into Gaza, given that the Israelis had made it clear that they would not let us in? Who knows, but I imagine it was all down to the UNRWA people. In effect, we were smuggled into Rafah to take the briefest of looks at what was going on, with the risk being taken that the Israelis would not stop a UN convoy. We also had great assistance from the Egyptian authorities, again for unknown reasons but, given the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt, it must say something.



Why did I not emphasise how desperate journalists are to get in too? Israeli aggression would have long since been forced to a halt if journalists were reporting what they saw each day. I did not mention in my account that every journalist standing around at the Rafah crossing compound tried to get into our UN minibus when it was realised it might cross the line. They had to be shouted at and pushed out before we could proceed.

Why did I not make the point that the Palestinians in Gaza are trapped? Israeli civilians facing Hamas rockets can flee if need be, but the Palestinians are like fish in a tank with no means of escape. There is a wall around the Gaza Strip and Palestinians will be killed by the Israeli Defence Force should they try to cross it. (And don’t imagine they can get out by boat either).

And with the benefit of hindsight, why did we not think through how we might better have communicated our thoughts? All eight MEPs have given accounts to their national media, but we did not have the equipment with us to give them pictures. And instead of travelling back to Europe, why did we not go to Israel, hold a press conference in Jerusalem, and challenge the Israeli version of events? It would have had so much more impact.

E-mails have poured in thanking me for the account and congratulating my ‘bravery’. But I am not in the least brave. The brave ones are the UN people. I look at the pictures on the news of Gaza being blasted and blasted, and I think of the fear I felt when explosions took place hundreds of metres away. The Palestinians in Gaza are no more brave than me, but for them there is no escape.

Chris Davies is Liberal Democrat MEP for the North West of England

HOW LONG UNTIL MORE BABY PS?

The blunders around Haringey Council's handling of the 'Baby P' case are not new, and there will be similar cases while the lessons go unlearned, says Lynne Featherstone

I remember sitting in Haringey Council chamber some years ago. Victoria Climbié's parents were in the gallery and Labour members were beating their breasts and promising that never again would a child die the way Victoria had. In her case, there were somewhere between 12 and 17 occasions when – if any of the individuals from any of the authorities who saw Victoria had done what they should have done – she might have been saved.

Labour promised fulsomely that lessons would be learned. And that's about as far as they went. They went into denial mode, saying: "Don't blame us, no-one senior should carry the can."

Council leader George Meehan (yes, the same one as this time) did not resign, and nor did Gina Adamou (then Labour executive member for social services) and nor did Mary Richardson – the then director of social services. Only a social worker right at the bottom of the food chain was disciplined. Everyone else more senior got off scot free.

That was despite the myriad failures of organisation and management that the Laming inquiry unearthed. And that's why, this time, after the death of Baby P despite nearly 80 visits, I was so determined to see those responsible at senior levels take that responsibility – rather than dodge it and lay all the blame on the most junior staff they could find.

Indeed, as Laming himself said in his Climbié report: "Those in senior positions in such organisations carry, on behalf of society, responsibility for the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of local services. If ever such a tragedy happens again, I hope those in leadership posts will examine their responsibilities more widely. These proposals are designed to ensure that those who manage services for children and families are held personally accountable for the effectiveness of these services, and for the arrangements their organisations put in place to ensure that all children are offered the best protection possible."

RESPONSIBILITY DUCKED

Despite Laming's pleas, once again, Haringey Council and Haringey Labour tried to duck personally responsibility – until, to his credit, children, schools and families secretary Ed Balls intervened to ensure that responsibility this time, as enshrined in the Children's Act 2004, really meant something. His actions over ordering an urgent review and then acting on its conclusions were welcome.

Where I depart from him, however, is in my continued belief that we need a public inquiry, in order to get at some of the wider issues.

Goodness me, Haringey had whistleblowers – with specific, credible concerns – coming out of its ears. But until the media tsunami and central government intervention, neither the council scrutiny process nor the local media got any sort of grip on the problems – nor was the council responsive to those, like me, who raised concerns direct with senior staff and the councillors in charge.

It was only when it became a national issue – with national media and national politicians – that local accountability and scrutiny followed.

So how do we reconcile that with a belief in the efficiency and democracy of having services delivered locally, for local people and accountable to local people? The way council scrutiny processes work, the way media scrutiny of councils works, the information and resources available to opposition councillors – all these are the sorts of issues we need to look in to.

There is also the broader cultural question of our managerial society's habit of inspections, tick boxes and gold stars. Ofsted has quite a lot to answer for – failing to spot the problems in Haringey when it gave it a clean bill of health. But while it was Ofsted this time, last time inspections failed too. A different body back then, but the same story – inspectors giving Haringey a clean bill of health before the tragic death of a child led to the revelations of how wrong they'd been.

So often it is a matter of get the paper trail right, jump through the inspectors' hoops, get a gold star, get the praise of your peers and get more central government funding. It's a culture almost designed to fail – because paper trails don't equal quality services, and because with those incentives at stake, of course we get people bending the rules and shuffling the papers to hide away failures. These largely paper-based inspections have a role, but I believe we place far too much reliance on them.

Part of the alternative is giving the voice of the professional more weight. Whistleblowers need to be listened to properly – they are not always right, but they provide a vital safety net. Yet far too many – even of those I've spoken to – are so wrapped up in legal constraints they can barely say anything. How can we hear what they have to tell us and know that real action or investigation will follow without the organisation turning on those who raise such concerns?

BANNED FROM SPEAKING OUT

The public is not served by the state banning those critical of its administration from speaking out. There were and are many injunctions stopping people telling what they know. The very nature of an injunction or a gagging order means there is almost no accountability for the creation and maintenance of this culture of dishing out legal restraints. The courts judge requests for injunctions on far too narrow grounds – in particular because injunctions are heard one by one, but overall a culture of injunctions year after year brings problems beyond just the individual case. And the whistleblower? They don't have anywhere secure and independent to turn.

There are some areas of public life where the decision to invoke particular legal powers is only a matter of last resort, has to be taken at a senior level and comes with a degree of accountability. Injunctions and gagging orders though seem too much like convenient confetti, scattered about to avoid political or administrative embarrassment. Likewise, the weaknesses of many serious case reviews – a vital tool to learn the lessons when things go wrong – is perpetuated by their secrecy.

Next, and I tread cautiously here, I believe we have to at least ask whether merging education and children's services has worked. Was it the right policy, and was it enacted in the right way?

With Laming now investigating how his own recommendations were implemented, we are not getting at the more fundamental question: were they the right recommendations in the first place?

I don't claim to know. Laming is knowledgeable and skilled – but none of us is infallible. Nor – as we know only too well – is Ofsted. To be fair, Ofsted staff are overwhelmingly from an education background – yet they are appraising non-education services. Should we be so surprised when their work goes wrong?

Understandably, most attention has been focused on the performance of Haringey's children's services. However, the NHS should have some serious questions to answer.

The shocking news that the doctor who examined Baby P two days before he died failed to recognise a broken back and broken ribs resulted in his suspension. Yet they only examined Baby P four months after it was decided that an inspection was needed and a key part of keeping Baby P safe. *Four months*. In an NHS surrounded with waiting times targets, how did that happen?

How too did we end up with a team providing specialist children's health services where two out of the four doctors have resigned since 2006, a third is off sick and the fourth has been on 'special leave' for over a year? What is going on at the heart of such an apparently troubled health team – and who is taking responsibility for investigating and sorting out? So far – no-one much. Great Ormond Street hospital has only recently started to make concerned noises – and yet it was warned about the risks to children in the health team long ago – and took no notice.

This health team was outsourced by Haringey Primary Care Trust to Great Ormond Street. But look at what 'outsourcing' meant to the trust when I went to it over complaints of bullying and general unhappiness with management – and which might be putting children at risk.

The response was simply "not us guv, we've outsourced it". And when I went back not that long ago to again raise

the issue of Baby P, the first thing said to me was, thank goodness we're screened from the worst of the fall out from Baby P as Great Ormond Street is in the front line instead of us. Only when I got angry did the Trust agree it was responsible, and that outsourcing services to others doesn't mean it can just wash its hands of it all. Too late in the day though – and how many other trusts are similarly dodging responsibility, but without the tragedy of a Baby P to make them open their eyes?

It all still leaves unanswered why one doctor was warned off raising concerns over the failure to pass on proper information by being told, "it would leave a bad paper trail". This and many other examples lead back to a malfunctioning department with poor management and failure to take responsibility – but without steps being taken so far to sort it out.

And the Government's hands aren't clean on the health side. Top slicing £400,000 from the child protection budget at their behest meant axing a key doctor post amongst other reductions. But if you write to health secretary Alan Johnson, he will simply write back and says 'child protection' is a matter for the Department of Children, Families and Schools. Round and round we go – where we stop, nobody knows.

I have been inundated with information from professionals in all the appropriate fields – and from those who used to work at Haringey or who still work there and who tell me things that really need to be told to a proper independent inquiry.

Many have had concerns or ideas for years – but had nowhere to go, no-one who would listen. To benefit fully from this wisdom, experience and evidence, we need that public inquiry.

In among what I've learnt through this process has been a huge number of practical, detailed steps to deal with problems such as the minutes of safeguarding boards not fully recording concerns and disagreements over their conclusions, and such as the relatively low maximum sentence for the offences which were used for prosecuting following Baby P's death.

My freedom of information request to Haringey asking for sight of a memo/email that allegedly instructs staff in children's services not to take children into care for budgetary reasons has been refused, as it would be too costly. So we have the situation where I have had two separate sources telling me of this communication – but no-one is willing to look through the records to see. A public inquiry could summon information and uncover much, much more.

Three hideous, dreadful adults were responsible for the death of Baby P. Hideous, dreadful people have children – and that isn't going to change. Our child protection services stand between those children and that evil. Three babies are dying a week where that protection fails. We can't banish evil and have perfection every day, but we should do what we can to bring that number down. Zero may not be obtainable, but three a week is far too high.

Lynne Featherstone is Liberal Democrat MP for Hornsey and Wood Green

HOW TO LOSE A GOOD CASE

The overwhelming referendum defeat of Greater Manchester's proposed congestion charge has raised doubts about whether it will ever be possible to win public support for environmental taxes. A better conducted campaign could have done the trick, says Bill le Breton

Was the crushing 4:1 defeat for a £3bn Transport Innovation Fund (TIF) bid across Greater Manchester in December a nail in the coffin for such programmes and referenda?

Could it dissuade politicians from committing to the type of public works and infrastructure projects needed to reverse economic decline locally and nationally today?

More than one million citizens voted during the two-week postal ballot in December. That was 53% of the electorate in the ten boroughs of the city region. They voted 812,815 (79%) 'no' and 218,860 (21%) 'yes'.

Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive (PTE) figures had suggested no more than 10% of the population would pay the peak time only charge – £2 to enter an outer ring defined by the M60, a further £1 to enter the inner city ring and £1 for each ring later in the day for vehicles leaving the city.

This means 600,000 people who would not have had to pay the charge voted 'no' to a package of transport improvements which should have benefited them greatly.

Politicians across the city region were divided over the merits and demerits of the scheme, including Liberal Democrats. This is not an article that will seek to examine the pros and cons of congestion charging in general or the scheme that was put to the people of Greater Manchester. It will look at the campaigning lessons for public service providers that were highlighted.

Perhaps it does not need stating in *Liberator*, but the first lesson in campaigning is that people vote with their hearts more often than with their heads. That is to say, it is emotional messages rather than facts that win the day.

It was easy to anticipate a well resourced and straightforward 'no' campaign. Those who drive on the orbital M60 round Manchester can see plainly the important and large businesses that are located just to the city-side of the motorway. Choosing a boundary for the charging zone that therefore took in such economic hubs as the Trafford Centre and the Trafford Park Industrial Site was asking for trouble.

The 'no' campaign, although probably funded by very large businesses, was fronted by ordinary business people from medium to small concerns. In marked contrast, the official campaign went for the high profile show business approach, which annoys the public who think that their

money is being used to pay for 'propaganda', in an effort to make decisions 'for' them. Later, a Coronation Street starring TV advertisement, which had to be pulled very publicly, reinforced the view that 'politicians' were trying to force the issue.

By treating the matter as a technical transport issue and not from the outset as something that would have to carry community support, those responsible for devising the scheme failed to ensure the disaffected sector of business was kept to a minimum and failed to inspire public support. The choice of boundaries for the zones was systematic rather than pragmatic. The 'voice' of the campaign was corporate rather than personal.

The PTE's own information campaign lacked political experience and awareness and only late in the day realised it was a 'local' election. When it did so, it was already disqualified legally from being 'persuasive'.

ALL POLITICS IS LOCAL

A sign on every door at PTE headquarters reciting Tip O'Neil's sage advice, "All politics is local" would have been a smart starter. Voters want to know, "What do we get out of it? How does it benefit our family, our health, our community, our school, our GP clinic, our hospital, the buses and trains we use, our jobs, our town, this city, my future?"

Nor was there a 'near term campaign', that concentrated on raising awareness of the full effects of continuing traffic expansion. In local elections, the time taken for messages to reach and be taken on board by an electorate is longer than for national campaigns, and 'near-term' campaigning activity needs to be even more sustained and to begin even earlier.

When it eventually turned to look outwards, the PTE chose to major on the effect of the charge on congestion – in effect the business case. It was a one-club approach – an approach that allowed opponents to set the agenda.

Predictably, therefore, the issue became 'the charge' and not what the charge was meant to resolve. In fact the only problem that the scheme argued that it could solve was the problem of delay. No effort was made to find or communicate the effects it would have on that large majority of citizens who do not benefit from cars or drive

them at peak hours but whose communities and lives are affected by traffic.

The PTE and its communications consultants did not have, let alone use, evidence of the effect of the introduction of the charge on emotive issues like the numbers of accidents near schools in the rush hours, the incidence of asthma around arterial routes and the effect of community fragmentation caused by busy roads through neighbourhoods.

There was no effort to enlist the train guards and bus drivers to communicate the benefits of extra services to their passengers. There were no efforts to find out and communicate the effects of the present and expected congestion on numbers of accidents, health and social exclusion; not to mention green concerns. That did not appear important.

One enthusiastic promoter of electric vehicles asked why there would be no discount or waiver for electric vehicles. He and others were told that the charge was designed to reduce congestion, not to improve environmental conditions!

One chief executive of a primary care trust was actively campaigning against 'the charge' because she thought it would have an adverse effect on her staff – never mind the effect that the benefits of the scheme might have on the primary health of its most important stakeholders – its citizens.

A seemingly hastily convened and anodyne 'yes' campaign further added to the mistrust felt by the electorate, who thought they saw vast quantities of public money (even when it was privately raised) being used to patronise them. Because effective campaigners feel issues personally and believe in the changes they campaign for, there is an aspect of campaigning that cannot be taught and that cannot be applied systematically to a preordained formula. They instinctively appeal to our emotions because they are communicating their own genuine emotion.

But the 'yes' campaign used the classic and wrong headed approach of holding focus groups, identifying messages and holding to a set but wrong communications strategy, come what may. It was campaigning by numbers. It was self-delusional. It was futile. It was wrong.

The use of polls and focus groups enable us to follow opinion. To jump on the back of the public. To take a free ride. To compromise. A true campaigner leads. If that lead strikes a chord and if it inspires, movement takes place and change results.

So, can support be built for public action that is characterised by opponents as requiring private cost be won, and if so, how?

Here's a checklist for success for a future campaign in support of a transport initiative such as a TIF bid, but I hope it is also a general checklist for those seeking support for public initiatives.

Transport authorities must engage in a continuing campaign to raise awareness of the existing costs of congestion; financial, social, environmental and personal; being paid by every citizen. "YOU are already paying a congestion charge."

Well before any 'test of public opinion' this near-term campaign must be intensified.

Messages and campaigns must appeal at an emotional level and be delivered locally with benefits defined on a street-by-street, community-by-community basis.

Any campaigning activity has to engender an atmosphere of local people coming together and using their own skills and resources to fight these issues and to win this campaign. The slicker and more 'professional' the look and feel of the campaign, the more alienating it will be.

Local opinion formers must be identified, and at the earliest, and must be involved in the construction of the programme as well as any campaign. This is especially so of key stakeholders, often operating at an authority-wide level.

Public service staff must be mobilised, especially those in daily contact with the public.

Other potential local activists must be identified, recruited and engaged. There is a huge role for the so-called 'backbencher' whose potential has been so excluded by recent changes in local governance.

There needs to be something to campaign against as well as for. In this case, the social, environmental and personal costs of congestion and overcrowding.

Each media outlet needs to have demonstrated to it its own business case for the programme. How would the programme safeguard and build advertising revenue and circulation?

Local and identifiable people must be featured in campaign material. The use of soap stars has to be avoided. Even if they volunteer, they are seen as hired hands. Local schools and colleges needed to be involved now in projects, providing educational material and support to ensure full understanding of the issues around congestion. A cogent business case must be identified and delivered. Use social networks including new media social networks.

Finally, the governance culture has to be addressed. In that culture, officers and senior civil servants see themselves as the holders of appropriate experience and the givers of best advice. Members play out a role too, reacting to that advice as a representative of their community – a role that is very different from their campaigning role in their community. Those roles are not appropriate especially to winning these kinds of campaigns, which can only be won using political campaigning skills. It is the politicians who have the experience and the expertise. Neither officers, nor consultants who have never had to face the electorate themselves, should be left to lead.

If the great challenge to public policy makers is to find a way to win support for improved services and infrastructure expenditure (and a Keynesian inspired national recovery plan is an urgent case in point), the lesson from Manchester is that this will only come when the demand for action comes from the people upwards, not from the politicians downwards. In times of fear and uncertainty, the role of the Liberal Democrat working both in their community and council, or parliament, is to inform, to organise, to persuade, to reassure and to inspire. The task is to build that grassroots movement committed to action.

Bill le Breton worked as a consultant with Oldham and Rochdale Councils to increase turnout in the referendum. He has worked on consultation and communications for the Merseyside local transport plan, and is a former chair of ALDC

GET A LIFE

A cynical culture of 'cool' is corroding society and replacing one form of conformity with another, warns Simon Titley

It is 9 December 2005. That London icon, the Routemaster bus, is making its final journey in normal passenger service. And as the final bus returns to the depot, a TV crew from the BBC's London regional news is on hand to record the historic event.

How did BBC London report this event? There were several news angles it could have chosen. How would tourists feel about being deprived of a popular cliché? Did disabled people welcome the disappearance of a vehicle with poor access? Were regular passengers pleased to get new buses or disappointed to lose an old friend?

BBC London instead chose an angle that told us little about the event but a lot about contemporary prejudices. That crowd of enthusiasts greeting the last bus outside the depot – well, it's not *normal*, is it? Cut to the studio, where a smug metrosexual presenter is interviewing a psychologist. His first question is to ask what mental problem someone must suffer from to find buses interesting.

The presenter gets short shrift. The psychologist explains that there is nothing wrong with bus enthusiasts or any other sort of enthusiast for that matter. In fact, studies show that people with hobbies are mentally healthier than those without. This obviously isn't the answer the presenter expects so, instead of moving on, he maintains his condescending smirk and asks more or less the same question again. The answer is still not the one in the script. By the end of the interview, you get the impression that this particular expert is not one that BBC London will be inviting back.

MIDDLE CLASS COOL

Not sympathetic? Still think enthusiasms are a bit of a laugh, do you? Try this one for size.

You are at a dinner party. You've done the usual topics: house prices, finding a school place for the children and where you're going on holiday. The conversation turns to the difficulties of commuting. Guests relate their little stories and then someone asks which train you catch each morning.

You're about to say "the 8.13" but you pause in horror. Like most other commuters, you know exactly when your habitual train departs. You have it down to a fine art: precisely when to leave the house for the station; precisely where to stand on the platform to maximise your chance of finding a seat while minimising the walk at the other end.

But you can't say "8.13". It's too exact. Everyone else will think you're anal. So you make a special effort to sound vague. "Oh, sort of, you know, about quarter past eight-ish", you say, praying that you have not committed the ultimate *faux pas* of sounding precise or knowledgeable.

Welcome to the world of British middle class 'cool'. A world where it is no longer permissible to have hobbies or intellectual pursuits. A world where enthusiasm or erudition earns contempt. A world where, if you commit any of these social sins, you will immediately be slapped down with one of these stock sneers: 'sad', 'trainspotter', 'anorak', 'anal' or 'get a life'.

The phenomenon of 'cool' has been examined thoroughly in a pioneering book, *Cool Rules: Anatomy of an Attitude* by Dick Pountain and David Robins. Cool is essentially about narcissism and ironic detachment. Its modern origins can be traced to American black culture of the 1940s, when young black men adopted a defiant posture as a means of defence. It was then picked up by rebellious white icons of the 50s such as James Dean. During the 60s, 'cool' began to be exploited by advertisers as a means of selling consumer goods and in the 70s it moved from the counter-culture into the mainstream. But while 'cool' people today affect an air of rebellion, in reality they are conforming to commercially-driven norms.

RETARDED ADOLESCENCE

'Cool' is not just a fashion but an attitude, a retarded adolescence that is having a thoroughly corrosive effect on our culture and society. Since 'cool' is about cynicism rather than doing anything positive, it follows that most enthusiasms and intellectual pursuits must be stigmatised as 'uncool'.

To illustrate this cultural change, let us return to the topic of transport. Why have railway enthusiasm in general and trainspotting in particular gone out of fashion? Until the late 70s, it was considered perfectly normal to be interested in railways. Indeed, in the post-war era, young boys were *expected* to be interested in trains and large numbers of people pursued this hobby with no risk of shame. Nowadays, this harmless pastime is commonly regarded as only one step removed from being placed on the register of sex offenders.

Liberals believe that no-one should be enslaved by conformity so any assault on diversity should be resisted. What ought to worry Liberals is not just the casual intolerance towards hobbies but also their pathologising as a form of mental disorder. Travel writer Bill Bryson, in a piece on the narrow gauge railways of North Wales in *Notes from a Small Island*, wrote: "I had recently read a newspaper article in which it was reported that a speaker at the British Psychological Society had described trainspotting as a form of autism called Asperger's syndrome."

Or consider a particularly nasty opinion piece written by columnist Cristina Odone in the Observer (10 November 2002), in the wake of a big media story about the arrest of some British plane spotters in Greece. She attacked hobbies such as plane spotting and stamp collecting as a

uniquely British phenomenon (which they are not) and concluded:

“This kind of social autism, regarded as dysfunctional in most societies, is positively encouraged in Britain. Every other nation suspects the solitary citizen as an oddball who could at any moment turn into a sniper, a pervert or an axe murderer; the British instead prize them as individuals with a strong sense of self.” Odone did not seem to realise that British culture had already moved a long way towards the intolerance she craves.

Or consider Lib Dem MP Norman Baker. On 5 January this year, he revealed that the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2000 has been used to stop 62,584 people at railway stations and that another 87,000 travellers have been questioned under ‘stop and search’ legislation. But he added: “The anti-terror laws allow officers to stop people for taking photographs and I know this has led to innocent trainspotters being stopped. This is an abuse of anti-terrorism powers and a worrying sign that we are sliding towards a police state. Trainspotting may be an activity of limited, and indeed questionable, appeal, but it is not a criminal offence and it is not a terrorist threat.”

Why did Baker feel it necessary to qualify his remarks with the word ‘questionable’? Baker is not above hobbies himself, since he has a passion for collecting rare vinyl records. The harassment of trainspotters is not about terrorism but the enforcement of conformity and, with his offhand remark, Baker risks colluding with this intolerance.

Meanwhile, we are subjected to hysterical media reports of an ‘epidemic’ of autism. It is more likely that it is the diagnosis rather than the incidence of autism that has increased, partly because there is greater understanding of autistic spectrum disorders. But another significant reason is that boys whose hobbies would once have been considered healthy and normal are now considered mentally disordered.

DEEP INTOLERANCE

Although ‘cool’ may affect a fierce individualism, it expresses a deep intolerance of anyone different and simply represents a change in our idea of what it means to be ‘normal’. Until the 1970s, normality meant being white and male, but equality for women and ethnic minorities has made ‘normality’ more female and black. Linguist Mary Bucholtz observes that the terms ‘nerd’ and ‘geek’ came into common parlance only as ‘cool’ went mainstream, and that these terms refer to a hyper-whiteness. In other words, nerds are essentially white males who unfashionably refuse to appropriate black youth culture. But black people are not the beneficiaries of this trend.

‘Cool’ may have originated as a way for black men to earn respect but it has become a means for anxious and insecure white people to accommodate to sexual and ethnic liberation. It enables white men to avoid opprobrium by adopting the insouciance of rebellious blacks and the androgynous fashions of gay men. It enables white women to turn the tables on men by undermining what they see as archetypal male behaviour – not the male violence and sexism that deserve opprobrium, but the harmless male behaviour of being interested in things, having hobbies and preferring the rational to the emotional. We kid ourselves that we live in a more tolerant age when all we have done is exchange one type of conformity for another.

Does any of this really matter? Attacking trainspotters may seem harmless enough, until you realise the

consequences. Once upon a time, small boys who collected train numbers matured into adult railway enthusiasts who ran various museums and preserved steam railways, contributing much to our local heritage and tourism, and giving pleasure to many people. It’s not just trains. All over Britain, volunteer enthusiasts can be found restoring and running old windmills, canals and factories. But not for long. They are failing to enlist a new generation of volunteers, because potential young recruits are deterred for fear of being mocked by their peers.

The effects go far beyond preserving our industrial heritage. The overriding need to look ‘cool’ is now recognised as the main reason why boys are underperforming in the state school system. Boys are under huge peer group pressure not to study or be seen as a swot. And now, we are faced with a rash of knife incidents in schools because, apparently, it’s ‘cool’ to carry a knife.

MOST DAMAGING EFFECT

But when behaviour once confined to teenagers becomes an everyday routine for adults, the most damaging effect of ‘cool’ is on democratic politics. Pountain and Robins point out that “politics, almost by definition, can never be cool. To get anywhere in politics you need to care passionately about something, whether it is a cause or merely the achievement of personal power, and you need to sacrifice present pleasures to the long and tedious process of campaigning and party organization.”

Pountain and Robins caution against politicians trying to harness cool. They applaud political desires “to restore our disintegrating sense of community (by shoring up the traditional family and eliminating drug abuse), to halt the rise of crime and to improve the performance of our education system,” but warn that “Cool stands for almost exactly the opposite values: it is intrinsically anti-family, pro-drug, anti-authority and admires criminality... What’s more, ironic detachment is a poor adhesive for any society as well as being extremely difficult to harness to any collective endeavour.”

I’ll leave the final word on the cool ‘get a life’ crowd to the inestimable Stephen Fry. On the TV comedy programme ‘QI’, Jo Brand wearily demanded of Fry whether there was any practical use for the information being discussed. Fry lost his cool (in more ways than one): “It’s extraordinary. It’s always the children who say, ‘Sir, sir, what’s the point of geometry?’ or ‘what’s the point of Latin?’ who end up having no job, being alcoholic, and they don’t notice that the ones who actually find knowledge for its own sake and pleasure in information and in history and in the world and nature around us are actually getting on and doing things with their fucking lives.”

It is Quite Interesting that Fry’s outburst was never broadcast. It is available only as an outtake on YouTube. Not cool, you see.

Simon Titley is a member of the Liberator Collective

IS AN F.E. PLACE WORTH F. ALL?

After two years on the Liberal Democrat Federal Executive, Richard Clein wonders what the party's top administration body is for, and why no-one ever tells its members anything

Perhaps Federal Executive isn't for 'someone like me'. When in 2006 I decided to stand for it, I actually didn't expect to win. Despite having a relatively high profile within the party, which I suspect is largely due to the fact that I co-compere Glee Club, it seemed a committee that was far too important for 'someone like me' to be elected to.

It is, and I suspect always has been, dominated by the 'great and the good', who are by and large based in the Greater London area, which makes the House of Commons at 5.30pm on a Monday night the ideal venue for the bi-monthly meetings. Of course, for those who do travel from further afield, it is also an opportunity to spend the day in the Palace of Westminster and be wined and dined – a huge thrill for 'someone like me'.

However, it's not something my hectic schedule allowed. My journey consisted of a 420 mile round trip arriving for the start of the meeting and having to leave before the end to catch the last train home – and paying £10 per meeting for the pleasure, a rule I tried to get abolished in an effort to improve the diversity of the committee.

Despite what many people within the party think, I am not a councillor in Liverpool. Even a recent reply to a letter from Nick Clegg was addressed 'Cllr Richard Clein' and the table plan at a fundraising dinner in Southport the same – despite the fact it is the neighbouring constituency to Sefton Central where I am the PPC! The fact is I have never, apart from my student days which are now only a blurred haze, been a member of a 'political' committee – which may explain why I felt quite intimidated and was therefore relatively quiet on FE.

Another reason why I was quieter than people may have expected is that I didn't want to get the backs up of the people who effectively decided in which seats money should be allocated for campaigning.

As a PPC in a new seat, I naively thought that it might help my case. For the record, the local party has to date not received a penny from the party despite on paper, at least, it looking like a Tory/Lib Dem marginal. I was also aware how previous members of the committee had been treated for 'speaking out'.

POWERLESS

But perhaps the real reason is that I realised from quite early on that it was a huge waste of time as the members of FE are powerless. In fact, it could take months for the committee to reach a decision on a simple suggestion that the party should introduce a new presidential award, which took around five months before becoming reality.

However it is the farcical events of the 15 October 2007, when Ming Campbell resigned as party leader, which

perhaps best sum up how highly regarded the FE is seen by the party hierarchy – that same hierarchy which has finally come out of the shadows following the Bones Commission. The COG – or Chief Officers Group – has been in existence for some time but only in recent months has it come to the fore. I remember at one of my first meetings having to ask an FE member of long standing what the initials stood for and who was a member.

From the very start of the 15 October meeting, many of us present started receiving texts from friends in the media about what was about to happen just around the corner in SW1. But here we were, the ruling body of the party, chaired by the president with the chief executive also present, carrying on as though nothing of any particular importance was about to happen.

It even got to the stage where the president, Simon Hughes,

announced he was going off to do a television interview – when in fact he was about to stage an impromptu press conference on the steps of Cowley Street. I, and many of my colleagues, were angry because we knew exactly what

“When Nick Clegg mentioned that every member would be getting a copy of Make It Happen, even he seemed astounded that no one on the FE seemed to know anything about it”

was happening and demanded to know why such an important announcement was being kept from us. The explanation basically boiled down to the fact that the FE couldn't be trusted, but we were still going to be told before the media. It just so happened that time was now – which was approximately one minute before the official announcement! It was hugely tempting to go and tell Michael Crick, who after the meeting was hanging around St Stephen's Entrance, about how we'd been spurned, but of course I had a train to catch.

NOT TRUSTWORTHY

It was again a question of trust when discussing (or not) the Bones Commission report. Members of the FE were not deemed trustworthy enough to be given copies of the final report – despite being told we had to make a decision 'in principle' to support its findings because of timescales as to its implementation.

I believe much of the report is positive, particularly if we are to achieve the leader's ambitions. However, I don't think the 'all or nothing campaign strategy', which I raised concerns about at my last FE meeting, is the right way to proceed. The reality is that we need to ensure across a huge swathe of seats, particularly in the north, that we are the challengers come the general election after next.

And again when Nick Clegg, as part of his 'slot' at the start of meetings, mentioned that every member would be getting a copy of a new policy document *Make It Happen*, even he seemed astounded that no one on the FE seemed to know anything about it.

I am at least satisfied that the FE has now become more of a committee concerned with scrutiny, as opposed to one that was in danger of becoming bogged down in micromanagement. I am also proud to have played my part in ensuring a new focus was adopted.

Don't get me wrong. I feel that, during my two year tenure, I was able to achieve some things – from establishing a secure forum for FE members to discuss forthcoming agenda items to introducing a new award recognising the contribution of Belinda Eyre Brook to the party.

And, despite my criticisms, I was hugely disappointed not to have been re-elected. I hope at least my occasional outbursts about our campaigning techniques or plea for more resource in 'moving forward' seats put across the views of 'someone like me' and made the great and the good think about whether what the party is doing will lead to electoral success.

I actually got more first preferences than last time, which made me think that perhaps we should move to supporting FPTP, but of course I have never, and don't intend now, to start backing something purely for personal gain.

Richard Clein is Liberal Democrat PPC for Sefton Central and a member of the Liberator Collective

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STRAIT JACKET

The defeat of Taiwan's previous liberal government has put its democracy under pressure from China's sympathisers, say Olly Wells and Fang-yi Ho

Since the election of a Kuomintang (KMT) government in the spring of 2008, Taiwan has started an ever-worsening decline in freedom, seemingly linked to aspirations of the government for closer relations with China. This decline is leading Taiwan towards a situation reminiscent of a previous era when the division between the organs of state and the ruling KMT blurred, especially with respect to the police and judiciary.

Following the election of President Ma Ying Jeou, the Republic of China, as he likes to refer to Taiwan, has made efforts at reconciliation with mainland China. However Ma, who prefers to be known as Mr Ma in deference to China, has taken actions that have led to many concerns about his respect for Taiwanese sovereignty and his Taiwanese citizenship over his family connections to mainland China.

Various protests took place during the visit of Chen Yun-lin, the chairman of the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS) from mainland China in November.

Many were injured as protesters holding Taiwan's national flags were asked to leave the public premises and had their flags confiscated by the police. A record shop in central Taipei was forced to stop playing traditional songs about Taiwan, as part of a government drive to make mainland officials feel comfortable, far exceeding the powers of the state.

The freedom of expression and assembly of Taiwanese citizens were heavily restricted during his visit. Many Taiwanese commented that these events reminded them of the 'white terror' and martial law period before 1987. The media generally labelled the protesters as supporters of the former government of the liberal Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), though non-party political individuals or groups of bloggers organised the protests.

People were outraged by the disproportionate treatment they suffered while they were not in breach of any law. Following the incident, hundreds of students started daily protests and asked Ma and premier Liu to apologise to the public for the social unrest caused by excessive use of police power.

The police have, after a great deal of delay, made an apology to the injured protesters but Ma still insisted that he will not apologise. He has also failed to ensure the police work within their powers in future while protecting foreign visitors.

Following the unlawful removal of protesters waving Taiwanese flags, a large group of students formed a camp outside the National Taiwan Democracy Memorial Hall.

The group, known as the Taiwanese Wild Strawberry Movement, feel that these police powers have not only

been applied unlawfully, but also indiscriminately. The students also raised concerns that the price being paid for closer ties with China is too high

"Does increasing cross-Strait exchange require Taiwan to lower its standards of freedom and democracy, in order to achieve the same level of repressive authoritarian rule that China has," they asked. Questions have been raised about the future of freedoms Taiwanese citizens have taken for granted since democratisation in 1996.

The 'White Terror' between 1947 and 1987 saw the KMT impose martial law and brutally crush all opposition after its arrival on the island from the mainland. The period was littered with violent clashes and secret disappearances of opposition figures, and many officials of the DPP were imprisoned for exercising freedom of speech during this period.

Former DPP president Chen, who along with a number of other Taiwanese city mayors and party officials are now accused of corruption charges, has been in and out of detention and on hunger strike against a variety of charges, some of which appear fabricated and others related to the actions of his family members.

The KMT government has detained the former president for up to three months without trial, a practice commonly used in cases of political corruption in Taiwan. He denies all charges, but the extent of the accusations has made it difficult for some DPP supporters to remain loyal to a party that following its defeat has struggled to rebuild even in its southern heartland.

Ma has continued to shift politically towards China by publicly rejecting the possibility of a visit from the Dalai Lama. Following his meeting with the ARATS chairman, Taiwan has established direct air, commercial shipping and postal links with the mainland, all of which eluded the previous government.

Freedom House has referred to 2009 as a critical year for human rights in Taiwan. If the decline in standards of human rights in democracy continues, it would be more accurate to look back and see that 2008 was a critical year for Taiwan and that 2009 may be the year that it became clear that the speed of the decline was out of control.

Now is the time that friends of Taiwan must stand by its citizens and press for international support for Taiwan and Taiwanese democracy.

Olly Wells is a member of the Liberal International British Group executive. Fang-yi Ho is the former human rights officer of Liberal International

MULTI-CULTURALISM WORKS

Dear Liberator,

Conservatives, following Labour government ministers, are abandoning multi-culturalism and advocating integration, yet our own Christian churches are multi-cultural not integrated. So why should there be a different standard for other faiths and cultures?

Only 50 years ago, Christian denominations hardly talked to each other. In extreme cases such as Liverpool and Glasgow, there was Protestant/Catholic violence and the 'troubles' of Northern Ireland had yet to re-emerge. In some Liverpool wards, Protestant candidates stood, in the absence of Conservatives, to defeat Roman Catholic Labour candidates. Previous to that we have had centuries of extreme violence between Protestants and Catholics.

The Christian unity movement, as a widely held ideal, is as recent as the 1960s. Until then, the different Christian denominations (Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, Roman Catholic, etc.) each spoke as if each were the only true faith. They tried to get converts from each other. I have a press cutting from 1961, when for the first time, the Free Churches of Coventry joined the Anglicans in a procession of Christian witness – an historic moment. However, a Baptist Union booklet from 1967 *Baptists and Unity* clearly is concerned about losing the Baptist identity.

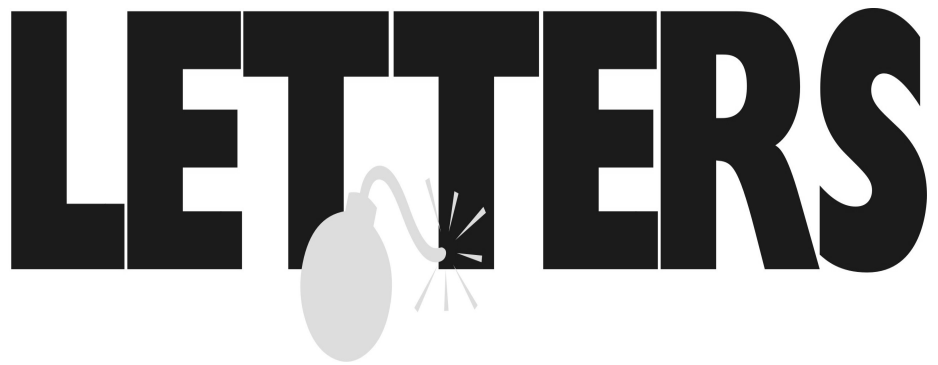
The 'summer of love' was not just an isolated pop event but reflected a wider belief in the 1960s that we should move towards a more peaceful co-operative society and the churches were an important part of that movement.

After centuries of antagonism, the churches started to meet together, they tentatively started worshipping together.

Early on, the talk was of one united church with the different denominations integrated into it.

It soon became apparent that worshippers valued their own specific beliefs and methods of worship. While they welcomed the dialogue and worshipping together, they would not relinquish their own faith and practices – or cultures. So multi-culturalism not integration became the way to unity.

LETTERS



That is a respect for each other's way of doing things. Respect was seen as much more than mere toleration. It meant that the other person's faith was valued because it gave different insights. Worshipping together didn't mean compromising your own beliefs but recognising that we are all struggling in different ways, to discover the truth.

Since the 1960s, the churches are much more at peace with each other. They co-operate on such things as the Christian Aid collection. In most towns they worship together periodically. The clergy meet regularly and have pulpit swaps. Significantly, the different denominations retain their own individuality.

We forget how far we have come. When my then Baptist minister moved to another town in 1968, our neighbouring Roman Catholic church gave him a presentation Bible – at the time this was regarded as a very significant step forward.

The experience of multi-culturalism in our churches is that you do have to work at it. You do have to meet and listen to each other. Respect for and value of each other's cultures is vital. Finding practical things on which to co-operate and succeed together is a great catalyst. The same applies between faiths and cultures. Integration has failed. Multi-culturalism works.

Rob Wheway
Coventry

POPULIST NONSENSE

Dear Liberator,

David Howarth says of eliminating tuition fees (Liberator 329) that "It reduces student debt, and thus addresses

poverty, promotes education, and thus combats ignorance, and reduces the pressure on students to take conventional career-related courses and subsequently become office fodder, and so it tends to undermine conformity".

Promising to abolish mortgage debt for graduates would achieve two of those: it would reduce the debts that students face, addressing poverty, and reduce the pressure to do a conventional job.

If only the state would pay off my mortgage, I could bum around India for a year, rather than having to go into my office. Indeed, knowing that graduates got a free mortgage would surely persuade people to start a degree. Bingo! These arguments are silly, but no sillier than David's.

Whether eliminating student debts is in line with our principles depends on whether it is the best way to combat ignorance. Here the evidence is pretty clear: kids who get good 'A'-levels go to university pretty much irrespective of social background.

Ah! David says, but maybe the reason poor kids don't do so well at school is because they know they won't go to university because they are scared of debt. But poor kids always did worse at school, even before student fees, and they fall behind in primary school.

The idea that, in between pretending to be princesses and power rangers, my daughter's six-year-old friends are thinking about their willingness to get into debt aged 18, and as a result paying attention or not in class, is ludicrous.

We need to get elected, and sometimes popular, populist nonsense is needed to get elected. Abolishing tuition fees may be such a policy, but let's not kid ourselves that it is in any way in line with our principles.

Dr Tim Leunig
London School of Economics

THEM'S THE RULES

Dear Liberator,

I was saddened to read (Liberator 330) that the Liberal Democrats have lost over a quarter of their members in the past 10 years. I also was an activist 10 years ago, but have not been inspired by the disjointed “don’t offend anyone” policies that our front bench expects people to campaign on.

It was said by Michael Moore in *Bowling for Columbine* that the American media deliberately made its people fearful, so that the government and ‘Homeland Security’ could have more funding, (and the media could sell more papers) so they brainwashed Americans into ignorant conformity to support this.

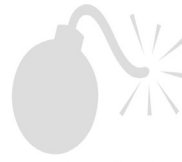
I can see this happening in the UK and EU today. Just because two men once tried to put explosives into a bottle of pop, now no-one can take sufficient toiletries on a plane, or buy bottles of drinks when abroad and bring them home – and people support this.

In Boots, with a streaming cold, I was told I could not buy two packets of anti-cold tablets, only one, because it would appear that one in a million people may use (two boxes!) of tablets to make crystal meths drugs. If I really wanted to make drugs, would I not ask 20 people to each buy one packet of pills? The shop assistants sounded like robots as they reeled off the rules. And they think it is good for them to become an arm of the police. I think it is soul destroying for them.

If we really want to raise our membership and our profile, let us start campaigns to pass laws which help people to use their intelligence to accept that every day is a risk.

That people should not say “oh my operation was cancelled again today, but mustn’t grumble” – that more people should complain and campaign to stop the complacency, the mindless obedience to indiscriminate rules, which is turning our nation into the Cybermen of Dr Who. If we do not offend someone, then we stand for nothing.

Hilary Leighter
London



REVIEWS

Unlocking Democracy: 20 Years of Charter88 edited by Peter Facey and others Politico's 2008 £14.99

Charter 88 was formed at the high tide of Thatcherism to gather a wide coalition to press the then unfashionable cause of constitutional reform.

Two decades on, this commemorative collection shows that, while some of the reforms sought have been won, other challenges to liberty and democracy have arisen, and it will help to arm opponents of authoritarianism with the arguments they need.

It also shows, in particular in some politicians’ contributions, how constitutional reform can descend into a series of wheezes rather than being a coherent project.

Contributors reflect on successes such as devolution in Wales and Scotland, the almost-eviction of hereditary peers, and the freedom of information and human rights acts.

They also explain how the original Charter 88 came apart financially and organisationally in the early part of this decade as a result of its unravelling relationship with the Labour party, and morphed into Unlock Democracy.

As deputy director Alexandra Runswick puts it, Labour’s attitude to constitutional reform was “half-hearted and chaotic” and when Charter 88 began to point this out, it alienated Labour members and donors in its ranks. Its campaign against Labour backsliding in the 2001 election, which depicted Tony Blair with Pinocchio’s nose, was a key stage in this estrangement.

Nothing changes. Gordon Brown’s contribution – in fact a foreword to a

re-publication of a 1992 lecture – includes the introduction of ID cards and pre-charge detention in a section that begins by discussing why “we must continue to safeguard and extend the liberties of our citizens”. You couldn’t make it up.

More interesting among the party political contributions are those from Nick Clegg, Simon Hughes and a joint one from David Cameron and the Tory MP Nick Herbert.

They take it as read that British politics is in a mess. “Not in living memory have confidence in politicians, trust in the system and faith in the government’s capacity to change things been as low as today” (Clegg). “Public faith in politicians and our political institutions is draining away” (Cameron and Herbert).

Hughes takes a similar view and so do some other contributors. None of them though, with the partial exception of the concluding chapter from Unlock Democracy director Peter Facey, seem to consider that this might be because for 15 years there has been little politics with which the public could engage.

In 1992, the last time an election was genuinely competitive between parties with alternative views of what should be done, the turnout was an entirely respectable 77.72%.

The results of the next three elections were foregone conclusions, even if the extent of Labour’s 1997 win was not. Even worse, they were fought over little.

Labour committed itself to stick to Tory spending plans in office and accepted the ‘private good, public bad’ ethos of the Major government, Paddy Ashdown then tied the Lib Dems to Labour, and this three-way consensus lingers.

Is it any wonder that turnouts and public engagement fall when election outcomes are predictable and they are fought between parties that have

minor differences of emphasis over tax and spending, and propose nothing that would either frighten or inspire anyone much?

The assumption that the problem lies in the mechanisms of politics, rather than in the ability of politicians to offer ideas, leads Clegg, Hughes, Cameron and Herbert to offer a set of interchangeable gimmicks among their solutions.

See if you can guess which belongs to which. "All voters should be given independently produced information about candidates." "If a petition is presented to parliament signed by a set number of voters, say 100,000, there would be a formal debate on the topic." "A two-thirds majority [of MPs] should be able to vote ministers out of office."

The answers are Hughes, Cameron and Herbert, and Clegg, but they could be in any order. This is the sort of thinking that lumbered us with uncontrolled postal voting as a cure for low turnout.

Surely the problem is what politicians offer, or fail to, rather than the channels and processes through which they make that offer?

Elsewhere the book includes chapters on many issues that affect the loss of liberty in Britain, such as electoral reform, deaths in custody, the lack of legal aid, privacy and diversity from writers who include Geoffrey Bindman, Louise Christian, Helena Kennedy and Trevor Phillips.

Charter 88's financial woes led eventually to its merger with the New Politics Network under the Unlock Democracy name. The NPN was once the Democratic Left, the legal successor the Communist Party of Great Britain.

As the political writer Francis Beckett has shown in his book *Enemy Within*, the CPGB was propped up with subsidies from Moscow and its dissolution, while ostensibly a dispute between Eurocommunists and Stalinists, involved an unseemly squabble over the ownership of assets this 'gold' had bought, which the former won.

Thus resources that originated with the Soviet politburo are now being used to advance the causes of democracy, civil liberty and human rights in Britain. Would Stalin have seen the funny side?

Mark Smulian

10 Years of the Euro – New Perspectives for Britain edited by Graham Bishop, Willem Buiten, Brendan Donnelly and Will Hutton Published by John Stevens 2009

The names of the publisher and editors indicate that this book is not trying to talk us out of approaching the euro.

Produced in the last few weeks, when the issue of the euro as a reserve currency that might have saved the UK from the depth of its recession was beginning to be whispered in the corridors of power, the book is a timely series of 31 essays from distinguished writers who appreciate the importance of the EU to this country.

In addition to the above and members of the former Pro-European Conservatives – and Conservatives such as Dirk Hazell who jumped ship later, it includes luminaries such as Peter Sutherland, Stephen Wall and Wolfgang Munchau.

The articles are of varying length. Confusingly, the authors' contributions are not ordered by subject matter but are in alphabetical order by author, with no title shown in the table of contents.

The methodologies of the authors vary, from political essays on Thinking Again, Silence of the Lambs (Brendan Donnelly's attack on Tories, pro-European Labour and, indeed, the Liberal Democrats for not speaking out), to pieces with a wealth of graphs from Graham Bishop and Willem Buiten and Nicolas Stevenson. The editors have at least managed to ensure that each deals with a different aspect. We are treated, therefore, to history lessons – Gordon Brown's famous five principles, drawn up by himself and Ed Balls in a taxi "on the back of a fag packet" in order to stymie the pro- Euro Tony Blair, and whose current relevance is deemed by the authors to have passed their sell-by date.

The danger to our economy of having a currency which has some historical pretensions to reserve

currency status but which is in truth extremely vulnerable to foreign speculators, is well argued. Nick Crosby argues that Cameron and Hague are playing a game that is both foolish and destructive of UK interests. There is far too much mythology around about the success of the Brown economic years in comparison with the continent. With the chickens coming home to roost, ironically the conclusion to enter the euro or not is TINA – There Is No Alternative.

The book is available at www.e4u.org.uk

Robert Woodthorpe Browne

There's A Riot Going On by Peter Doggett Canongate 2007 £25.00

Listening again on a winter's night in London 40 years later, it's hard to take seriously America's 1960s musical declarations of universal love, revolution and getting high.

But there was a time when rock musicians thought, genuinely in some cases, that they could change the world, that they and the counter-culture for which they spoke had the power to effect political change and that revolution was around the corner.

This now seems an eccentric conceit, but it was treated seriously by both supporters and opponents of 'the revolution' between 1965 and 1972, and the American state responded to dissent with a savagery that still startles. It is no exaggeration to say that generational conflict was afoot; at least there was no youth political apathy back then.

Doggett's vast book, a work of considerable research, shows the confluence of two American phenomena – the rise of black militancy and growing opposition to the Vietnam war, in particular to the use of conscripts – giving rise to both specific grievances and more generally to discontent with the 'system'.

Rock and soul music provide the soundtrack. As indignation grew, so musicians – some from conviction, some from opportunism – nailed their colours to the revolutionary mast.

The problem was that no-one knew what this revolution was – some

wanted race equality, others an end to the war, some changes to the drug laws, others sexual freedom, some were just exhibitionists, others conventional Marxists, yet more sought a vague 'liberation'.

As Doggett shows, few had a clear idea of the objectives of a 'revolution', let alone how to achieve them, and this incoherence and disunity doomed their efforts.

Black militants and white radicals sometimes collaborated, at other times distrusted each other, leftist groups split into factions as they always will and tactical disputes stifled many initiatives.

The relationship between music and politics was never easy, particularly as those musicians from whom a lead was most keenly sought were the least willing to give it.

Bob Dylan was seen as the political voice of his generation but after 1965 refused to take that role, not least because of his harassment by a lunatic who founded the Dylan Liberation Front with a view to 'saving Dylan from Dylan' so that he might become politically conscious again.

The Beatles and The Rolling Stones, insofar as they expressed political views, voiced scepticism about the radical groups and what they might lead to as, respectively, *Revolution* and *Street Fighting Man* show.

These two bands' high status among 'revolutionaries' is slightly strange given that they were British, and Britain was the one place important in popular culture in which almost nothing happened to disturb anyone. Harold Wilson kept the country out of Vietnam, showing more courage under American pressure than Tony Blair did 35 years later.

The revolutionary fervour and rock's relationship with it dissipated roughly around the time that the liberal Democrat George McGovern was slaughtered by Richard Nixon in the 1972 presidential election, when those who sought radical change gave up to hopelessness.

What remained were a handful of fringe groups. One, the Weather Underground, even produced a sort of revolutionary version of the *Liberator* songbook.

A few samples quoted include Maria, from *West Side Story*, adapted as "I've just met a Marxist-Leninist

named Kim Il-Sung, and suddenly his line seems so correct and so fine."

White Christmas found itself rewritten as "I'm dreaming of a mass movement, that has the highest consciousness."

It is, I think, impossible to have anything but contempt for those who followed Kim Il-Sung, or who waved the Little Red Book of an odious mass-murderer like Mao Tse-Tung.

But there was a lot of real anger and passion in this era, which Doggett explains and analyses well, and it did lead to some lasting changes, notably to racial attitudes and the early stirrings of feminism. Some, at least, of the music was pretty good too.

Lastly, I have a question. Doggett says the decision to storm the fences of the 1970 Isle of Wight rock festival and turn it into a free event was taken by an improbable-sounding alliance of French anarchists, the White Panthers, the Hell's Angels and the Young Liberals.

Do any of *Liberator's* older readers recall whether this is true?

Mark Smulian

Burning to Read by James Simpson Harvard UP 2007 £18.95

A year or two ago, I decided to read the New Testament; having filled myself with all sorts of other mythologies and contemplating the Qu'ran, it seemed an appropriate starting point. In any case, it is central to any understanding of western political thought.

Perversely, I chose to read Tyndall's translation in the original sixteenth century English, on the basis that it might be 'purer' than any official translation. I was brought up on the King James version, knew the basic story well and was pleasantly surprised at how much of it we'd got through at school. The Gospels and the Acts at least were familiar.

The Letters on the other hand were another matter; I started to struggle, with only the promise of Revelation to keep me going. The commonplace view that there was nothing wrong with primitive Christianity before it fell into the hands of Paul and Constantine was underlined by this experience.

Along comes Simpson's *Burning to Read*. Subtitled *English Fundamentalism and its Reformation Opponents*, Simpson argues that the English liberal tradition's claim of ancestry from the Protestant Reformation is faulted. Approaching this from a political philosophical angle, what was the problem? Politically, Luther was known to be a conservative – a label easier to apply that 'Liberal' before the nineteenth century.

The Peasants' War (1524-25) is referred to in Simpson's book as one of the causes of concern for Thomas More and his ilk against a vernacular Bible and the spread of reading. It is not widely known here, but was probably more brutal than our peasants' revolts. It is probably most widely understood as an argument for historical materialism following Engels's work, itself an argument for major revision. Critically, Luther did not back Müntzer, still less the Anabaptist movement. But ruling classes elsewhere saw more simply cause and effect between the two.

Simpson argues a fundamentalism amongst the early translators of the Bible which does not square with a Liberal progeny; More's Humanism might be better suited to this. Personally I've never got on with More. I've not read the works Simpson refers to and was not impressed by *Utopia*, though it features in many a supposed political genealogy (more often socialist than Liberal). I know More by his deeds, and he wasn't a saint (as Simpson makes quite clear).

However, the simple answer is that Liberalism is the bastard child of both of these strains of thought. Renaissance humanism doubtlessly tracks a clearer path, but was in its day only accessible to the few. The translation of the Bible was critical to the spread of reading and, as critics of the act said, set fools a-wandering. The tit-for-tat question 'were the Protestant persecutions worse than the Roman Catholic ones' is of little note, but since the winners write history, it is certain that the Marian persecutions made an indelible imprint on the English psyche at least up to my generation, while those under Elizabeth – a bit like Guantánamo – were in the wrong place at the wrong time, even if they weren't executed for what they were arraigned for.

So I finish Simpson's book better informed than I had been before, but not particularly moved by his argument. The book is heavy going in places, even if you are broadly familiar with the arguments and the times; the introduction and first chapter will inform the lay reader.

Stewart Rayment

The Uniting of Nations: An Essay on Global Governance by John McClintock Peter Lang 2008 £18.70

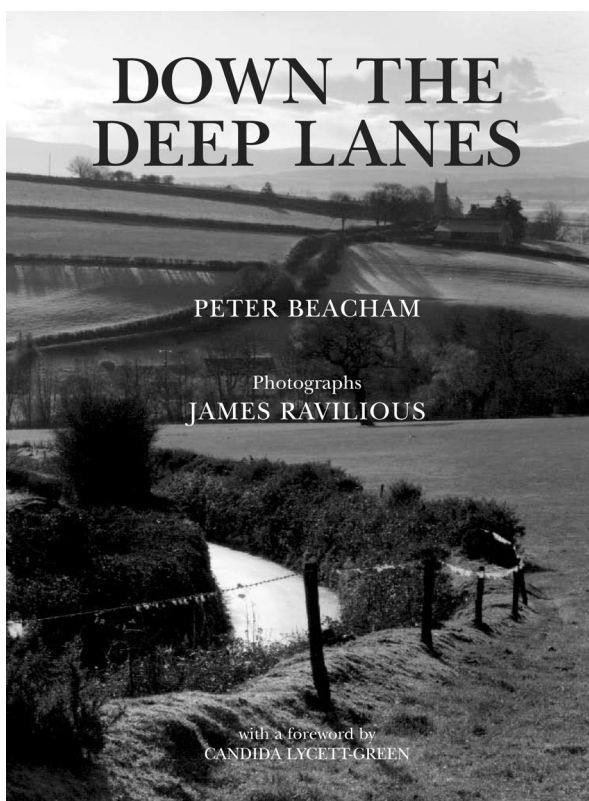
This is an intriguing work, written by a European Commission official with considerable experience of working in developing countries.

The basic thesis is that the United Nations and most international bodies such as World Bank, IMF, G7/8, NATO, etc., have failed to live up to the tasks they were created to undertake. Peace has not broken out all over the world; there is far too much poverty; the abuse of human rights is commonplace; climate change is ineffectually tackled; and there are failed states about which the international community is incapable of taking action and which can present dangers to all.

McClintock analyses these problems at length and concludes that the United Nations, while undertaking valuable work, lacks the teeth to impose the will. This is especially true because of the ability of a single power on the Security Council to block a measure even if it has the backing of a huge majority in the General Assembly.

The author rightly analyses that the only successful sharing of sovereignty to date is the European Union, and seeks to learn whether this example could be extended to a world stage.

He concludes that to open the EU's doors to membership by any democracy in the world is not feasible or desirable. Rather, there should be a new world body with a voluntary membership. The EU should be one such member. Other regional groupings would be invited to join as a unit. Individual countries would be eligible, but if more than one country in a geographical region wished to



join, they would have to form the nucleus of a regional grouping that other democracies could later join.

McClintock favours an incremental approach to the work of the 'Global Union of Democracies', with its initial tasks being limited to the eradication of poverty and tackling global warming. As with the EU, additional responsibilities could be added by mutual agreement. This would be necessary as the intention is a real transfer of sovereignty to allow executive action.

It is recognised that countries such as Russia, China and the United States will not be members at the outset, being far too jealous of their absolute sovereignty. It is envisaged that they would enter at a later stage, if the project were successful.

An interesting attempt to solve some very real problems, and this must be worth a debate among the party's internationalists.

The book can be ordered from www.peterlang.com

Robert Woodthorpe Browne

Down the Deep Lanes by Peter Beacham, photographs by James Ravilious Bardwell 2008 £19.95

A celebration of Devon and country life (first published in 2000). As

Candida Lycett-Green writes in her preface, "not the stuff of ordinary guide books".

Glorious photographs to whet your appetite in a county that is bound to be one of the chief battlegrounds with the Tories at the next general election. Grockles might usefully study Beacham's text before setting off on a day's canvassing.

I particularly enjoyed Beacham's eulogy to corrugated iron, a much maligned material, not least because it was beloved of the Socialist Republic of London (Ken Livingstone's GLC) as it rushed to demolish as many homes as it could before Maggie Thatcher could abolish it. Vast swathes of London were tinned up, but as Beacham reminds us, the same material has preserved many an old building which might have

decayed completely in the ravages faced by agriculture over the last century (many inspired by governments, red or blue, who cared little for that industry).

By people who truly love their county for people who truly love their county (native or otherwise) and for people who love beautiful books.

Stewart Rayment

Fairy Teatime Tales: Fairy Bergamot's New House by Amber McCarroll, illus Pamela Harden The Book Guild 2007 £6.99

No, not a Young Liberal Conference of the mid 70s, Amber McCarroll is venturing on a series of some 40 stories of her faery friends. This is the first. Underlying the stories is an environmental message as the author interacts with her faery and animal friends. I am puzzled to find Fairy Bergamot in England. It isn't a native plant and I'd have thought the fay would stay near the plants they are responsible for. However, this isn't a matter I'll dwell on.

Stewart Rayment.

Lord Bonkers' XI

When frost rimes the trees outside my Library window, I cheer myself by thinking of summers past and summers yet to come. Over the seasons many notable cricketers have turned out for me, and I shall devote a few pages of my diary to choosing the finest Lord Bonkers' XI of all. Modesty dictates that I should not include myself, of course, but in reality I should be captaining the team, batting at number four and turning my googlies. Let me tarry no longer: here is my selection...

Len Hutton

The inadequacy of his report into the circumstances surrounding the death of David Kelly (it was forensically dissected by my old friend Norman Baker in his recent masterpiece) should not blind us to Hutton's excellence as an opening bat. I recall a match against the Independent Labour Party at Worksop when, aided by a fighting 15 from Ray Alan and Lord Charles, he saw us home on a 'sticky dog'. Seeing him stride to the wicket gave one much the same feeling of security that one feels nowadays when Vince "High Voltage" Cable gets up to speak in the House.

C. B. Fry

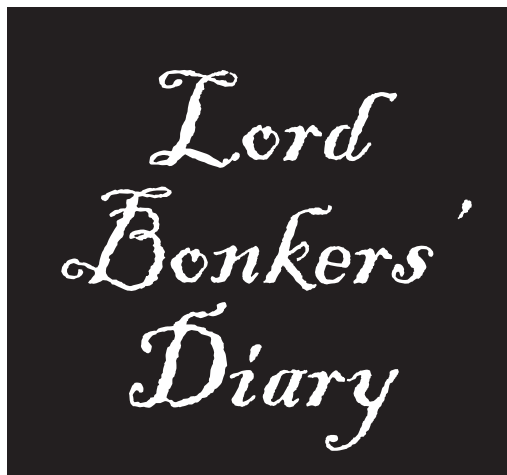
Sometime Liberal candidate for Brighton, Banbury and Oxford, "C. B." was a brilliant scholar and an accomplished performer in every variety of outdoor sport. He captained England at cricket and we lost not a single test match whilst he was at the helm. He played rugger for Blackheath and the Barbarians, and association football for England against Ireland in 1901, as well as playing for Southampton in the F. A. Cup Final. He also set a world long jump record that stood for 21 years. Fry was once offered the throne of Albania, and had he succeeded in convincing von Ribbentrop that the Germans should take up cricket then the history of the twentieth century would have been different indeed. In short, Fry was the second most remarkable Englishman of his generation.

David Steel

With his grey hair, glasses and catchphrase "Don't panic, Mr Greig," Steel raised our nation's morale during its darkest hour – I refer, of course, to our humiliation at the hands of the Australian fast bowlers Lillee and Thomson. Steel's obdurate forward defensive prod became a symbol of national resistance: we had lost our steam trains, seen our currency defiled, but we were not going to let them get another wicket before lunch. I shall pass over Steel's subsequent leadership of the Liberal Party. Though I was one of the first to spot his potential as a batsman, it never occurred to me to invite him to captain the team.

Violent Bonham-Carter

Something of a rough diamond, Violent was always an innovator in batting technique. One hears much nowadays of 'pinch hitting' and of Kevin Pietersen's 'reverse sweep', but how many of today's young people know that both were invented by my second selection? If a short leg fielder came too close or the umpire looked poised to give her out lbw to one that had straightened a bit, then they were likely to find themselves on the business end of one of these novel approaches. As Violent herself would have put it, she made the cricket pitch 'her manor' and anyone who tried to take her wicket was 'out of order' and 'needed a slap'.



Mike Brearley

Quite where to bat him was always a puzzle – he once came in at number ten with two of the three Beverley Sisters at nine and eleven – but there was no doubting that he was Terribly Clever and quite the best captain England have had. These days he works as a psychotherapist and is well versed in the theories of Clement Freud.

L. J. Hobhouse

I thought of Graeme Pollock, Everton Weekes and John Farquhar Munro, but ultimately there was only one choice to

complete my middle order.

Paul Keetch

A good wicketkeeper is the heart of any cricket team and I am always on the lookout for a good prospect. When he was first elected for Hereford I asked some people I knew there: "Can Keetch catch?" When I was answered in the affirmative, I knew I had my man.

Nancy Seear

Every side needs a seamer who is prepared to bowl into the wind or take a spell when the ball is not swinging or the opposition is on top. Nancy was never afraid of hard yakka.

Simon Hughes

There are many clergymen who have achieved eminence at cricket; one thinks of David Sheppard, Andrew Wingfield Digby and Archbishop Makarios. Funnily enough, the Revd Hughes is not one of them. When I appointed him to the living at St Asquith's upon the assumption that he was the bright eyed, bushy tailed Middlesex opening bowler who had performed well for me on many occasions. He turned out to be quite another chap. I have never held this against the Revd, but it is the other fellow who makes my XI.

Phil Willis

With his fuzzy hair and 100mph balls, Philip Dylan Willis was a fearsome sight for any batsman and later became MP for Harrogate and Liberal Democrat education spokesman. After a particularly destructive performance, I once suggested that I should fetch him a cup of tea whilst he put his feet up on the pavilion balcony and watched our batsmen knock off their meagre target. It was typical of the man that he should decline my offer on the grounds that this would constitute a "two-tier service".

Dobbin

Though his chief contribution was made pulling the heavy roller, Dobbin was always happy to turn out if we were a man short and once played out the final over to secure a draw against Mebyon Kernow at St Austell.

So there you have it: Lord Bonkers' finest XI. Let us not, however, forget the contribution that many make from beyond the boundary rope. I think, in particular, of Meadowcroft's sterling work as groundsman, of Miss Fearn's delicious teas and of the Well-Behaved Orphans who swarm up and down the ladders all day to work the scoreboard. With their help, and that of our trusty scorer Mr Bernie Madoff, I have no doubt that this team would be hard indeed to beat.