

liberator



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COMMENTARY

GUARDING THE GUARDIANS

It would once have seemed unimaginable that the Conservative Party – of all things – would find itself complaining about police behaviour.

But then it would also have seemed beyond belief that an opposition MP would be arrested and find his parliamentary office raided by police at the behest of senior civil servants who resented politically embarrassing leaks.

It may yet prove that the police decision to take a DNA sample from Damian Green will have marked a turning point when the Tories decided that, should they return to power, they would actually do something to roll back Labour's assault on civil liberty.

Green is not the only person with a grievance about police conduct. Liberal Democrat MP Tom Brake describes elsewhere in this issue what he saw as a parliamentary observer at the G20 demonstrations at which passer-by Ian Tomlinson died, at the time of writing for reasons that remain disputed.

Those G20 demonstrators who were neither killed nor injured can at least be grateful that they got onto the streets at all; in Nottinghamshire, 114 people who merely thought about staging an environmental protest at a power station found themselves arrested, only to be released without charge (but in some cases subject to vindictive bail conditions).

Less serious, but equally questionable, was the police action against two Austrian tourists engaged in the eccentric but harmless pursuit of photographing a bus station in suburban London. Has the UK under Labour become one of those countries where the guide books warn, "seek police permission before taking photos"?

What these events collectively show is that, if the police are given a power, they will use it to its fullest extent until the government or courts stop them. And since Labour has spent 12 years giving the police every power for which they ask, these excesses are hardly a surprise.

Ever since Tony Blair became its leader, Labour has been in cowardly thrall to tabloid campaigns on crime.

Its response has been a sort of mindless hyperactivism that equates the creation of endless new offences – and the destruction of endless historic liberties – with effective action.

There was a pleasing irony in Jacqui Smith, the latest in Labour's dismal parade of authoritarian home secretaries, being caught out on her expenses by prying neighbours – those who wish to spy on the whole country can hardly complain when it happens to them.

There was a less pleasing one in a party that wants to impose identity cards on everyone allowing riot police to conceal their identifications at the G20 protests.

We all know where another Labour government would lead – to a country where people are arrested or worse for failing to carry identity cards, and for even merely thinking about any disruptive protest.

But since Labour is now the party that supports illegal warfare and the use of torture, what else is to be expected? A government that hands its own residents over to a foreign power to be tortured is hardly likely to mind a few protesters being beaten.

Labour's record on civil liberty is shameful – indeed so shameful that the whole issue is now slowly coming out of the political closet in which it normally dwells, to become a matter of public concern and an opportunity for the Liberal Democrats.

This has always been a Lib Dem issue, and now it is one that has ceased to be theoretical and can be related to people's everyday lives.

Do you want your e-mails spied on? Do you want to have your movements tracked by the police through an identity card? Do you want your child's DNA held for life on a database of actual or imagined criminals? If so, vote Labour.

That the Lib Dems might end up making common cause on civil liberty with the Conservatives would once also have been unimaginable, and that this now happens shows the depths to which Labour has sunk and why it cannot be trusted with civil liberty.

STOP WAVING IT ABOUT

Liberator 332 carried a story that said Nick Clegg was revisiting Liberal Democrat policy on Trident replacement. It seems we were right, even if it not clear how or when a policy change might take place.

Even though the argument against Trident now is cast more in financial terms than military – let alone moral – ones, the case for the Lib Dems to oppose this piece of Blair willy-waving is compelling.

It hardly needs saying that, of the words 'independent British nuclear deterrent', only 'nuclear' is true and the rest fiction.

Opposing it would not merely offer a popular public spending cut but would give the Lib Dems a very clear point of differentiation from the other parties and, with Iraq and tuition fees fading as live issues, the party needs plenty of those.

The policy decision in 2007 had the additional problem of being so complex that it cannot easily be explained, especially not on a doorstep, and so is the worst of all worlds – unconvincing to both Trident's opponents and supporters.

Clegg shows signs of moving away from the bland 'me too' politics that made his first year heavy going. Here is another opportunity.

RADICAL BULLETIN

A SONG FOR EUROPE

Liberal Democrat candidates will all be singing from same hymn sheet devised by Willie Rennie, Nick Clegg's vicar on earth to the European election campaign.

But how robust will the tunes sound? As Liberator has long argued, there is a pro-European constituency that comprises roughly one-third of the electorate and which is targeted by no other party. Targeting that significant group would give the Lib Dems both a distinct position and a large reservoir of voters in which to fish.

As we have also argued, there is no point in the Lib Dems trying to out-sceptic the Euro-sceptics, since this will alienate pro-Europeans while convincing no-one else.

But with some people determined to pander to opinion polls, Rennie has sought to square this circle with mixed success. He is looking for five simple messages about things the Lib Dems would change or improve in Europe alongside five things that are being done well, preferably as a result of Lib Dem efforts.

Rennie has come to a sound conclusion in wanting to attack the other parties for things they have got wrong in Europe, which would mean the campaign would at least be fought on European issues rather than the attempt to ignore them that characterised the disaster of 2004.

So far so good, but Rennie does not want the campaign sounding too positive about Europe and does not want to offer any vision of what it might be – merely that its members are stronger together and things would be worse outside the EU, hardly the most inspiring message.

SPILT MILK

Mark Oaten has made an extraordinary claim to the media magazine Press Gazette about his fall from grace during the 2006 leadership campaign.

He said that the News of the World had long known of his activities with rent boys – which the paper delicately termed as involving an act “too revolting mention” – but waited for a suitable political opportunity to use it, which occurred when he made his ill-advised leadership bid.

Oaten said: “I just want them to be more upfront and honest and say ‘yep,’ we’re doing it to sell newspapers. I would have no problem if they actually admitted that it’s not in the public interest.

“They had my story for three years I think, but hung on to it and never did anything with it.”

He went on: “They could have made that public interest argument at any point in the three years. I had always been a member of parliament, but they waited until it could sell most newspapers, at the point at which I became well-known and at my most famous... What

annoys me is when they essentially expose people’s private lives and pretend they’re doing society a great service.”

The newspaper’s response was to note, “perhaps it is the married MP who paid rent boys for kinky sex who should consider a more ‘upfront and honest’ approach.”

Let’s assume for argument’s sake that Oaten knows when he began to commit the aforementioned acts. By his own account, this must have been before 2003 and so have overlapped his undistinguished tenure as shadow home secretary, a post that would certainly invite scrutiny over this sort of conduct.

The moral is that is that if you choose to enter public life, as MPs do, then voluntarily carrying out ‘revolting acts’ tends to become public sooner or later and does not help your prospects, although in this case it did spare the Lib Dems from subsequently having this liability in any important post.

TESTAMENT OF YOUTH

Liberal Youth’s fractious election for chair (Liberator 333) saw incumbent Elaine Bagshaw re-elected with 148 votes to 92 for Sara Scarlett, whose heckling at Harrogate may have helped to scupper her campaign.

A healthy third place with 44 votes was secured by ‘Ron’ (better known as ‘reopen nominations’) and, in some kind of record, fourth place went to Muhammad Elias Ali with just four votes. Perhaps this was because he is, as described by LY blogger Irfan Ahmed, “unknown to almost everyone in Liberal Youth,” which sounds a strange basis on which to stand for chair.

Astute mathematicians will have noticed that just 288 votes were cast.

PLAYING TRUMPS

The latest twist to the Aberdeenshire dispute (Liberator 333) has seen councillors Paul Johnston and Sam Coull allowed into the Scottish Lib Dem conference in Perth despite at that point being suspended from the party, and the Aberdeenshire Group has written to them to indicate that standing orders have changed and that they’d be welcome to rejoin.

This saga, which began in 2007, has seen Lib Dem councillors suspended and expelled from a group that is determined to allow developer Donald Trump to build a golf resort on a site of special scientific interest.

A rapprochement with Johnston and Coull appears to be one of the fruits of the involvement of party president Ros Scott’s emissary Chris White, who has managed to pour at least some oil on troubled waters.

The other two councillors persecuted by the Aberdeenshire group for opposing Trump, though, have left the party and show no sign of wishing to rejoin it.

Martin Ford sent a lengthy resignation letter to Scottish leader Tavish Scott, which detailed how he felt the Aberdeenshire Lib Dems' shameful conduct has made a mockery of the party's environmentalist claims.

Debra Storr meanwhile has received an extraordinary personal letter from Trump after she complained that she had been unlawfully detained while about her duties as a councillor at the edge of Trump's site.

The letter begins by robustly denying this claim. It goes on, amid other pleasantries, to note that the project had been through a lengthy planning process and "your personal performance and the performance of the very few project opponents was dismal and widely accepted as a national embarrassment".

Trump concludes by advising Storr: "These ongoing publicity stunts are disgraceful and you should be ashamed of yourself."

SILENCE IS GOLDEN

The history of relations between Liberal Democrats and rap music is not a happy one, as anyone who had the misfortune to hear David Steel's 1982 single 'I Feel Liberal, Alright' will doubtless attest.

Steel's opus, though, sounds like the real thing when compared with the 'Six To Fix Rap' delivered by Hertfordshire county councillor Alan Witherick to promote the Lib Dem campaign in June's elections (*Liberator* 333).

In what is possibly the first example of a rap artist referring to council tax levels in St Albans, Witherick works his unaccompanied way through all six fixes in a performance that somebody, somewhere, thought, or perhaps didn't think, would help the campaign.

There's nothing like 'getting down with the kids' to impress voters of any age.

WHERE WERE YOU WHEN...?

David Alton is, thankfully, a largely forgotten figure ever since he flounced out of the Liberal Democrats in the mid-1990s having long been, as Paddy Ashdown put it, "semi-detached" from the parliamentary party.

Alton's relations with the Lib Dems were not helped by his attempts to set up and lead a Christian Democrat party while he was still an MP or by his acceptance of a peerage on the recommendation of John Major. This peerage is thought to have been given after pressure on Major from various clerics, since Ashdown would probably have rather eaten broken glass than nominate Alton.

An unusual gathering in March at Westminster Cathedral marked the thirtieth anniversary of Alton's victory as Liberal candidate in the Liverpool Edge Hill by-election.

It was presided over by former Young Liberal chair Steve Attack, who later joined the Labour party and is now a Tory and who quoted at length from various missives from the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Chief Rabbi and other clerical figures.

Also speaking were Rebecca Tinsley, a former Union of Liberal Students chair who works with Alton on international issues such as Darfur, and Shirley Williams, who spoke as someone who had been on the defeated Labour side at the 1979 by-election.

At no point were the thousands of Liberal volunteers who worked to elect Alton thanked for their efforts in this or his many other election campaigns.

The brochure for the event claimed that he left the Liberal Democrats when it made abortion a matter of party policy (which it did not).

Alton's win probably got the party through the 1979 general election in the wake of the Lib-Lab pact and Thorpe scandal. His subsequent career and attitude towards the party must have made many wonder whether it was worth the effort.

MONEY SUPPLY

Liberator has no idea whether the allegations printed in the *Observer* on 19 April about party donor Sudhir Choudhrie are true or not, but a controversy like this surfacing after the Michael Brown affair is a potential embarrassment.

The newspaper alleged that Choudhrie, who has donated £95,000, and £475,000 from related companies, had been accused of accepting kickbacks from an arms deal in India, which it said he had denied.

A costly general election is coming, for which the party will be seeking to drum up funds. Brown's donation was seen as a welcome windfall at the time but later caused the party endless trouble, and it has never become clear who agreed to it.

The party must do all it can to make sure that no donation could cause it embarrassment. At a time when it is seeking the high moral ground over MPs' expenses, it can hardly do otherwise.

And it will hope to have that high ground. A report in the *Daily Mail* claimed that a Lib Dem MP had asked Nick Clegg during a parliamentary party meeting for an assurance that he would not sack anyone from his front bench when expenses details are revealed in July. It said Clegg refused to give any such assurance, leaving at least one worried MP.

This is understood to be not a piece of political malice by the *Mail* but a genuine leak, though its motivation is unclear. Just wait for July and, if some of the rumours are true, there should be a crop of autumn by-elections offering the chance of Lib Dem gains.

UNSUNG HEROES

Nominations have opened for the Harriet Smith award, set up by the Liberal Democrats in her memory after she died in 2006 (*Liberator* 312).

Harriet was a member of the *Liberator* Collective for many years and was also involved in numerous roles in the party, and was a member of the Federal Conference Committee at the time of her death.

However, she was never elected as a councillor or MP and never seriously tried to be, serving as a paper candidate for the 1997 general election in Motherwell North. The award is thus for party members who have given outstanding service but who have never been elected to public office.

Nominations are open until 30 June for those who "deserve recognition for all their unswerving, consistent commitment and contribution to the party over a significant period of time".

The awards will be announced at party conference in September. Details and nomination forms from: emma.peall@libdems.org.uk

THE MP CAUGHT IN THE KETTLE

Tom Brake saw the treatment of G20 protesters as a parliamentary observer and says police tactics must change

At the beginning of my day with the G20 protesters, I had every hope that my presence there as an independent observer on behalf of parliament would be redundant.

Sadly, as I reflect on a day that turned ugly in places, my concerns about how the event was policed have grown.

From the media reports trailing the protests, it almost seemed inevitable that some level of conflict would occur. There is often a minority attending some protests who do not mind causing trouble, and a smaller number who will actively seek it, stealing the headlines away from issues like climate change, third world debt, employment or the world economy.

Anyone who has been to a protest, music festival or a football match understands that crowd control is a thankless task – little praise when things pass off peacefully; dominating headlines when tragic and appalling incidents like the death of Ian Tomlinson occur.

The words engraved on the Queen's Police Medal, 'Guard my People', have perhaps never been so poignant in light of the number of stories of violence and intimidation that have emerged. The Home Affairs Select Committee and I have heard evidence from the Independent Police Complaints Commission that more than 50 complaints were being looked into. There are lessons to be learnt from the policing of the G20 protests, and learnt they must be.

On the day, many of most violent protestors were arrested by police and swiftly removed from the City. But we judge our police force not only by how they handle a relatively small number of very difficult individuals, but also how they manage a much larger body of peaceful protestors.

I was rooted in one of what has been dubbed the police 'kettles' for five hours. I witnessed first-hand the professionalism of many police officers, as well as the final failure of the police strategy. 'Kettling', far from tackling the situation efficiently, fanned the flames. Many of the problems the police encountered I believe ultimately stem from the tactic.

In short, 'kettling' should come under review. Kettling involves the police building a wall of riot shields and batons around a mass of protesters, the peaceful alongside the problematic – and slowly squeezing them into a tighter space. People are allowed in, but absolutely no-one is allowed to leave.

Slowly the number of those 'arrested' (not my choice of word but that of a very senior police officer) within the kettle increases. No access to food. No water. Young trapped with the old. Journalists trapped with anarchists.

People, like an elderly couple I spoke to, who simply didn't want to be there at all.

It is not surprising that, under such conditions, an otherwise overwhelmingly relaxed and peaceful crowd can become agitated, and then angry, and finally alienated from the police. The tactic proved misguided and counter-productive.

My team escorted one protester with a suspected broken arm to a police cordon. Not even his friend was allowed to accompany the injured man as he left the kettle.

Journalistic freedom was curtailed too – I filmed a journalist, flanked by police, prevented from leaving despite legitimate credentials and contact information for the police to use. For me, this raises serious civil liberties issues and that's what prompted me to release the footage to news networks and make a formal complaint to the IPCC.

Journalists have the right to carry out their lawful business, and report the way in which the police handle demonstrations, without state interference. They need to be confident that they can carry out their role.

The public in turn have the right to impart and receive information: the media are the eyes and ears of the public, helping to ensure that the police are accountable to the people they serve. Effective training of front line police officers on the role of journalists in protests is vital.

Police forces must consider how to ensure their officers follow the agreed media guidelines, and take steps to deal with officers who do not follow them.

They must also consider how police officers are disciplined when they are found to have either covered up or removed their identification numbers. I support the very strong comments made by chief inspector of constabulary Denis O'Connor that there are no circumstances in which it is acceptable for police officers not to display their ID.

Five hours inside the 'kettle', as pressure built, gave me ample time to think about how things could have been handled differently and to question when our hard fought liberties were lost – when containment became not about containing the mood of the crowd, but about physically penning them in and 'arresting' them simply for being, in the eyes of the law, in the wrong place at the wrong time.

There is now a different public mood to contain – one that wants to know why a man died, why thousands were detained against their will and why dozens were injured.

The public won't be silenced this time by backing them into a corner.

Tom Brake is Liberal Democrat MP
for Carshalton and Wallington

NEVER AGAIN

The policing of the recent G20 demonstrations was wrong and fundamental reform is needed, says Dee Doocey

The tragic death of Ian Tomlinson has raised questions about the conduct of some members of the police during the G20 demonstrations on 1st April. We owe it to Ian Tomlinson, and to the vast majority of police officers who do an excellent job in often difficult circumstances, to ensure that the right questions are asked.

There were attempts to portray this death as an isolated incident. But as more pieces of video footage appear on the internet, as more witness statements are published in the press, as more formal complaints are made to the Independent Police Complaints Commission, the ‘isolated incident’ version of events has lost all credibility.

The review of policing tactics by Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Constabulary is therefore welcome. But if this review is to achieve anything worthwhile, it must be a full-scale inquiry that leads to a fundamental change in the police’s policy towards protest. Future policy must respect six basic principles, which apply regardless.

- **Demonstrations and other peaceful forms of protest are a fundamental democratic right** – In a democracy, the duty of the police is to protect the process of democratic debate and decision rather than merely to defend the political and economic status quo. But recent events suggest that the police have opted for the latter. This misguided policy appears to spring from a post-9/11 obsession with counter-terrorism to the detriment of other duties, to the extent that all forms of dissent seem to have been conflated into one big threat. It is not acceptable for the police to try to define the boundaries of democratic rights.
- **Demonstrations are usually peaceful** – There are hundreds of demonstrations and other protests in London every year and most of them pass off without incident. On the rare occasions when violence occurs, it tends to be confined to a minority of the demonstrators present. Policing must therefore discriminate between the need to protect the rights of a peaceful majority of demonstrators and the need to prevent criminal acts by a minority. The police should never make a presumption of criminality on the part of all demonstrators nor adopt a ‘one size fits all’ policy.
- **Policing should be proportionate** – The police must never use disproportionate, provocative or inappropriate tactics against peaceful demonstrators, such as ‘kettling’, baton charges, attacks with dogs or the seizure of personal property. They are counter-productive, since they increase the tension and likelihood of violence. To realise this, one only has to compare the G20 demonstrations with other large crowds that the police frequently manage, by and large very successfully and with no controversy. Consider football crowds, for example. Despite a long record of

violent incidents and other problems with a small minority of football supporters, the police have long managed to address the problems without resorting to over-the-top and draconian measures affecting everyone. Put bluntly, it would be considered totally unacceptable for the vast majority of, say, Millwall fans to be detained for five hours or more, so why should such actions ever be considered acceptable for people peacefully demonstrating?

- **It is unacceptable for any officer deliberately to obscure his or her identification number** – This behaviour contravenes existing regulations and Sir Paul Stephenson’s reiteration of the rules should be welcomed. Yet the practice appeared to have been widespread on 1st and 2nd April. We need to find out why. This is not the first time. The IPPC report on the pro-hunting demonstration in 2004 drew attention to “the failure of some officers to comply with an instruction to wear black epaulettes on their yellow fluorescent jackets, thus ensuring easy identification”.
- **The police must exercise due care and attention when making statements to the media** – Predictions of violence can be self-fulfilling. The police must never exaggerate the likelihood of violence, nor should they dissemble the facts after a demonstration has occurred. The advance media hype almost certainly ramped up the tension and created an expectation of violence. This had two likely consequences; to scare away peaceful demonstrators and incite violence. More generally, the police must also wake up to the reality that surveillance cuts both ways. Most people nowadays carry mobile phones, which can be used to take photos, record short videos or broadcast live reports via the Internet, for anyone in the world to see.
- **The police have Britain’s reputation to consider** – The best way to promote human rights around the world is to lead by example. Our political leaders will have some difficulty criticising state oppression abroad when peaceful demonstrators are being clobbered at home.

Policing a large demonstration is never easy and it would be unreasonable to expect decision-making to be perfect. However, it is clear that the strategy and tactics adopted by the Metropolitan Police at the G20 demonstrations were fundamentally wrong, with tragic consequences. We must ensure this never happens again.

Dee Doocey AM is a Liberal Democrat member of the London Assembly and the Metropolitan Police Authority. This article is adapted from a blog originally written for Progressive London

PERFECT STORM

Vince Cable's new book is an excellent primer on the financial crisis but does not answer the moral questions underlying the crisis, says Simon Titley

Given that economic welfare is fundamental to political success, remarkably few politicians are economically literate. They seem frightened of economics in much the same way that infant school children run scared of 'hard sums'.

Whether you agree with him or not, Vince Cable commands respect because of his economic literacy. The House of Commons tends to fall silent when a genuine expert gets to his feet, and Cable knows what he is talking about. He was a professional economist before he entered parliament; in columnist Alan Watkins's famous phrase, he has had "a proper job".

Cable combines this expertise with fluency. He has the knack of taking complex subjects and expressing them in lay terms. For all we know, he may have talked about 'neo-endogenous growth theory' while employed as a full-time economist but he does not use such jargon on a public platform.

True to his Yorkshire roots, Cable is a plain speaker. He never indulges in the sort of contorted language written by spin doctors, nor does he resort to populist tropes about "struggling families". If house prices are over-valued, he is not afraid to say so, despite the risks this runs with the Daily Mail.

MERCHANT OF DOOM

But the quality for which Cable is now best known and most respected is his apparent ability to predict the future. He was warning of a looming economic crisis as early as 2002, when conventional wisdom still bought into Gordon Brown's promise of "no more boom and bust".

For a long while, Cable was derided as a merchant of doom; in an exchange with Gordon Brown in the Commons in November 2003, Brown claimed that Cable "has been writing articles in the newspapers... that spread alarm, without substance, about the state of the British economy." It was not until Northern Rock went bust in 2007 that people began to take serious notice.

Before Northern Rock, few experts were prepared to break with the prevailing consensus and warn of the debt crisis and the possibility of a recession. Professor David Blanchflower was the sole member of the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee to express such sceptical views. Gillian Tett at the FT and Larry Elliott at the Guardian were just about the only leading financial journalists to see the crisis coming.

But it is mistaken to categorise such mavericks, including Vince Cable, as magical soothsayers. The evidence was plain to see and therefore the true mark of such people is less foresight than the courage to break ranks. Their special quality is an unfashionable willingness

to say, in effect, that when something seems too good to be true, it probably is.

For example, anyone who subscribes to Credit Action's free monthly e-mail bulletin *UK Debt Statistics* (www.creditaction.org.uk) would have long been regularly exposed to some eye-watering statistics about the levels of personal indebtedness in Britain. And it was obvious that housing was absurdly over-valued and that house prices could not rise indefinitely. But such was the devotion to life on Fantasy Island that even shocking statistics and common sense were not a powerful enough combination to counter the collective delusion.

Even amongst those who could see trouble ahead, few realised until recently how the mountain of debt was being sliced and diced and repackaged into assorted exotic financial products such as 'collateralised debt obligations' and 'credit default swaps'. The levels of debt were bad enough. It turned out that nobody, least of all the bankers responsible, knew where the liabilities were.

THE PARTY'S OVER

It is now twenty months since Northern Rock hit the buffers, yet it was not until the symbolic fall of Woolworths last Christmas that reality finally dawned on the Great British Public. With house prices nose-diving and unemployment soaring, the impact of the financial crisis is now widely felt. But although people may realise that the party's over, most don't understand why, preferring instead to heap blame on Sir Fred Goodwin or Gordon Brown. Neither man is blameless yet we would have been in a similar mess without either of them.

For anyone seeking to make sense of the current situation, Vince Cable has come to the rescue with his new book, *The Storm*. As if to underscore the title, the cover features a dramatically posed photo of a windswept Cable with upturned collar. Fortunately the pages inside are free of such publishing gimmicks. The book is aimed at the intelligent lay reader; it is short (only 170 pages) and provides sufficient historical perspective not to lapse into one of those journalistic efforts pieced together from the clippings library, which inevitably are out of date before they are published.

Cable's narrative is a story of stupidity, greed and complacency. He points out that, despite a recurrence of economic manias and crises going back to 'tulip mania' (the world's first speculative bubble in 1637), the lessons had been forgotten. Politicians and economists instead adopted the conceit that, this time, it would be different.

Cable examines both the national and international dimensions. In the UK, the house price and debt bubbles have been worse than elsewhere, encouraged by a national obsession with property and property values. The economy

became excessively reliant on the financial sector, which enjoyed excessive prestige. In the USA, there have been the problems of sub-prime mortgages and the trade imbalance with China. Cable also studies the oil shock, the food price shock, and the rise of China and India with the consequent problems for world trade.

Cable considers the potential for dangerous political reactions to the crisis. He fears a rejection of liberal economics but, with the demise of socialism, regards the main threat as ultra-nationalism and identity politics leading to protectionism. He also has little time for the anti-globalisation movement.

His remedy is a pragmatic economic programme that steers a middle way between the 'New Interventionists' who believe the fault rests with weak regulation and the 'Old Liberals' who believe the fault lies with bad regulation. Cable counsels "a middle position... which acknowledges that financial markets are subject to repeated bubbles, panics and crashes, and maintains that they should not be confused with markets in goods and services within and between countries. The worry some of us have is that legitimate arguments for re-regulating financial markets will become confused with a generalized movement towards dirigisme and state control of economic activity."

Cable's 'road map' for reform is fine so far as it goes, but sees the remedies mostly in terms of fixing the "blocked financial plumbing and dangerous economic wiring". He believes that the openness of our economy should be balanced by a sense of fairness but does not really address the deeper moral and social issues raised by our systemic economic problems: the growing sense of insecurity, the loss of community, the damage to the environment, and people's increased reliance on consumerism to fill a void in their lives.

But these issues must be addressed if one wishes to construct a robust defence of liberal economics. We are also at a time when politics has reached one of its periodic turning points. Some sort of value judgement about the fundamental purpose of the economy would therefore have been welcome.

For example, does Cable agree with the view advanced in the recent ALDC booklet *The Theory and Practice of Community Economics*, that economics is a means to an end rather than an end in itself? This booklet's essential argument is that, "In a democratic society, the role of politics is to enable its citizens to determine their political, social, environmental and cultural objectives; economics is the means for achieving them." It is not clear whether Cable is comfortable with such a rejection of economism.

But the big question about Vince Cable is why the Cable 'brand' has not much benefitted the Liberal Democrat brand. There are probably two reasons. The first is evident in the book, which is non-partisan in the sense of neither crowing about the Liberal Democrats (the party is hardly mentioned) nor taking cheap shots at the Tories or Labour. Cable's public image has developed into that of an avuncular figure somehow above party politics, even though he sometimes makes cruel jokes at the expense of leading figures in the other parties (his 'Mr Bean' joke about Gordon Brown is still fondly remembered).

"A story of stupidity, greed and complacency"

The other reason is Nick Clegg's failure to build on Cable's stature. While Clegg himself avoids criticism of Cable, there have been regular jealous mutterings from some in the bunker complaining that Cable steals the limelight. Also, Clegg seems to be trapped in something of an ideological bind, able neither

to promote nor to repudiate neoliberal economic dogma.

On this point, *The Storm* provides little solace for the Liberal Democrats' dwindling band of market fundamentalists. In terms of internal party politics, the significant thing about Vince Cable's recent statements on the financial crisis (not just this book) is that Cable emerges as a Keynesian. His ideological sympathies remain to the right of those of most Liberator readers, but he is nevertheless a mainstream Liberal Democrat who supports capitalism but is pragmatic about it.

Any neoliberals still standing must have choked on their corn flakes when they read Cable's article in the Independent (24 April): "The failure is much deeper: that of a model of economic growth which originated a quarter of a century ago in Thatcher's resurgent Britain which New Labour meekly adopted. And the more successful the Tories are in transforming this crisis into votes, the greater the likelihood of their inheriting a deep, systemic problem which they helped to create and which their modern PR skills are now hopelessly ill-equipped to solve.

"The Falklands War was a key turning point in modern British history since it signalled the end of a long period of national demoralisation, relative decline and perceived failure. The basis of the subsequent economic recovery, which was brutally but only temporarily disrupted by the recession of the early 1990s, rested on several key elements: a liberalised, internationally competitive, financial services sector in the City; a property-owning democracy in which personal well-being and wealth were reflected in house prices; and a growth in personal consumer spending based on easy access to consumer finance and high personal indebtedness. The historic importance of Blair and Brown was to take and build on Thatcher's legacy enthusiastically and uncritically. And they milked it for all it was worth for 10 years before it failed.

"Each of the three pillars of that model have now buckled. The banking sector has collapsed and the failure of the City tax revenues has contributed greatly to the crisis. The housing market has fallen by over 20 per cent and faces a much bigger correction. Frightened, over-indebted consumers will no longer spend."

Don't get too excited. Vince Cable is unlikely to sign up to the Social Liberal Forum. But we can safely assume that hedge fund millionaire Paul Marshall's cunning plan to turn the Liberal Democrats into a bespoke vehicle for his bankrupt ideology – which effectively neutered the party's ability to criticise the Thatcherite consensus – is finally doomed.

Simon Titley is a member of the Liberator Collective
The Storm by Vince Cable is published by Atlantic Books,
price £14.99

WE KNOW WHAT DOESN'T WORK

We can defeat the BNP if we use more effective arguments instead of clumsily reinforcing its supporters' sense of exclusion, says Michael Meadowcroft

In September 1993, a BNP candidate was elected to Tower Hamlets borough council in a by-election in Millwall. Twenty years before this, National Front candidates had polled in double figures in a number of parliamentary elections and this had catalysed the Anti-Nazi League demonstrations but here was the first actual election victory in Britain for an extremist right wing candidate and it created shock waves amongst the political establishment.

As it happened, Derek Beackon's victory in the Millwall by-election was short-lived – he was defeated at the full elections the following May and everyone breathed a sigh of relief. However, today there are fifty-six BNP councillors in Britain, an elected member of the Greater London Authority and the possibility of a BNP MEP being elected under the extremely defective proportional system being used for June's European Parliament election. In Leeds, the BNP's one councillor was elected in Morley, where there is scarcely a black resident in sight, and last month a BNP candidate came within 200 votes of winning a city council by-election.

Now, despite the fact that the BNP can poll at least 20% of the votes in many urban wards without much effort, there is a remarkably complacent view that it does not really pose a serious threat. I for one do not subscribe to this opinion and I am alarmed that there is no settled view of how to deal with this dangerous and extreme party.

POTENT SELLING POINT

We should have learnt by now what does not work. Ignoring the BNP and thinking that it will go away quietly if no-one draws attention to it is obviously foolish – the BNP clearly exists for a particular section of the electorate. Boycotting its elected councillors and not putting them on committees and other representative bodies simply feeds the BNP's image of being outside the establishment, which is a potent selling point in these troubled political times. Endeavouring to deny individual BNP members their civil rights has a similar effect. Waiting until the incompetence of the BNP's elected representatives shows itself – which, curiously, has actually been urged seriously – is hardly a safe course of action. Demonstrations and protests outside town halls and council offices are easy and make the participants feel good, but are wholly ineffective in that they have little or no resonance amongst those inclined to support the BNP and they feed the party's martyrdom image.

Principled statements by the great and the good, such as united groups of religious leaders in Leeds recently, urging the great British public not to vote for the BNP on moral grounds, are a waste of breath as few of the BNP's potential voters are susceptible to any moral appeal, let alone one from the religious 'establishment.' The latest proposal, from the otherwise splendid Archbishop of York, John Sentamu, is for us all to develop an English identity and so passionately to promote our Englishness that we will thus deny the BNP their "unique selling point"! Quite bizarre! As if one can out-nationalist the nationalists, and as if there were a geographic logic to the BNP's appeal. One local supporter who flies the English St George flag in his garden has a Honda car in his drive and a Volvo at the roadside!

FLIMSY AND UNSUSTAINABLE

It is thus clear what does not work. It is equally clear that the BNP case is so flimsy and unsustainable that no Liberal Democrat activist should have any difficulty in taking it on.

The BNP's constitution and its mission statement make it clear that it is a party based on a racial identity. There is a tortuous definition of 'indigenous', to limit to white people those it seeks to serve without actually using the word. It is clear from similar phrases in its constitution that only white people can join the party. However, in its policy statements it is clearer: it speaks of "white Britons [being] second-class citizens," and of "native British people [being] an ethnic minority in our country within sixty years."

Whereas BNP activists may well be racists in the full sense (i.e. not only believing in discrimination against black people, but also believing whites to be innately superior), I doubt whether more than a few BNP voters would go so far. Their support of the BNP largely comes from those who feel economically deprived, sometimes with two generations being unemployed, from those who regard themselves as being excluded from the broader urban community, and is fed by the huge problems of living on tough estates. The BNP, using the easy scapegoat of immigrants, and calling for tough law and order measures, chimes in perfectly with these electors' concerns. The new besuited BNP puts on a respectable facade but its real aims are far more sinister and dangerous. Le Pen's Front National slogan in France, "two million immigrants, two million unemployed French," was facile and simplistic but very plausible.

Much of the ‘evidence’ of preferential treatment of immigrants stems from the usual myths but the mainstream parties, largely including the Liberal Democrats, avoided tackling the issue of the visibly increased immigration of the past decade while there was no apparent electoral penalty for so doing. Now, when the swathe of disenchanted non-voters is being motivated by the extreme right, the positive arguments for the value of immigrants and for humanitarian treatment of asylum seekers need to be deployed. There is no evidence that harsh negative measures to try to assuage the immediate causes of apparent discontent would inhibit electors from voting BNP. The arguments presented are only the symptoms of the deeper seated sense of exclusion and the BNP can always be more extreme than any mainstream party.

MORE VISIBLE TARGETS

The BNP has an increasing problem matching its white emphasis with its anti-immigration stance, in that the majority of current immigrants are from EU countries and are only identifiable, if at all, from their initial lack of English or from their accents. It has an additional difficulty in that, in common with other extreme right parties, it has an inherent anti-semitism. Traditionally it has been radical Jews who have infiltrated and provided information on such organisations but the BNP has had to soft pedal on its anti-semitism in order to concentrate on its more visible target.

It is ironic that a black man can be the President of the United States but cannot be a member of this small British political party. Interestingly, the exit polls from the American election showed that many of the white American voters in Pennsylvania and Ohio who had expressed racist views, and who are in similar economic circumstances to the BNP voters in urban Britain, did in the end vote for Barack Obama. This in itself shows the value of taking on the arguments.

How dangerous is the BNP? The answer is very simple: today hardly at all, but tomorrow, potentially very dangerous. A recent article in the *New Statesman* (‘The BNP’s breakthrough’, Matthew Goodman and Robert Ford, 20 April) quoted survey material: “Those who dismiss the BNP fail to appreciate the potential appeal of the modern far right’s fusion of nationalism, xenophobia and economic populism. Our research suggests that roughly one-fifth of white British voters share most or all of the BNP’s views.”

The comparisons with interwar Germany are not as fanciful as some suggest. The Nazi party first presented candidates in the two parliamentary elections of 1924, and then only in alliance with other right wing parties. It fielded its own candidates in the 1928 election but polled only 2.6% of the national vote. Its key breakthrough came in

“It is thus clear what does not work. It is equally clear that the BNP case is so flimsy and unsustainable that no Liberal Democrat activist should have any difficulty in taking it on”

provincial elections the following year when it polled 7% in Baden in October, 5.4% in Prussia in November, and 11.3% in Thuringia in December. These polls presaged the phenomenal rise nationally from 18.3% in 1930 to 43.9% in 1933 – the final poll before elections were abolished and Hitler ruled by referendum, a separate lesson in itself.

There were those who saw the dangers too late but who still spoke out to warn the German people. In October 1930, Thomas Mann abandoned his familiar terrain of art, literature and philosophy to deliver an appeal to join him and the Social Democrats in defence of humanistic values. He noted the role that economic despair had played in the rise of Nazism but believed that it was part of a deeper

“spiritual” crisis. In winter 1931, the great Liberal, Theodor Heuss, published a booklet with a formidable attack on the Nazi movement. He stressed the role of racism and anti-semitism in the Nazi appeal but believed that more important was Hitler’s ability to exploit the discontent of those who had become disorientated by Germany’s military defeat and a decade of economic hardship. All this has all too familiar echoes with the BNP today. All that differs is the scapegoat: the blacks rather than the Jews. The similarities are sufficient enough for Liberal Democrats to quote them as one of the powerful arguments for rejecting the BNP.

Essentially, the arguments against the BNP are based on peace rather than strife; on cohesion rather than division; on inclusion rather than exploitation; and on generosity rather than selfishness. None of these issues can be fully addressed without an immense effort to enhance the whole political process. So long as their potential voters feel excluded from the political process, the BNP will have resonance. A democracy that is inclusive, and a party that can inspire, are the foundations on which the necessary policy structure can be built. It is a huge challenge, and there is little time. We have to make the case.

Michael Meadowcroft has led, or been a member of, 47 missions to 31 different countries, assisting in the transition to multi-party democracy. He was Liberal MP for Leeds West, 1983-87.

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HITTING THE GLASS CEILING

Two decades of progress have still left women poorly represented in the political process, says Elizabeth Sidney

Democracy would be a fine thing, and it's urgent that we get around to it. We have the vote. We can, despite some barriers, elect a new government and new representatives. We enjoy the rule of law and a fair degree of personal liberty within the law. In practice, if not officially, we are a secular state.

But clearly few of us feel involved in public decision-making and inequalities between citizens are far wider than a full democracy can tolerate. Leave aside the obscene Sir Fred Goodwin; the average salary of a FTSE chief executive is about 70 times the salary of the average employee in (his) organisation. Such maldistribution of wealth is always an incipient cause for civil unrest.

We are wrestling with the realisation that neither government nor parliament had any effective control over global corporations and international banking systems. The free market has been interpreted as freedom to make as much money as possible for the few, not as an effective way to bring general prosperity. It has been treated as freedom from political interference, although politics and economics are inextricably linked.

Demonstrations and even referenda are not clever ways of judging public opinion but, even so, the public made very clear its rejection of our entering the Iraq war. Our prime minister took no notice. We entered an appallingly expensive war with dreadful consequences for Iraq, with most of the spoils going to the USA (and Haliburton). We were right and Tony Blair was wrong, and faith in UK democracy suffered a mighty blow.

And parliament is grossly unrepresentative. In it, 52% of the population is represented by only 20% of MPs. This, in the Mother of Parliaments, is just 1.6% above the world average, and helps to drag down the European average to 21.7%. That average is bad enough in itself.

Putting all this together, the public has become seriously cynical, disinclined to 'waste' its votes and sceptical of the political profession. Yet we could put one thing right, and the measures needed to do so and the effects of this change might yet revive democracy. We could get more women into parliament.

Terry Davis, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, said in March when launching a report on the participation of women in public decision-making in Europe: "The current situation is unfair, unintelligent and ineffective. Gender inequality is detrimental to political, social and economic development."

We could surely aim for the parity zone (40% of either sex) and at least get 30% in at the next election.

Does 30% make a difference? The evidence is that it certainly changes behaviour. Women become 'normal',

less noticed for their physique and wardrobe, more like colleagues, valued in terms of their skills and contribution. Yah-boo attacks become increasingly silly, the risk of 'masculinisation' recedes and tokenism disappears. Research also shows that the content of debates is influenced. This is not because women abandon commitment to their party and its values, but because their life experience leads to a modification of perspective, which is collectively effective. For example, women suffer unduly from armed conflict, which may explain their preference for non-violent conflict resolution. Where's the sense in raising children, only to send them off to slaughter in early adulthood? Thirty per cent women in parliament would make us very much less likely to agree to go to war.

MASS DESTRUCTION

Women collectively are also likely to want to ensure full implementation of Article 1325, to seek more transparency on defence expenditure and arms trading and to urge greater support for the International Court of Justice. They might increase demands for company responsibility for weapons of mass destruction and stronger pursuit of companies culpable of mass destruction and release of toxic waste. They might emphasise closer examination of the gender effects of international trade agreements and national debt repayments, and of aid saddled with trade and procurement conditions. They might strengthen the resistance to privatisation and its corollary, reduction in public services, with all the consequences for women's lives. They would surely promote government financial support for women's NGOs and more consultation of their expert members.

Finally, having less reason than their male colleagues to support dysfunctional traditions, the 30% might give extra impetus to reform of the constitution and of parliamentary procedures.

Just 30% of women parliamentarians would certainly bring a great influx of new talents and new ideas. Debates would benefit from more informed discussion, fewer histrionics and generally shorter contributions.

So What's Stopping Us? With all these desiderata in sight, what is handicapping their realisation? Are the four Cs still with us?

- **Culture.** In some respects, our patriarchal culture seems to be modifying for the better. New men are around, who see hands-on parenting as a matter of pride and respect their partners' equal and complementary abilities. Father Time is continuing to take care of older and crustier attitudes. Yet, violence against women remains appallingly high even in the

so-called developed world. It is the subject of a worldwide campaign, in view of its damage to women's ability to engage in any activities within or outside the home. The campaign is to stop the violence, but it must also stop the conditions in which violence can flourish, and these can be found in inequality. Unequal pay, unequal distribution of domestic chores and child and elder care all increase women's physical and mental vulnerability. Culture, though improving, retains plenty of handicaps.

- **Childcare.** This is being somewhat addressed by better social provision (spurred on by EU determination to improve maternity and parental rights). Also, it is welcomed by new men. Here the handicaps are reducing.
- **Cash.** Not so good. The Women's National Commission is grossly under funded and no state help is given to the many women's NGOs which inform and train women in their legal human rights. We need an Emily's List or, as One World Action suggests, an international fund to promote women's political participation.
- **Confidence.** Now that women are used to academic and professional achievement and to combining careers with family life, confidence seems generally high. Frustration remains, of course, as women still fail to gain due recognition in the professions' higher echelons. What seems lacking in many women's self perception is the idea that they could or should also engage in politics and that their citizenship involves contributing to public decision-making.

So, what's to be done? First, we need some structural changes. The first must be – a perhaps forlorn hope – the abolition of first-past-the-post in Westminster elections. Its discriminatory effect is now clearly demonstrated by the Welsh and Scottish parliaments, not to mention most EU member states. It must go. Failure to effect this change is a further indication of both major parties' lack of commitment to democracy.

Government must be greatly decentralised. Increasing the power of local government would do much to increase interest in democracy, as well as training local councillors (an important step for many women).

The government's cautious commitment to equal pay must match the vigour it applies to removing bankers' bonuses.

Legislation should ensure that all NGOs with elected officers should be consulted automatically – many have constituencies far bigger than an MPs. Equally, they should receive state financial support.

While no-one can query the freedom of the press, surely the Equal Rights Commission should challenge press omissions (such as the England women's world triumph in cricket) and commissions (for example persecutions of Cherie Blair and Harriet Harman). Barack Obama struck a

blow for equality when he referred, in his inaugural speech, to 'our precious daughters'.

Next, we need some positive discrimination. Twinning and zipping in candidate selections have brought women forward with some real success.

Quotas are used in many countries with obvious success. They are opposed by those who claim that advancement should be gained solely on merit.

DISAGREEABLY PROMOTED

This argument is disagreeably promoted by some talented and privileged women, much as some women joined the Anti-Suffragette Movement in the early 20th Century. No doubt some horses would win the Grand National even if required to take extra jumps, but democracy means equal opportunities for all.

Quotas are also opposed as discriminating against men, an objection easily overcome by requiring the quota to apply to both genders. This would also meet the objection that quotas are patronising and that they can impose an artificial glass ceiling. Moreover, quotas can and should be temporary and subject to revision.

Use of quotas has succeeded beyond expectation in Rwanda, where 55% of parliamentarians are now women, and in Tanzania. The overwhelming evidence is that they kick-start change and should be considered alongside other measures.

Next, training. Liberal Democrats strongly support training for those seeking political roles. One World Action calls for women's political training from raising general awareness of legal rights to practical skills in campaigning, lobbying, running an election, understanding power structures, influencing parliament and learning from role models. It proposes advising women on ways to contribute to political work even if not in office, including letter writing. It suggests support should continue into early years in office.

From the 1980s onwards, we have increasingly respected realisation of individual rights and development. This has brought some valuable elimination of discrimination as regards race, disability and sexual orientation. It has encouraged talent, regardless of where the talent comes from. But it has also eroded social responsibility and elevated the importance of the consumer. Citizenship has been diminished.

Respect for individual rights needs redirecting to include an additional responsibility to contribute to public decision-making. Women have plenty of responsibilities already, but if we seek equality, we must accept this addition. We must all work for gender parity in parliament, for our own sakes and to revive democracy.

“Twinning and zipping in candidate selections have brought women forward with some real success”

Elizabeth Sidney is chair of Women against Fundamentalism and for Equality and a former president of Women Liberal Democrats

LABOUR'S SCHOOLS WHEEZE FAILS

Academies were supposed to be the vehicles to turn round failing schools. Instead they have consumed money, damaged local education systems and failed to deliver consistent results, says Alasdair Smith

As I write, Lord Bhatia, founder of the Academy chain Edutrust, which is planning eight academies, has resigned after it was found by a government inquiry to have paid £70,000 in 'excess' rent to the Ethnic Minority Foundation, of which Lord Bhatia is co-founder.

Just a week before that, Dudley Council had announced it was abandoning plans to turn two schools into an academy, citing the cost to the local community as being unacceptable.

In Carlisle, the Richard Rose Academy opened in September. This January, the headteacher and the chief executive resigned after 200 pupils staged a protest at the gates, 200 parents formed an education action group, the school failed its Ofsted inspection and teachers threatened industrial action.

Rev Steve Chalke, the head of Oasis, a chain that runs nine academies, has admitted that some may fail to reach the 30% baseline set by the government. When the Oasis Southampton Academy opened in September, there were reports of a 'riot' and teachers were threatening industrial action.

Teachers in Walthamstow Academy, run by ULT, are balloting for industrial action in response to allegations of management bullying. Teachers in Bolton, Derby, Croydon and Newham have taken strike action against proposals to turn their schools into academies. The list is endless.

The Anti Academies Alliance welcomes the announcement in the Lib Dem Equity and Excellence policy paper that academies will be brought back under local government authority. One of the biggest problems with academies is that they are outside local authority control.

Congratulations to the Liberal Democrat-led Derby Council for listening to the parents and teachers in Sinfin. There were more than 700 consultation replies opposing the academy proposal, seven days of strike action, and both the headteacher and governors turned against the academy proposal for Sinfin Community School. The council abandoned the plans in January.

Congratulations too to the Liberal Democrat-led Sheffield Council for declaring that it will now 'actively discourage' schools from becoming academies.

The PriceWaterhouse Cooper Academies 5th Annual Report concludes: "There is insufficient evidence to make a definitive judgement about the academies as a model for school improvement." Hardly a ringing endorsement of a policy pursued ruthlessly since 2000.

The PWC report was published in November 2008. Since then, the Sutton Trust has also produced a report. In both, there is enough for the government to spin the magic of academies. Yet there are also plenty of problems reported.

When the academies programme started in 2003, the government argued: "Academies will contribute to driving up standards by raising achievement levels for their own pupils, their family of schools and the wider community by breaking the cycle of underachievement and low aspirations in areas of deprivation with historical low performance."

Have they succeeded? The Sutton Trust report, referring to the government benchmark of 30% of pupils getting five GCSEs (including maths and English), says: "As Phase 1 Academies have seen their first cohort go all the way through, it might be expected that they would now be hitting this target. However, none of the first three Academies achieved this in 2007."

OPPOSITION HAS MUSHROOMED

The reality is that, far from guaranteeing success, academies experience many of the same problems as state community schools. So, for example, nine of the oldest 36 academies saw their results fall last year.

When the first few academies opened, there was hardly a word of opposition. But as the numbers have grown, the impact on the school system has become more obvious. We can now witness the impact in local communities and the wider school system. As a result, opposition has mushroomed and continues to do so.

Campaigners have faced an uphill struggle due to the undemocratic processes by which academies are created.

Frequently campaigns have been able to mobilise parents and teachers in opposition, only to find their views completely ignored.

The momentum against academies is spreading elsewhere. Preston City Council passed a motion opposing the proposal for Fulwood High School to become an academy by 43 to two votes. It then wrote to Lancashire County Council outlining its opposition to the academy. The letter raises serious concerns about the consultation process, the lack of information about the sponsor and that “in the current economic climate there is a danger of instability associated with private sponsors”.

From the outset, campaigners have identified sponsors as one of the key problems. The AAA has always made it clear that we welcome partnerships with local business and universities. But the role of sponsors in academies has made schools and their communities subject to the ups and downs of the business world. There are a number of sponsors who have significant problems

David Ross, founder of Carphone Warehouse and sponsor of Havelock Academy, has resigned from the mobile phone retailer’s board after failing to declare that he had used most of his shareholding as security for personal loans.

Founder of ARK, Arpad Busson, lost \$220m in the recent Madoff fraud.

Amey has announced that it wants to withdraw as a sponsor of Unity Academy.

Taken separately, these issues may seem fairly minor. But in addition to the lack of accountability of sponsors, they create an emerging sense of uncertainty surrounding some academies. Such conditions can never be a sound basis for the life and development of a school community.

Academies continue to exclude far larger numbers of children than the state sector. They were responsible for 2% of all temporary exclusions, and 3% of permanent exclusions, despite making up only 0.3% of state schools in England.

Academies in the PWC sample have 12% of their staff without qualified teacher status, compared to an England average of 5%. This is despite the fact that the funding agreements for the academies in the sample all require teachers to have this.

In 11 of the 27 academies in the sample, there was a change of leadership, mostly within the first year of becoming an academy. There are no academy principals from black and minority ethnic backgrounds in the PWC sample, despite many being in areas with high numbers of pupils from these communities.

Again, taken separately, these may not be so significant, but together they establish a pattern – a direction of travel – that is creating a deregulated, two-tier education system.

“Rather than think of the strategic needs of the whole community, councils have succumbed to ministerial pressure to pursue an unproven system of school improvement”

The long-term implications of the academy programme have never seriously been considered. Issues such as the impact on strategic planning of the school system, especially in large metropolitan areas, have been wilfully ignored.

In reality, many councils have been bullied into accepting academies to secure Building School for the Future money. Rather than think of the strategic needs of the whole community, councils have succumbed to ministerial pressure to pursue an unproven system of school improvement.

IDEOLOGICALLY DRIVEN

Of course the massive funds associated with individual academies have meant some academies have succeeded. But investment in maintained state schools also creates success.

Sadly, the academies programme has seen public policy being driven by neo-liberal ideology – of deregulation and privatisation – rather the serious research evidence.

The weight of research evidence from around the world demonstrates very clearly that public education systems, well funded and with highly trained staff, deliver the best education. The £5bn earmarked for academies may well have helped a handful of schools, but there is no doubt it could have been better spent.

Every child deserves a good local school, and most schools achieve this already. But the relentless focus on so-called failing or ‘national challenge’ schools has distorted our education system. CTCs, Sats, league tables, Education Action Zones and a host of other top-down government initiatives over more than two decades have all been peddled as quick fix solutions to “drive up standards”. Academies are just the latest in a long line of magic bullets that didn’t really supply the magic.

I suspect that the millions of pounds spent on these schemes, and on the gravy train of consultancies that has accompanied them over the years, could, if spent more wisely, have made a real difference by cutting class sizes, providing more specialist support and raising many, many children and their families out of poverty.

Many councillors report the pressure the Department for Children, Schools and Families puts on them to include an academy in their BSF proposal. If every Lib Dem council followed Derby and Sheffield, the government’s academy programme would come grinding to a halt.

Alasdair Smith is national secretary of the Anti Academies Alliance: www.antiacademies.org.uk

SAVING EUROPE'S SICK MAN

One Hungarian liberal party turned into right-wing populists, another is near collapse. Will a third new one offer hope to a country with a stricken economy, asks Howard Cohen

On 21 March, this year, the Hungarian prime minister announced to his party congress that he would go to parliament and move a motion of no-confidence in himself.

Somehow this one action sums up the state in which Hungary now finds itself, almost 20 years after the hopes and dreams of a new democracy seemed to provide this nation with a genuine momentum towards political stability and economic prosperity. In the early 1990s, Hungary was hailed as the perfect example of how to turn a communist economy into a model capitalist society. Yet today Hungary is undisputedly the 'sick man of Europe', with an economy teetering on the edge of bankruptcy, propped up by EU and IMF bailouts. So what went wrong?

Some of the current problems can be traced back nearly 20 years. Hungary had been one of the more successful economies of Eastern Europe in the final days of communism and so hit the ground running in 1990, attracting significant foreign investment and achieving remarkably fast growth compared with its neighbours. This led the early democratic governments to shy away from making the sweeping public sector reforms that many neighbouring nations undertook at that time, leaving the country with a massive public sector workforce and a rapidly growing imbalance between salaries in the public and private sectors. The population was generally happy and comfortable, so no government wanted to introduce unpopular reforms and lose power as a result. Taxes and public spending remained high when most other former communist governments were slashing both.

By 2002, the feel-good factor was waning as the massive public sector workforce found its salaries too low to keep up with those in the private sector. At a time when the real solution economically should have been to reduce public spending and completely reform the public sector, a new Socialist/Liberal (SzDSz) coalition government swept to power pledging to increase public sector wages by 50%. For a brief period, the population felt good again and all seemed well. Hungary was on its way to joining the EU and confidence was high. In reality, the economy was starting to crack with a rapidly growing budget deficit, and a tax system that was becoming unworkable with tax avoidance and the black economy becoming the norm at all levels of society. Corruption was on the increase at all levels of government, particularly local government, with all political parties implicated.

When Hungary joined the EU in 2004, the budget deficit was already too high but the EU, in its haste to expand,

simply told the Hungarian government that it was OK to join as long as the necessary reforms were put in place within two years. Instead of heeding those warnings, the government continued along the same path of high taxes and high spending. By 2006, far from introducing reforms and stabilising the economy, the government went in to a new general election with a budget deficit of more than 10% of GDP. What's more, instead of warning the electorate of the inevitable crisis and reforms that would be necessary, the socialists went in to the campaign pledging further spending and hiding the economic data. The populist plan worked and the coalition became the first Hungarian government to retain power in an election since the fall of communism.

ELECTION LIES

Outwardly both the Socialists and Liberals were euphoric about their victory and looking forward to two more years of power. Inwardly, however, things were starting to fall apart in both parties. Within days of the election, prime minister Ferenc Gyurcsány addressed a private meeting of his party's MPs, stating that they should all realise that they had lied to the electorate about the state of the economy and now needed to put a strategy in place quickly to explain why massive reforms would need to be introduced to slash the deficit. This speech was secretly recorded by one of those present and subsequently posted anonymously on the internet.

Hungarians had always had a degree of cynicism about their politicians and widely assumed them all to be personally corrupt. However, this admission by their prime minister to lying was greeted with even more shock than the revelation of the state of the economy itself. Mass demonstrations appeared on the streets for the first time since 1956, some even descending into riots, although the lack of preparedness or experience by both rioters and police meant that most of the so-called riots involved more TV crews than rioters and most of the injuries were the result of police officers accidentally turning water cannon and tear gas on themselves.

However minor the 'rioting' may have been, the repercussions were immediate. The population lost trust in the politicians it had just re-elected and the world woke up to the crisis in Hungary. The myth of Hungarian political stability and economic strength was killed in an instant. Foreign investment dried up and businesses immediately made plans to relocate to neighbouring countries, most notably Slovakia, which had risen from a much lower base

to overtake Hungary's economy by actively seeking foreign investment through low taxation and economic reforms. The currency started to collapse, causing huge problems for the majority of Hungarian home owners, who had taken out mortgages in Swiss Francs.

Despite what seemed like an untenable position, Gyurcsány remained prime minister and pledged to introduce an austerity package. The most unpopular of the initial proposals was for the introduction of charges for health and education. Gyurcsány cleverly manoeuvred to put his Liberal coalition partners in charge of these reforms so that he could keep his own party's doubters on side. The plan backfired as some of his own MPs voted with the opposition to call a referendum on the proposals, in which the government was heavily defeated. Within weeks, the coalition had collapsed. Support for the Liberal SzDSz had plummeted to under 2%, so it had no desire for a fresh election and no interest in working with the main opposition Fidesz party. The result was that the socialists were able to continue in minority administration.

After the referendum debacle, the economic reforms began slowly. This meant increasing the already high and widely abused taxes, raising VAT and indirect taxes, increasing charges for public transport, and mass redundancies and cutbacks within the public sector. The deficit did start to reduce but, just at the moment that it seemed like Hungary might be heading in the right direction, the global economic crisis hit. Hungary's largely foreign-owned banking system started to creak. Foreign investment dried up, with many multinationals closing operations in Hungary or massively reducing workforces. Share prices and the currency plummeted and economic confidence reached an all time low. The government was left with no choice but to go cap-in-hand to the EU, the IMF and the World Bank for a bail out. That cash injection has stabilised the currency and the economy in the short term but it is by no means certain that this stability can be maintained in the long term.

On 14 April, a new socialist prime minister, Gordon Bajnai, was finally sworn in, with support from most but not all SzDSz MPs. Bajnai and his cabinet have pledged to run a crisis-management administration, which will not seek re-election in the 2010 general election. The cabinet includes some members from outside party politics but is still clearly at the head of a socialist minority administration. Protests have already begun against Bajnai's appointment and the drastic economic reforms he has promised. The trade unions, in particular, are threatening industrial action.

Hungary's biggest opposition party, Fidesz, retains a predictably populist position, arguing against the reforms and calling for immediate elections but offering little realistic alternative. Fidesz started in the 1980s as a genuine Liberal 'youth' party and gained popularity for its refreshing and dynamic approach to politics. Sadly, it was that ability to gain support from style rather than ideology which eventually led the party down the road of populism and away from liberalism. Its autocratic leader, Victor

“SzDSz is hopelessly split between its economic and social liberal factions”

Orban, has kept a firm grip on the party and driven out all the true liberals. It is often labelled as conservative but, in reality, it is a purely populist party that will say whatever it takes to get elected, and sometimes that even involves pandering to the extremes of nationalism and xenophobia. As the only credible option, it is riding high in opinion polls but most Hungarians, in reality, have little more respect for it than for the socialists.

As is often the case in an economic crisis, there have been worrying developments on the extremes, with far-right groups building support, especially in the more impoverished countryside. The other inevitable effect of an economic crisis has been increases in crime and the extremists have not missed the opportunity to blame this on the Roma ethnic minority. Violent attacks on Roma people are on the increase and often it seems that the police have no desire or interest in doing anything about these.

LIBERAL STALEMATE

Meanwhile, at a time when the country is in desperate need of fresh ideas, one might think that a liberal party would be in the perfect position to step forward and offer solutions. Instead SzDSz is hopelessly split between its economic and social liberal factions. Numerous leadership elections have been held for both its party and parliamentary group, which always end with 50-50 stalemates. There have also been proven cases of rigging in one of these votes. The parliamentary group is led by an economic liberal and the party itself by a social liberal. While the Liberals fight on and try to maintain a degree of dignity, the party is polling well below the 5% threshold required to retain its place in parliament and may drop from being Hungary's third party to fifth or even sixth place in the European elections. The party, which was very close to being Hungary's largest in the early 1990s, has now lost all credibility and it seems highly unlikely that it will find a way to recover.

There is some small hope for liberalism and for political reform in Hungary, in the shape of a new party called Politics Can Be Different (LMP), which has been formed by a combination of environmentalist pressure groups and former members of SzDSz. It is also believed to have the support of Hungary's independent president, László Sólyom. The party will be fighting the European elections and has already attracted a number of well known figures to its ranks. It is promoting itself as a Green Liberal party and has also reached out to the country's large expatriate community for help and support. Only time will tell if it succeeds but anyone who can offer a serious alternative to the parties that have collectively taken Hungary into this mess must have a fighting chance.

Howard Cohen is a member of the Liberator collective and a former Liberal Democrat parliamentary candidate. He has lived and worked in Hungary for the last four years

KINGDOM OF PORK

Like other rich countries, Israel increasingly depends on a semi-visible community of migrant workers, says Vivienne Jackson, who volunteered with a workers' rights body there

Can you imagine who lives in Israel? And the Occupied Territories? Almost immediately you'd think solely in terms of Jews and Arabs, or Israelis and Palestinians.

However, a walk around Tel Aviv's central bus station soon shows that, like so many other relatively wealthy states, Israel is a home, if temporary, to people from all over the world.

'Kingdom of Pork' is precisely what the Israeli state does not aim to be, but such is the name of the very first shop that you'll see as you alight from a shared taxi at Israel's largest transport hub.

Some of Israel's new residents are people who have come to work. Others are escaping persecution from nearby East African states, not far over Israel's south-west borders.

Further down the road, if it's a nice day or a Sunday, groups of workers and refugees hang around or play football in the local park. The local boulevard, Neve Sha'anun Street, boasts a collection of shops that meet the practical needs of workers – laundrettes, mobile phone stores, pubs – and also others with a distinctly more seedy orientation. It's hard to guess where the people thronging the street are from, because there are so many possibilities.

NO-GO ZONE

The whole area around the central bus station has been described to me by many Israelis as an almost 'no-go' zone. This includes one friend who had been in the airforce several years ago. He told me that he found the unfamiliarity of the situation deeply unsettling: "I arrived back from the army, full of confidence, and when I waited at the central bus station, I felt more nervous than I had in Gaza." Of those few Israelis who are hanging out here, a visible proportion is down on its luck, or high on drugs.

In the Israeli workplace, the links between foreign workers' nationality and job role are fairly straightforward. Thai men work in agriculture, Romanian and Chinese men in construction. These were jobs that were mainly held by Palestinians from the Occupied Territories before the first Intifada. A couple of years after the military conquest of Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem in 1967, Israel decided to allow Palestinians from the Occupied Territories to take up employment as day workers inside 'Green Line' Israel (the armistice line of 1949). By the mid-1980s, one-third of the West Bank labour force and one-half of the Gazan labour force was working in Israel, many illegally. The Israeli economy, according to some academics, became profoundly dependent on extremely cheap labour. At night, the Palestinian workers went home to their villages. As non-citizens of Israel, Palestinians from the Occupied Territories did not receive social benefits linked to their

work. Nevertheless, they paid the same paycheck deductions as Israelis, on the basis that Israeli labour should not be priced out of the market.

Came the first Intifada, and the borders between Israel and the Occupied Territories were increasingly sealed off. Closing the borders was also a measure to deal with public concern over bombs within Israel. Some argue that the closures were also intended to deal with high unemployment in Israel at this time. While to this day, several Palestinians I've met sneak through the barriers or have quietly gained permits to work, Israeli bosses found the Palestinian labour force increasingly unpredictable, as checkpoints and closures took a toll on commuting. However, entreaties from the government to Israeli citizens to go back to the fields and building sites had little impact. Newly arrived ex-USSR Jewish migrants also shunned such jobs. The clamour of construction and agricultural bosses for an injection of labour from overseas was heeded eventually, and the government issued increasing numbers of permits for migrant workers from 1993 onwards.

The Israeli state's wish to keep Palestinians out of the economy roughly coincided with new neoliberal measures to scale down public services. Thus the female face of the foreign migrant worker in Israel emerged; the live-in careworker for elderly and disabled people, most likely to come from the Philippines. Other careworkers come from other South Asian countries, such as India and Nepal. A number are men, as some religious Jews prefer same-gender care.

UNKNOWN NUMBERS

No-one really knows how many foreign migrant workers there are today in Israel, not least because many are undocumented. Estimates range from between 85,000-100,000 documented workers and around 150,000 undocumented workers. Visas for work are time-limited. Careworkers get around four years, and three months to earn back the money that they've mostly likely borrowed. This goes to pay agency fees to get to Israel, send some money home to families, and hopefully have some left over to invest at home in the future. Teresa from the Philippines tells me about the typical financial worries she and her friends suffer: "How can you budget? You send to your family, you give the money to your lender and whatever... but the salary, it's too hard to divide to budget, because we're supposed to pay immediately the money to stop the interest... sometimes we suffer, suffer here and even the family in the Philippines suffer. We cannot send money sometimes because we prioritise our debt."

The difficulties that foreign workers face have been well documented by Kav La Oved, a leading workers' rights NGO in Israel. While Israeli labour law is fairly good in

theory, enforcement is poor, they've told me. Typical problems include employers withholding wages or benefits from workers, not paying workers in a timely fashion, the illegal retention of passports, and sexual harassment. Some work rights progress has been made. The Israeli High Court overturned the original system, similar to indentured labour conditions, where workers were bound to one employer and sacrificed their visa if they quit an exploitative job. Some workers tell me that they will never make their life in Israel. Some accept that Israel will never want them on a long-term basis, and are looking to move on to Canada or the UK, where they expect better prospects for a longer visa and improved pay.

Yet despite the hardships of money worries, and the capriciousness of the Israeli migration system, some migrant workers have constructed lives in Israel, whether intentionally or otherwise. On a local street characterized by street hawkers, felaful shops, makeshift bars, strip joints and moneychangers, the iron-barred door of an unprepossessing building is unlocked for me.

ENGLISH, HEBREW AND TAGALOG

A flight of stairs – past yet another gate – leads into a bright and clean set of rooms. Here a strong community of Philippine workers assembles on Friday and Saturday nights to pray, a charismatic congregation praising Jesus in prayer and in tongues, in English, Hebrew and Tagalog. During the day, the worship room is transformed into a kindergarten for scores of children of Philippine workers, usually women. The room is bright, the pastors become child workers, and the Philippine children are multilingual. One six-year-old asks me in Hebrew: 'Does your Mummy have work? Does she have enough work?'

Elsewhere, in the northern city of Haifa, an evangelical Christian community is celebrating its church chapter's fifth birthday in a central city location. The stage carries both the Philippine and Israeli flags, and both anthems are sung. The mood is high, but tears are shed during the prayers. Later, one worker, Meribel tells me that these emotional moments are signs of workers 'refreshing' themselves – expressing the pains of being parted from children or the problems people face at work.

Nevertheless, some workers tell me they love Israel. Certain Christian workers talk to me about the place that the Holy Land has always had in their dreams and hearts. Some believe that God protects Israel. Some have fallen in love with Israelis and will stay with their partners. Others have children in school in Israel, and talk about the choice their children will have to make on reaching legal maturity; to stay in a country where they are not recognized as part of the core ethnic group or to go to live in a country where they have never visited. These children are eligible to fight in the Israeli army. At a mothers' group, women talk about the results of the Israeli election, and whether 'Bibi' Netanyahu will make a good prime minister. As mothers of

*“Several
Palestinians
I've met sneak
through the
barriers or have
quietly gained
permits to work”*

children born in Israel, they have the right to vote in local Tel Aviv elections, if not in general elections, and they are keenly interested in politics.

For others, such as the Thai workers in agriculture, the openings to find communities or make connections in Israel are almost non-existent. Living in provided temporary accommodation close to farm fields, and usually in remote rural areas away from contact with Israelis, Thai workers have little opportunity to meet Israelis. They are often too frightened of losing their jobs to complain about their work and living conditions,

specialist translation workers tell me.

With the recent change of government in Israel, the foreign workers are unsure of what will lie ahead for them. Noises were made before the election about cutting down the numbers of construction and agricultural workers.

Netanyahu, forming the next government of Israel, was against allowing more foreign workers into Israel in the 1990s, preferring a return to Palestinian labour. It is hard to imagine Israel providing the financial incentives to encourage Israelis to become farm workers. Possibly more credible is a citizens' return to construction work. It is near impossible to conceive of Israel today without the public sight of elderly people being assisted by migrant workers, sitting next to them on park benches, or helping them onto a bus. Nevertheless, even long-term foreign workers are hedging their bets. Thelma, who came here from the Philippines over a decade ago and who tells me she loves Israel, says: "You can never know, with the policies, when they change politics they change policies. You cannot say 'tomorrow is okay here'."

Vivienne Jackson volunteered with Kav LaOved in Israel in 2008. She is a PhD candidate at the University of Bristol looking at foreign migrant workers in Israel, and has previously acted as volunteer monitor in the occupied territories for Ecumenical Accompaniment in Palestine (Liberator 302)

IT'S TIME TO KILL TRIDENT

It costs a fortune and has no use, so will the Liberal Democrats now oppose Trident replacement, asks David Grace

In 2006, a senior retired diplomat who saw no point in keeping Trident nevertheless commented that neither the Liberal Democrats nor any other party would give up nuclear weapons because it would not be an election winner.

He also observed that there was no public debate on the subject, because the parties were not prepared to have it.

On this point he was wrong. The Tories didn't debate it, although Matthew Parris urged them to. The Labour conference didn't debate it because it was ruled out of order. Only the Liberal Democrats debated the option of not replacing Trident.

Instead, we decided by a narrow majority to postpone the decision to 2014. Our 2008 conference added that we should put Trident on the table at the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Conference. So far, so measured, so cautious. That same diplomat advised that we should be clear and aggressive, not subtle. Sadly we ignored that advice. But the world has changed.

Astonishingly, an American president has changed it. Barack Obama, speaking in Prague on 5 April, broke the taboo, as he has broken others: "...as the only nuclear power to have used a nuclear weapon, the United States has a moral responsibility to act... So today, I state clearly and with conviction America's commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons."

Nor is this just rhetoric, an accusation Obama's detractors often throw at him. Obama and Dmitry Medvedev, the Russian president, have already begun negotiations on further reductions in strategic offensive arms.

Even Gordon Brown has taken up the Liberal Democrat suggestion of putting Trident on the negotiating table but in characteristic Brownian prose that allows him to change his mind later – a non-committal commitment: "...as soon as it becomes useful for our arsenal to be included in a broader negotiation, Britain stands ready to participate and to act."

Who will decide when it "becomes useful"? Not parliament anyway. Despite Margaret Beckett's assurances in March 2007 that parliament would get another chance to debate Trident before the main spending begins, the government now plans to conclude the next stage, known as the Initial Gate decision in September 2009, during the parliamentary recess, and to update parliament on progress only after Initial Gate.

Our own defence spokesman, Nick Harvey, has now outlined three options:

1) Reduce the workload and so extending the life of the existing Vanguard submarines;

2) Adapt other delivery systems – like Astute submarines – to carry a more modest nuclear capability; or

3) Give up our nuclear capability, but retain nuclear technology with a contingency plan to mobilise it quickly should the need ever arise – which is the strategy pursued by Germany and Japan among others.

Isn't it time to be a bit braver? Options 1 and 2 scarcely signal a commitment to fulfil our promise under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to negotiate in good faith to get rid of nukes. Option 2 could be interpreted as a new system, which would be contrary to the treaty.

The world has changed in other ways too. As Alistair Darling's too-little-too-late budget has made clear, Britain is in recession with more than two million people unemployed, a public deficit of £175bn and the probability of further cuts in public spending. Is now the time to be considering spending at least £76bn on Trident replacement?

Meanwhile, British forces suffer shortages of vital equipment and operate at the limits of their capability. This overstretch has led to a crisis in recruitment and retention. The black hole in the defence budget is estimated at £15bn. What's the answer? It isn't rocket science, is it?

As Field Marshal Lord Bramall and generals Lord Ramsbotham and Sir Hugh Beach wrote to the Times (16 January): "Nuclear weapons have shown themselves to be completely useless as a deterrent to the threats and scale of the violence we currently face, or are likely to face – particularly international terrorism... our independent deterrent has become virtually irrelevant except in the context of domestic politics... rather than perpetuating Trident, the case is much stronger for funding our armed forces with what they need to meet the commitments actually laid upon them. In the present economic climate it may well prove impossible to afford both."

Nick Clegg persuaded the party to be radical on taxation, shifting the burden to the better off. Can we also be radical on defence? Nick wants a national debate about what the state can and cannot afford in the future. What better way to start that debate than to ask, "Can we afford Trident?" Dare we answer that question with a resounding 'no'? Should we? Can we? Yes we can.

David Grace is a Liberal Democrat in Yeovil and was one of the main anti-Trident campaigners in the 2007 debate

CUTS CANDIDATE

Dear Liberator,

What a very odd article by Felix Dodds (Reaching for the Summit, Liberator 332) explaining why he wishes people in the third world to continue to live in poverty.

He quotes Ghandi: "God forbid that India should ever take to industrialisation after the manner of the West". Happily the people of India have ignored this one of the Mahatma's teachings, meaning that hundreds of millions more Indians now enjoy adequate food, clean water, health care and all the other benefits of advancing economies.

Of course, the world faces lots of problems but the way to deal with them is to use science and technology along with the benefits of free trade to enable the poorer people in the world to improve their standard of living. Felix refers us to the website of his organisation Stakeholder Forum, which I recommend to Liberator readers for an example of how in thrall organisations like the UN are to pressure groups of self-appointed quangocrats.

On the bright side, a lot of this nonsense is funded by the British government – it sounds like a good place to start when the Liberal Democrats are looking for spending cuts.

Simon McGrath
Wimbledon

STAND AGAINST THE BNP

Dear Liberator,

I sympathise totally with Alan Bullion's sense of frustration (Liberator 332) that Swanley's inability to field a candidate in the recent by-election that sadly saw a BNP councillor returned. Surely the Liberal Democrats in each region should have a clear strategy in place to deal with this sort of situation, which is bound to recur?

Experience in London has convinced me that the Liberal Democrats should always field a candidate in contests that the BNP are fighting hard, as I have lost count of the times someone has said to me on the doorstep, "Well, it will either be you or the BNP!" (Because they feel let down by Labour, and hate the Tories). But there needs to be some mechanism in place to help local parties that are weak or derelict in the relevant wards to get a candidate nominated.

Jonathan Fryer
Lib Dem Euro-candidate for London

LETTERS



Modern Liberty and the Limits of Government by Charles Fried Norton 2006 £11.99

It is good to read books with titles like this. Even if they contain nothing new, they confirm all of our prejudices, in Fried's case, most eloquently. After all, do you read John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* every year? Fried, who astonishingly perhaps to a British audience, was solicitor general to Ronald Reagan, has a line that would be familiar to Mill but the anecdotes and concerns are of the early 21st rather than mid-19th century. So this is classical Liberalism with a modern coat.

Fried is probably not well known here. Stateside he caused a minor ripple in switching his support from John McCain to Barack Obama late in October 2008, but this had more to do with Sarah Palin than an objection to McCain per se. Although he has been at Harvard Law School since 1999, most of his published work predates this, including his study of the relationship between Kant, Rawls and Nozick (Right and Wrong).

This puts him firmly in the Liberal camp as a thinker and, better still, a thinker who lives in the real world rather than academia. His politics may be conservative, but I would have to defer to American colleagues on that.

Not to frighten the rabbits, most of his examples come from Quebecois Canada (or Wal-Mart free Vermont). These case studies show above all what a tangled web satisfying the

day-to-day problems that we face becomes. One man's freedom (as is known) can be another's tyranny, especially once delivered into the hands of public officials without the remit of common sense.

Vermont chose not to have out-of-town shopping malls so as to preserve its traditional high streets. It sounds quite attractive, but obviously deprives one of choice between the two. But does the shopping mall drive the high street out of business and thereby deprive choice? Vermont is a relatively small state, so does it matter? The answer has to be 'yes' and its resolution one of the accepted shortcomings of democracy, tempered with common sense and a vigilant Liberal body politic.

Stewart Rayment

Decency & Disorder: the Age of Cant 1789-1837 by Ben Wilson Faber and Faber 2008 £12.99

An account of how a society in which debauchery was widespread gradually became restrained and hypocritical. Wilson relates the accounts and campaigns of Patrick Colquhoun and John Bowles, how they met with hostility and resistance but gradually won power as opinion formers. Drunkenness and disorder were widespread and a certain degree of disorder was tolerated as a means of letting off steam.

Wilson contrasts the reformers of behaviour such as Bowles and Colquhoun with the reformers of society such as Francis Place, who lived through the period and was a keen social observer who contributed dissenting views to various committees.

Reformers of behaviour held the view that the lower orders would only be interested in spending money on drink if their living standards were improved, whereas Place held the view that sobriety

was more prevalent when there was a prospect of an improvement in conditions, and was himself an example of his theories.

However, many of the brewers and magistrates had a vested interest in encouraging excessive drinking. The moralisers were initially held in contempt by both the establishment and the masses.

Wilson shows how the theory of utilitarian political economy gradually took over, as did the idea of the undeserving poor, resulting in regulation and the workhouse, bringing in the kind of regulation that aided work in factories as the ideas of evangelical zealots won over the establishment.

Giving money to beggars was regarded as being harmful. In particular, the Vagrant Act of 1824 gave magistrates and watchmen unlimited powers to clear the streets, including restricting popular entertainment. Numerous societies for reform arose, including the RSPCA. However, it was only the forms of blood sport enjoyed by the masses that became outlawed whilst fishing, shooting and hunting were left alone.

By the end of the period, cant had won. Beer became heavily taxed, resulting in people turning to gin rather than sobriety. Place carried on as a social reformer despite having to sit in an uneasy and junior partnership with people whose aims he despised. The reaction against Victorian hypocrisy continues to this day.

Andrew Hudson

Religulous Dir Larry Charles Momentum Pictures 2009

Seeing this film makes me glad to live in a country where the main religious institution is the relatively tolerant Church of England.

Out there in the rest of the world, comedian Bill Maher has met a gallery of religious grotesques who, he argues, would be merely funny were it not for their strong influence over politics.

Comedy documentary is a rare genre – Michael Moore’s films are probably the best known – and hard to do well. Lean too far one way and



REVIEWS

it loses its point, too far the other and it loses the audience.

Maher’s personality carries what could have become an earnest diatribe, and should not just gratify non-believers but also make open-minded religious people think, not perhaps about their belief but about how some fellow-believers interpret theirs.

This is a polemic, so don’t go looking for balance. There are no members of religious organisations here who do charitable work or disaster relief.

Maher finds a Puerto Rican preacher who happens to share the first name Jesus and supposes himself to be the new messiah accumulating a cult following and considerable wealth on the strength of this.

The man’s surname is Miranda. Thus Maher suggests he is in fact not the reincarnation of Christ but of the singer Carmen Miranda, observing: “Maybe you should have fruit on your head. Instead of in your head.”

He also meets Jeremiah Cumming, founder and pastor of the Amazing Life World Outreach, and a former singer in the soul group Harold Melvin and the Bluenotes.

Cumming likens himself to St Paul (despite the latter never having performed with Harold Melvin, as a subtitle reminds us) and justifies his obvious opulence by stating that Jesus meant him to be rich and that Christ always wore “fine linen”. Maher cuts away to the “eye of a needle” quote.

Maher also finds Mormons who have undergone social ostracism for leaving their church – no small thing in Utah – ultra-orthodox Jews who devote themselves to inventing preposterous contraptions that allow their co-religionists to evade Sabbath restrictions, and Muslims extremists.

There is little about Hindus or Buddhists, presumably because they are scarce in America, which is where of course Maher is on the most fertile

ground.

He visits the Creation Theme Park in Kansas, where evolution is ‘disproved’ by animatronic dinosaurs, who placidly munch their dinners alongside animatronic people having all been ‘made’ in the same week.

In Florida, he attends the Holy Land Theme Park, a place visited by the sort of Americans who voted for Bush, who take tourist photographs as ‘Jesus’ is crucified on the hour amid copious amounts of, presumably, tomato ketchup. ‘Jesus’ tells us his role means he is frequently recognised in restaurants.

The most reasonable views of religion come from Father George Coyne, of the Vatican Observatory, who cheerily points out that the observatory is not run “just so we can get out there are baptise the extra-terrestrials before the Mormons get them”.

Modern science came long after the Bible was written, he says. “How could there be science in the scriptures. The scriptures are not teaching science.”

The film is directed by Larry Charles, who also made the film *Borat*, and has similar fun at the expense of the credulous inhabitants of the American heartlands, and a few other places too.

Maher ends by asking why the rest of us should risk being blown up, or slaughtered in wars, by people prepared to kill for what he sees as an absurdity.

Most of Europe seems to have come to an unspoken settlement in which religion is a private matter and faith groups can seek to influence politics but are at one remove from it. Elsewhere, things can look very different.

Mark Smulian

The Boat That Rocked Dir Richard Curtis Working Title 2009

As Easter 1964 dawned, Beatlemania was in full swing and British pop music was about to launch an unprecedented wave of creativity that would carry the world before it. Not that the BBC knew or cared, broadcasting less than six hours a week of such music.

Everything changed that weekend. Radio Caroline was in international waters in the North Sea giving the people what they wanted, soon joined by Caroline North, the slickly professional Radio London and a dozen-odd other stations.

The pirates quickly gained upwards of 25m listeners of most ages and destroyed the BBC monopoly. By the time the Labour government silenced them, legal commercial radio was a matter of time.

One factor that provoked the government to outlaw them was the death of Radio City owner Reg Calvert, who was shot dead in a business dispute by former Liberal candidate Oliver Smedley, who successfully pleaded self-defence.

There is enough in pirate radio for a comedy film, or a David versus Goliath drama, or a serious documentary on music, cultural and broadcasting history, and all with a tremendous soundtrack.

Curtis delivers none of these. The film is undemandingly enjoyable but rarely 'laugh out loud', centred on an uninvolved plot in which a teenager suspects various Radio Rock personnel of being his real father.

A subplot sees a caricature government minister and his senior civil servant plan the pirates' demise, believing them to corrupting young morals.

The real-life villain of the piece was Tony Benn. He closed the pirates on 14 August 1967 by outlawing their advertising and now claims to have badgered a reluctant BBC to set up a substitute in Radio 1, originally a lifeless imitation of Radio London.

Launched into complete illegality that night by Johnnie Walker's emotional 'Caroline Continues' speech, the originator sailed on, and off, until the 1990s and is now a legal internet station.

That may have been counted among the 299 music stations that film's closing sequence reminds us now broadcast music round the clock.

It does not seek to make serious points, but an obvious one arises from pirate radio. If enough people want something that the state refuses to make legally available, be it music, alcohol or drugs, someone will find a way to supply it outside the law, and that someone will rarely be as benign as the pirates.

Mark Smulian

Intolerance: Divided Societies on Trial by Brian Harris Wildy, Simmonds & Hill 2008 £19.99

Brian Harris brings us a small anthology of trials – mostly English and American – demonstrating man's inhumanity to man. In particular, Harris focuses on whether the trial was fair or not (frequently concluding that, in terms of the judiciary of the day, the trial was fair – of Oscar Wilde for example, whom it is generally regarded was actually given ample time to escape had he chosen to take it).

There is a paradox in the cases of John Brown (of mouldering body fame) and Lord George Gordon (of riots); whose intolerance is of whom? And Georges-Jacques Danton – one almost wonders why he is here at all. The clearest misuse of justice, the Salem 'Witches' and clearest miscarriage – Dame Alice Lisle, in the aftermath of the Monmouth rebellion. Harris goes to some extent to revise our assessment of Judge Jeffreys, but the judge invariably speaks for himself.

The 'Chatterley' Trial and, stateside, that of Johnny Scopes, demonstrate that the law can be an ass. But then in Hartlepool they did hang the monkey. Scopes is one of those instances where Harris shows we need to be ever vigilant. The states of the USA, as we are seldom aware, though they are one working model for our federalism, have considerable autonomy in their internal affairs.

In 1925, the State of Tennessee passed the Butler Act, which read: "It shall be unlawful for any teacher... supported by public school funds... to teach any theory that denies the story

of the Divine Creation of man as taught in the Bible, and to teach instead that man is descended from a lower order of animals." Similar cases percolate through the American courts from time to time – as recently as 2004 'Intelligent Design' was knocked on the head. But beware, certain British Conservatives are attracted by the relationship between certain (not all) Republican and fundamentalist Christians in the states. There are small voices for Creationism this side of the pond, so watch out.

Stewart Rayment

Boy In Darkness and other stories by Mervyn Peake Peter Owen 2007 £9.95

Dark, very dark. Darker than the deepest recess of Gormenghast. Boy In Darkness is an incident (or is it a dream?) in the life of Titus Groan not recorded in that trilogy. Whatever, it captures the boy's need for freedom and the spirit to obtain it. Does the goat appear a later, very sad story? The tale, a present, was originally published alongside John Wyndham's 'Consider Her Ways', a future through a hallucination, and William Golding's 'Envoy Extraordinary', an anachronistic past.

However, Peake's was not always tortured; his sense of humour bubbles over in 'I bought a Palm Tree' and 'The Connoisseurs'.

If all this isn't enough, the Chris Beetles Gallery has generously made available several of Peake's works to illuminate to book.

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Monday

Sad news arrives this morning as I learn of the death of my old friend Sir Clement Freud. I recall speaking for him at his by-election in the Isle of Ely, supported by his faithful companion Henry the bloodhound. Indeed, there were those in the constituency party who thought that Henry would make the better candidate, but he gave a ruff performance at the selection meeting and Cle carried the day. Be that as it may, I am told they still talk of my speech in the Fens. In it I observed what an irony it was that the Liberal candidate had won fame on the wireless by avoiding deviation in his conversation when his grandfather had become famous by talking of nothing else.

Tuesday

Spring has come to Rutland. Budget day finds me strolling on the quayside at Oakham, and I reflect upon the benefits brought by Free Trade. Once we scanned these waters for Viking longships or German U-boats; now the world's shipping arrives crammed with the good things of the season: wheels of Stilton and toppling towers of Melton Mowbray pork pies; tender asparagus from the Vale of Evesham and plump sticks of rhubarb from the West Riding of Yorkshire; richly patterned carpets from Persia and peppermint rock from Hunstanton and Herne Bay. As I remarked to our own Vince 'High-Voltage' Cable the other day, whatever economic problems we face, the world must never again descend into protectionism.

Wednesday

Like many of my readers, I demonstrated in London during the G20 summit. There are those who criticised us for lacking an agreed programme for change or even a common set of demands, so let me make it clear why I, for one, was marching through the capital that day. I marched because the global financial and economic systems are in crisis. I marched because current economic policies and institutions have overseen a system scarred by high levels of poverty and inequality, and are contributing to an environmental catastrophe. I marched because we have still not achieved proportional representation for Westminster elections, site value rating or a knighthood for the saintly Norman Baker. I marched because Honeysuckle Weeks is no longer on the electric television, because of Twenty20 cricket, because people now call railway stations "train stations". I marched because of Jonathan Ross, because schoolboys no longer wear short trousers, because you cannot get a cooked breakfast on trains any more. I marched because I can no longer patronise the Woolworth's Pick 'n' Mix counter (even if I don't tell Nanny), because Tom Croft was omitted from the British Lions touring party to South Africa, because you don't get proper wet fish shops any more. I hope this will silence my critics.

Thursday

I was shocked at the police behaviour in London. Whilst I did not suffer the worst of it myself – I should strongly advise the Metropolitan force not to try to kettle me – what I saw made a sorry contrast with what I am used to in Rutland. Here we insist that each village is provided with a red-faced, jolly policeman, who is supplied with his own police house and

Lord Bonkers' Diary

spends his time alternately clipping unruly youngsters around the ear and helping old ladies across the road (often, it has to be admitted, whether they have no particular wish to cross). The result is that we have not only a low crime rate, but also some of the best-behaved children and fittest old ladies in Europe.

Friday

Having complimented we Rutlanders on our low crime rate yesterday, I learn this morning that there is a prison riot going on in the county. Let me add at once that few if any of the felons

involved will prove to have come from hereabouts when the inquiry is held. It has always seemed to me a mistake to accept prisoners from other counties when, because of the policing strategy mentioned above (together with judicious use of the Jack Straw Memorial Reform School, Dungeness, and the success of the Reverend Hughes Church Lads' Ping Pong Club), we live in such a crime-free paradise. I fear that if there is one thing in which there should not be free trade, it is the human criminal. For what would happen if people stopped breaking the law? The answer is clear: the companies running the bridewells would agitate for innocent people to be gaoled to keep them in business. Indeed, I wonder if this is not the reason why this government has passed so many new laws. If you look into it, I expect you will find that the prison operators are generous funders of the Labour Party. Be that as it may, I post pickets of gamekeepers on every approach to the Hall, and ensure that they are armed with the stoutest orchard doughties, in case someone escapes.

Saturday

Today sees the first match of the season for Lord Bonkers' XI (if one overlooks our traditional Easter tour of the Holy Land) and upon having the curtains opened for me I am pleased to observe that the weather has held. I waste no time in rising and am soon outside supervising Meadowcroft as he mows the pitch (which he describes as "green as a Fenian's frog a-munching lettuce"). Our opponents are a powerful team drawn from the Women's Liberal Federation (or whatever they call themselves these days), but accurate seam bowling by Professor David Starkey wins the day. As ever, Miss Fearn's teas are a highlight of the day. I find even the Credit Crunch looks less menacing when viewed over the brim of a large Victoria sponge.

Sunday

One can take this ecumenical business too far. Upon arriving at St Asquith's, I find that the Revd Hughes, perhaps tired after his exertions in the outfield yesterday (which included a fine running catch to dismiss Baroness Thomas), has elected to put his feet up and invite Father Alton to preach the sermon. I am not sure that giving it both barrels against birth control and self-abuse is quite the right idea and he has rather lost his audience long before he reached his peroration. Still, he proves a decent enough cove when we knock back the communion wine afterwards and he lets slip that, what with Tony Blair and Ann Widdecombe, he is thinking of seeking political asylum with the Strict Baptists.

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