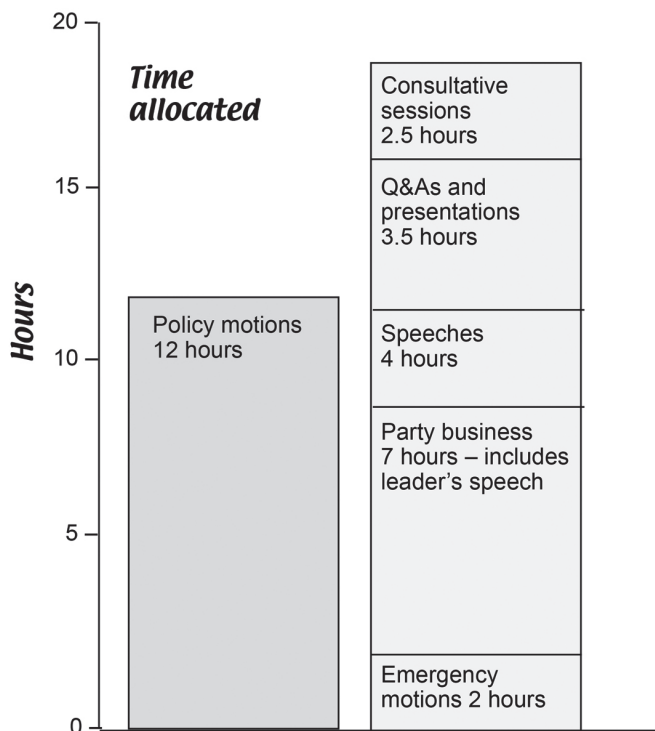


liberator

Welcome to Birmingham!!



“I know that we will have many passionate debates about the policies and direction of our party and the government.

“That is as it should be; that is what Liberal Democrat conference is all about.”

*Nick Clegg, in foreword
to Birmingham
conference agenda*

- 🔥 Why *Facing the Future* failed - Ed Randall and Simon Titley
- 🔥 Taking on Britain's greedy rich - Matthew Oakeshott
- 🔥 Responding to riots - Claire Tyler, Brian Haley and David Boyle
- 🔥 I'm delivering on green policy - Chris Huhne
- 🔥 Time for 'Plan C' - Prateek Buch
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☞ welcomes written contributions on relevant topics, up to 1800 words.

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COMMENTARY

CLEGG'S CLAIRVOYANCE

Most people had forgotten about Nick Clegg's pre-election prediction that a Conservative victory would lead to riots, until they erupted in August.

The reasons he cited – essentially the effects of spending cuts and unemployment on poorer people – did not spark the original riot, but certainly played their role in the subsequent ones as young people who felt they had little to lose played a substantial role in the disorder.

So if Clegg was right about the malign effects of austerity in April 2010, can he do anything to limit them now?

He has been at pains in the last year to stress that the Liberal Democrats did not win the last election and that this is not a Lib Dem government, but one in which the Lib Dems can limit the impact of what the Tories would have done if left to themselves.

That is no doubt true, but voters are rarely interested in what might have happened; they are interested instead in what they can see around them.

And what they can see is that the coalition's economic policy is two-pronged: cut public spending, then hope (in the style of Dickens's Mr Micawber) that something will turn up of its own accord to make the economy prosper.

This has been the substance of George Osborne's 'Plan A', in whose wake the Lib Dems have been dragged along.

So far, we have seen almost zero growth (and not in the benign sense that environmentalists once wished to achieve), collapses in business and consumer confidence, and a continued lending strike by the banks.

Suggestions abound as to what the government could and should do (and some are to be found in this issue of *Liberator*), and there will be judgements to be made on what is economically viable and politically possible within the coalition.

Bill Clinton's maxim that elections are won on the "the economy, stupid" has seldom been wrong, and the next election will turn on this.

The drumbeat of Labour's "too far, too fast" slogan is growing louder. It is a dishonest message, since Labour would have cut almost as deeply as has the coalition, but it is a simple and seductive one if voters continue to see around them economic misery inflicted for no discernable purpose.

Quite simply, if the coalition is allowed to carry on cutting and hoping for the best, the story it will be able to tell at the next election will be both inadequate and unconvincing.

THE SLIPPERY SLOPE

As our cover shows, the amount of time devoted to policy motions at the Lib Dem conference in Birmingham has sunk below the halfway mark at 12 hours, against 19 for everything else.

And of the motions on the agenda, only that on work capability assessments is likely to cause the government any difficulty if passed, though it must be said that it was brave of the Federal Conference Committee to include the perennially controversial and misinterpreted subject of drug policy reform.

Since there is hardly anyone on the FCC who could reasonably be described as obsessed with currying favour with the party leadership, the reasons must be sought elsewhere.

The last proper Liberal Assembly in 1987 started on a Saturday and finished on a Friday morning, with almost the entire proceedings given over to policy debates.

As the Lib Dems have grown in political size and influence, the time devoted to conference in total, and to debates within that, has shrunk.

It still leaves the Lib Dem conference a vastly different event from the fan club rallies held by the Conservative and Labour parties, as anyone who has attended either can attest.

But the danger is that the Lib Dems are sliding unconsciously towards that sort of event as a kind of group-think takes over: lots of us hold important positions and therefore want to spend less time at conference; we are in power at local (and now national) level so do not want boats rocked or embarrassing things said; we have a 'shop window' on television so let's fill it with people promoting messages determined by the leadership rather than by people disagreeing with each other.

The problem is not that some malign group of people is seeking to neuter conference, but rather that there isn't such a group. If there were, it could be countered. Instead, there is just a prevalent state of mind about what a 'serious' party should be doing and how it should conduct itself.

At the end of that road lies the Tory and Labour conferences, events of little interest to anyone except commercial lobbyists and exhibitors.

It's true that delegates are allowed a little more off the leash at spring conference, and that some of the rubbish submitted for debate at Birmingham may have left the FCC with less choice of decent motions than it would wish.

But look at the other party conferences and consider. If the Lib Dem conference ever came to resemble them, who would want to attend?

RADICAL BULLETIN

SPECIAL SUBJECT, THE BLEEDIN' OBVIOUS

MPs, peers and the Federal Policy Committee have been treated to a highly secret presentation on 'polling and strategy' from Richard Reeves, Nick Clegg's £85,000-a-year special adviser.

This document is so secret that Liberator, naturally, has a copy. And it reveals, well, nothing startling. Its provenance, though, tells us something about the coalition and how the party is struggling to define itself.

Reeves's paper kicks off by saying that party's long-term strategy is to show that coalition government works, that it delivers Liberal Democrat policies and to assert a distinct, *popular* (our emphasis) Liberal Democrat identity.

So far, so ordinary. But next comes the aspiration to "own the political centre ground: competence with a conscience".

Oh dear. As Liberator and many others have repeatedly explained, a party cannot inhabit 'the centre' without allowing its position and message to be defined by other parties to its left and right. Seeking 'the centre' condemns the party to define itself by what it is not, rather than what it is.

The presentation then turned to looking at what voters care about, which by a long way was the economy, the NHS and education, with taxation a distant fifth behind immigration. The Lib Dems are not voters' first choice on any of these issues but get a decent showing on the economy and education, and are almost level with Labour on taxation.

There is then an interesting finding. Both soft Conservative and soft Labour voters give 'immigration' as one of the top three reasons for not having voted Lib Dem, which some might think suggests the Liberal Party's 1966 slogan "Which twin is the Tory?" still has some mileage in it.

In the polling cited, 29% of the party's previous vote has gone to Labour, with twice as many Lib Dem voters of 2010 favouring a coalition with Labour rather than the Tories, an interesting finding for the next election.

The problem is the conclusions drawn. A section on political positioning in 2011-15 asserts again that the party should be "neither left nor right", and uses the preposterous 'alarm clock Britain' slogan (a Reeves invention) to describe the people to whom the party should appeal.

Reeves proposes that the party should choose three 'big identity issues', which distinguish the Lib Dems and which should be 'broadcast'. A bit like the last election, in fact.

But Reeves then says there should be "many areas where it makes political sense to show unity with our

coalition partners partly because we want to show coalition works, but mostly because we want to reap maximum benefit on the doorstep". This presupposes that the coalition will do something popular between now and 2015, but the party should only 'tell' rather than 'broadcast' such achievements, Reeves advises.

Specialist issues that matter to the party, or certain groups of supporters, should be 'narrowcast', whatever that is, while "danger areas of potential differentiation that leave us politically exposed" should be 'whispered'. Immigration is a 'whisper' subject. Much good that will do when other parties choose to 'broadcast' it.

When these insights were presented to the party's MPs and peers, they were unaccountably underwhelmed. They also wondered where the underlying data came from, and rightly so as perplexed listeners learned, after Reeves's main presentation, that some came second-hand from the Tories. The Lib Dems can hardly afford polling nowadays, whereas the Tories can and occasionally toss Reeves a few morsels.

It didn't seem to occur to him, though it certainly did to the parliamentarians, that the Tories would toss only morsels to their own advantage. Presumably this is something to do with showing the coalition 'works'.

Reeves further startled listeners by quoting George Osborne as a source of advice on the party's predicament on tuition fees, which was to "walk away from the body".

What have things come to when the Lib Dem leader's main adviser draws on Tory poll data to devise the party's strategy, and cites the Tory chancellor as a source of wisdom?

THE COMPANY HE KEEPS

Some may be unimpressed by Reeves's strategic ideas, but others are in awe of his oratorical skills.

Indeed, he is European Business Speaker of the Year for 2007 and "widely regarded as one of the UK's most inspirational and fun business speakers," according to a speakers' agency with which he was formerly associated. His style, it says, involves "plenty of flipchart action," which sounds vaguely unseemly.

Reeves's career "spans business, the media, academia, central government and the non-profit sector," he has been described as "Britain's leading expert on workplace trends," co-authored a book *The 80 Minute MBA* and speaks on "happiness, the future of work, diversity and leadership". He has also found time to write an intellectual biography of John Stuart Mill.

All of which shows that Reeves is very bright indeed. What it does not show is how this background equips him to be in charge of the Liberal Democrats' political strategy.

ANSWERS ON A POSTCARD

Some curious oversight has meant that no-one from *Liberator* was invited to help decide what the party's key principles are.

These were due to be determined in early September, not by any normal organ of the party, but at a workshop run by president Tim Farron and Collette Dunkley, the party's new director of marketing.

The invitation, which has fallen into our hands, reads: "We would like to invite you to take part in a workshop to establish key principles and a clear and concise form of words to articulate who the Liberal Democrats are and what we offer. You have been personally chosen to take part as one of a small number of key representatives from different branches of the party."

And why might this event be needed? Well, "An internal survey has shown there is a lack of consistency about what we stand for. It is critical that we are all able to agree on and encapsulate the essence of the party, in as few words as possible, to allow effective and consistent long-term communications."

It was not stated on what basis attendees were chosen, or by whom, or why it took a survey to discover that the past year's events might mean there is lack of consistency in perceptions of the party.

The workshop was due to be 'facilitated' by Duncan Bruce, described as chief executive of something called *The Brand Conspiracy* and author of *Brand Enigma*.

Since entrusting the 2010 general election campaign to advertising industry people proved such a resounding success, the party has clearly decided to repeat this approach.

SOMETHING MUST BE DONE

There were many contenders for the keenly-sought award of the Mitcham and Morden Commemorative Gold Toilet for the worst motion submitted to this autumn's Lib Dem conference.

Islington competed hard with a motion on SEN education, which was a mere one paragraph long and sought to commit the party to support the outcome of a review, none of whose findings or consequences were explained.

Sir Graham Watson deserves some sort of award for a motion calling for the creation of a European public prosecutor. Perhaps in the current climate, the Sir Humphrey Appleby Award for Courageousness might do. The toilet, awarded at every conference since 1983's motion on the siting of public conveniences, is however off to Merseyside, where Garston and Halewood local party has tackled the subject of fair taxation.

A classic of the 'something must be done, but we're not sure quite what' approach to motion writing, it calls on the government to "look, as a matter of urgency, at those tax havens used to avoid tax and to ensure that, wherever possible, companies and individuals pay tax on a fair and equitable basis".

What else are tax havens used for, if not avoiding tax? It then swiftly moves on to say that interest should not be charged where wrong tax codes have been imposed "by the IRS" (sic).

And finally, "HMG is asked to look at the situation in relation to this element of taxation and to take appropriate action in correcting these injustices."

A COSTLY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM

Anyone at party conference in Birmingham with money to burn may decide to miss conference sessions to attend the 'Liberal Democrat Corporate Day'.

For £800, they can attend "panel debates, policy discussions and break-out sessions with ministers, external experts and key policy advisors". This bun fight would be "your opportunity to find out more about the Coalition Government and meet the key people who are building a better future for businesses in Britain".

If that works up an appetite, why not spend a mere £350 on the business dinner to be held "in a prestigious central Birmingham venue," a concept some might consider a contradiction in terms.

Instead of a minister, MP or even Nick Clegg himself, this repast will be hosted by chief executive Chris Fox, a strange choice since, whatever his other merits, Fox is neither a public figure nor obviously among the "people that matter" promised to diners.

Tables for ten come in at £3,500 but for £5,000 one can dine at a 'bespoke premium table'. And what might a 'bespoke' table be? Possibly the table converses with diners to save MPs the trouble of listening to opinionated bores who know how to run businesses and so think they could also run the country. Or maybe business leaders are allowed to carve their initials in them.

That lot will be followed by a massive piss-up, sorry, an "informal and lively drinks reception" provided by the Treasurer's Forum, members of which get an invite to the leader's reception, run by the Leader's Forum.

Help is at hand in an obscure corner of the party website for those puzzled by this plethora of 'forums'. They are for those with "a deep interest in current affairs and politics" and provide "unique and enjoyable experiences" (no, not that sort, calm down).

For £25,000 a year, one can join the Leader's

COME AND SEE US AT THE LIBERATOR STALL IN BIRMINGHAM!

Security hassles at Lib Dem conference nowadays mean it is impractical for *Liberator* to continue to take its whole print run there and distribute copies to all subscribers present from the stall.

Therefore, for the first time, we have posted the conference issue to subscribers in advance, together with renewal notices where needed.

Please do still come and see us on our stall to renew your subscription, talk about the magazine's content, buy the new edition of the *Liberator* Songbook, and drip unattributable gossip into our ears!

Forum with “an international roster of inspiring guest speakers drawn from the worlds of business, politics and the arts,” who will provide “some of the most memorable evenings one could hope to have”. Again, calm down please. There is at least no claim that the £25,000 buys an audience with Clegg.

Membership of the Treasurer’s Forum comes at a mere £7,500 at the ‘executive level’, five grand for the ‘corporate level’ and £2,000 for the cheapskate ‘enterprise level’.

It is mainly for those “with a serious interest in the economic affairs of the nation” and offers “keynote speakers drawn from the world of business, industry and enterprise alongside senior Liberal Democrats,” though not memorable evenings.

The Liberty Forum, a descendent of the old Liberty Network, provides only “social events and political discussions” for a grand a year.

Behind all this breathless guff is the party’s need to raise cash, having been hit by the failure of the coalition negotiators to secure adequate resources, which led to the redundancy of many research staff.

It has also been hit by the loss of trust in the party following the tuition fees debacle, as a look at donations on the Electoral Commission website makes clear. Perhaps those attending these unique events could raise the matter with ‘senior Liberal Democrats’.

DEAFENING SILENCE

A constitutional amendment at Birmingham calls on the Liberal Democrats’ Federal Appeals Panel to “publish once a year, at the time of the party’s autumn conference, a report containing its procedures, all of its decisions on its interpretation of [the party] constitution since the previous report, a summary of each of its other rulings since the previous report and any other matters the panel shall see fit to include”.

This motion has arisen because, in July 2010, the FAP ruled the ‘triple lock’ to be unconstitutional mere weeks after Nick Clegg had been happy to use it to secure endorsement of the coalition agreement. This was the mechanism imposed by the 1998 spring conference when it appeared that Paddy Ashdown was about to do some dodgy deal with Labour.

It was then largely forgotten until last year’s inconclusive general election, when Clegg used it to get the authority of MPs, the Federal Executive and a special conference for the coalition. No-one then disputed its validity.

But then the FAP ruled it unconstitutional (Liberator 345). Why this was so remains a matter of conjecture for most people. It also remains a mystery who referred the triple lock to the FAP for a ruling after 12 years of unchallenged validity, and why.

Liberator understands that the decision was taken at the July 2010 meeting attended by the FAP’s then chair Philip Goldenberg, the English appeals chair Chris Willmore and a Welsh representative, the Scottish one being absent.

So where was such an important decision reported? There is nothing pertaining to this on the party website, and there is nothing in the Reports to Conference documents for Birmingham, Sheffield or Liverpool. Indeed, there is no report from the FAP to any of these conferences.

Liberator has been told that the FAP reports its

decisions to the Federal Executive, which then decides on their publication. So who decided not to publish this one, which, unlike the normal run of candidate appeals, was of considerable political significance?

The present constitution requires that the FAP “shall also publish its decisions on its interpretation of this constitution”. So did it? Since the party would rightly criticise any court or tribunal that failed to publish its decisions and reasoning, the FAP or the FE or both has some explaining to do.

The constitutional amendment may go some way towards getting this unaccountable body under control.

TAKING THE MICK

Lembit Öpik e-mailed London Lib Dems on 4 August, as he was entitled to do, in support of his bid to become the party’s mayoral candidate.

“I was an MP for 13 years. Did my celebrity profile and negative stories cost me votes? I think so. I take responsibility. But in London my profile is a strong asset.”

Oh yeah? Does ‘taking responsibility’ include appearing on ‘I’m A Celebrity Get Me Out of Here’ *after* declaring yourself a contender for the mayoral selection?

Öpik went on to describe himself as “left leaning, and I don’t like the drift towards the right”.

Again, oh yeah? If Öpik is on the left, perhaps he should look at his own campaign’s official Facebook page, which stated that his supporters hope to encourage the Liberal Democrats and Londoners “to adopt lower taxation, a smaller state and more personal freedom as key principles in a policy agenda”.

That phrase is identical to the answer provided to “What do you hope to achieve?” on the website FAQ of the lunatic fringe libertarian group Liberal Vision, an offshoot of an even loopier right-wing organisation outside the party called Progressive Vision.

Perhaps Ed Joyce placed these words there. When not running the campaign of ‘left-leaning’ Öpik, Joyce is Liberal Vision’s policy director. Or perhaps it was Öpik himself, but we have his word for it that he is not entirely responsible for the content of his own leaflets.

Öpik’s main mayoral leaflet said that he lost his Montgomeryshire seat last year not because of his own antics but because the public took exception to those of Mick Bates, the seat’s former Lib Dem Welsh Assembly member, who resigned after assaulting a Cardiff paramedic.

Welsh Assembly member Peter Black responded on his blog (22 July): “There were a number of reasons why Lembit lost his Parliamentary seat. Chief amongst them was his self-obsessive and flamboyant behaviour and his loss of perspective... It is possible that the Mick Bates issue influenced some people but it does not account for the eradication of a 7,000 majority. The loss of Montgomeryshire was down to Lembit alone. It is time he took responsibility for it.”

Öpik then told the Western Mail (22 July): “Having seen what Peter has seen I think he’s justifiably angry. He’d be right to take a dim view of it if I approved that phrase [about Bates] and I haven’t... I’d like to apologise to Mick. I personally apologise to Mick because this is unacceptable.”

So if Öpik did not approve a key passage in the main leaflet of his entire campaign, who did?

CUT THE CRINGE

It's time for the government to stand up to Britain's selfish rich, says Matthew Oakeshott

"It's time for our government to get serious about shared sacrifice" – Warren Buffett.

Liberator articles don't often start with a quote from a fat cat, but this one from the world's third richest man is spot on today, in Britain as much as America.

His point is that capital is taxed much more lightly than income – his effective tax rate at 16% is only half the average for US taxpayers. Many of France's business leaders and wealthy have called for an exceptional contribution from the wealthiest taxpayers to show solidarity and help close the deficit in the public finances.

But Britain's super rich are super selfish in a world of their own – not a peep from them about shouldering their fair share of the burden of rebuilding our economy, after the boom that made so many of them their fortunes.

All we hear is an endless whine about the disincentives from our so-called high rates of tax, with the 50p rate on taxable incomes over £150,000 their top target. This is encouraged by a steady stream of noises from the Treasury, and Tory ministers suggesting, that this raises very little extra tax, well before any evidence is produced to justify that highly improbable assertion.

Eric Pickles, as ever the real unacceptable face of Conservatism, has said he wants to abolish the 50p rate and put nothing in its place – no mansion tax, no wealth tax, no reformed council tax. He really is the fat cats' friend when he sees nothing wrong with a banker in a £30m mansion paying just £5 a week in property tax – the same as for many suburban semis. Never mind the poor, this isn't even standing up for Middle England.

It's high time we put fairness back at the centre of our economic policy – it's there on the front of our coalition agreement.

But when did you last hear a Conservative stress it? We've made a good start taking the lower paid out of income tax, and getting the tax threshold up to £10,000 by 2015 must be a Lib Dem 'must do' – an achievement that we can sell with pride, knowing that it helps millions. Somehow, the rich forget incentives matter even more at the bottom than at the top, and the lower paid face mountainously high effective tax rates.

But we've bottled out on real action to end the array of abusive tax dodging scams by the rich, and HMRC is hopelessly overstretched and ill-managed.

There are still far too many coach and horses-sized tax loopholes for the rich, and their accountants, to drive through while the taxman struggles behind. A key way to ensure that higher-rate income tax raises serious money is to limit tax relief for pension fund contributions to the standard rate. Why should 300,000 people – the top 1% – get a whacking great subsidy from ordinary taxpayers?

There are two pieces of serious unfinished business from George Osborne's first budget if he is serious about making the rich pay their fair share.

He let non-doms off the hook. By letting them bring any money they want into Britain tax-free, they now have the best of both worlds, by letting the income and capital gains roll up offshore while getting all the benefits of living in Britain for a nominal flat charge, a mere flea bite.

In his 2007 Tory conference speech, Osborne claimed this would raise £3.5bn a year to cut inheritance tax and stamp duty. In fact, last year it raised just £168m, only 5% of his claim. It must have been the biggest con ever in a Conservative speech – not an award to be made lightly. We Lib Dems have a single non-dom policy – after seven years here, you pay full British tax on all your worldwide income and assets or you're out – it's only fair. No other civilised country gives this outrageous tax bonanza.

On stamp duty, the Chancellor highlighted the widespread abuse at the top end of the market, where almost all owners of properties over £5m get away with stamp duty at 0.5% instead of 5% by packaging them up in companies, but he did precious little to stamp out the abuse.

Strip away the sham companies and charge full stamp duty on the property inside the wrapper. And if ownership is hidden offshore, charge a stiff annual tax on the capital value of the house, until the real owner is revealed!

Catching the millionaire stamp duty dodgers is a simple test of fairness because, as with a mansion tax, you can't move your property offshore to dodge stamp duty if it's properly enforced. We must also end the scandal of foreigners and non-doms dodging capital gains tax on their British properties by hiding them in tax havens.

There's far more for any government to do to make Britain a fairer country. But getting to grips with these scandalous abuses in our tax system would be a great start – and show the world it's not only America and France where the rich can be made to pay their fair share for the common good.

Britain is crying out for a government that stops cringing to bankers' and businessmen's greed.

Matthew Oakeshott is a former Liberal Democrat Treasury spokesman in the House of Lords

THE UNEXPLORED AND THE UNEXPLAINED

The 'Facing the Future' Working Group has come up with a descriptive document that fails to give the Liberal Democrats the political ammunition they need, says Ed Randall

At our conference this September, we will be invited to 'Face the Future'. But almost all of those who have been invited to help set a clear direction for the party's future policy making will in fact be telling Liberal Democrats to stick rather than twist and, in effect, to hold their nerve.

They will disdain fundamental questioning of the party's current role in economic policy-making within the coalition and its fraying environmentalism. Above all else, party members will be encouraged to steer clear of the party's radical traditions in policy-making, for fear of upsetting the Westminster appletart.

This is deeply regrettable because it is hard to exaggerate the significance and long-term ramifications of the economic convulsions that swept across the world in 2007 and 2008. No one – though the temptation in government to do so must be immense – should underestimate what our recent and current economic woes portend for liberal democracy in Britain and around the world. It will be no easy task to face up to the scale of the challenges that have been and are being generated.

It is all too apparent that political leaders – Liberal Democrat as well as Conservative and Labour – are reluctant to look much beyond the immediate task of patching things up. Most have failed to address, at least in public, the underlying causes of the economic dislocation and financial disorder that gave rise to an unprecedented bust.

Unfortunately, what Richard Florida has called the Great Reset can be expected to promote conservatism within our own party and others. There is a great desire – especially among our political opponents – to return to business as usual and to restore a Westminster scene in which the terms of political trade have been little affected by either coalition government or financial calamity.

The strength of the desire to go back – rather than to face up to a radically different future – reflects three things:

- a deep reluctance to acknowledge how fundamentally western liberal democracies, including our own, have been affected by economic, environmental and social changes compounded by – rather than driven by – the credit crunch;
- an understandable – but inexcusable – reluctance to get to grips with changes that have had a long gestation, and have impoverished our politics, disrupted markets and weakened social ties;
- a great failure of political imagination.

It is the failure of political imagination that most seriously handicaps Liberal Democrats who want to develop and to communicate the ideas and policies that are required to face the future.

SCEPTICAL PUBLIC

Any political party seeking to organise and mobilise its own supporters – and through them the electorate – must set out to show that it understands why the world is the way that it is. If it is a radical party – and that is what Liberal Democrats must surely aim to be – it also needs to be ready and willing to explain why it champions reform and how its reforms can be realised. A radical political party's *raison d'être* must be to provide the ideas and the arguments – as well as the detailed proposals – needed to persuade a sceptical public that it not only recognises and understands what's going on and going wrong but possesses the vision – as well as the values – needed to make things better.

However, one of the most striking things about 'Facing the Future', the Liberal Democrat consultation paper and the working group report of the same name, is the absence of any overarching analytical framework or set of political ideas capable of helping party members – or indeed the members of the working group itself – make sense of the multiple challenges that Liberal Democrats insist British society must now face up to.

For readers of 'Facing the Future', there can be no doubting that Liberal Democrats have strong values, which they are keen to restate; they are proclaimed there in 'Our Values'. Far less apparent is the ability (or desire) of Liberal Democrats to offer their own account of why the world is changing so rapidly and troublingly.

'Our Values' isn't, unfortunately and quite revealingly, matched by a section headed 'Our Explanation'. Is that because Liberal Democrats lack explanations for the way in which society is changing? Is it because Liberal Democrats cannot agree among themselves what is going on and going wrong? Is it because the party lacks the confidence to put forward its preferred explanation(s) for what is changing and challenging? Readers of 'Facing the Future' might be forgiven for thinking so.

In fact, for those Liberal Democrats who are prepared to go in search of it, contemporary social and economic research and, most especially, liberal scholarship, turns out to be richly rewarding.

Will Hutton's *Them and Us: changing Britain – why we need a fairer society* is just one of a number of recent and outstanding contributions to political and economic debate. Hutton, James Galbraith, Richard Florida, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger, and many others, brilliantly integrate social and economic

analyses and succeed in providing, whether or not that was their intent, critical support for a distinctively and unapologetically liberal point of view.

The party's Federal Policy Committee called upon the working group "to adopt a strategic, disciplined and focused approach to renewing" the party's policy. It interpreted this as a commission to spot 'major trends'; a brief that was hitched to two other tasks. The working group was asked to comment specifically on the political challenges likely to be generated by the 'major trends' it had identified, and to advise the party about how it should formulate policy to meet them. The working group was not asked to seek, provide or assess explanations for the 'major trends' it had spotted. While it was encouraged to seek out 'expert evidence', about the 'major trends' it had identified, it was in no position to form judgements that it could share with the party about what was actually driving change or the origins of the social and economic problems it had been requested to consider.

FATAL FLAW

The absence of any clear focus on accounting for the challenges it was asked to advise the party about wasn't just a serious omission from its brief. It led to a fatal flaw in the way in which the working group went about doing its work and preparing its report. Debate was constrained and its contribution to future party policy-making was seriously circumscribed.

Search as they might, members of the party will not find in 'Facing the Future' robust and distinctively Liberal Democrat analyses of: British economic failure; growing social inequality; limited social mobility; persistent gender inequality in pay; halting progress in meeting the challenges of energy and food security; mounting public cynicism about democratic politics and media reporting; faltering progress in recalibrating Britain's foreign and defence policies; contradictory and botched public service reform; limited success in stimulating investment in new technologies; deficiencies in reforming the criminal justice system.

The working group was well intentioned and diligent – aren't all such Liberal Democrat endeavours? It succeeded in identifying major trends likely to pose severe challenges to government. But, in the absence of the work needed to fashion an emphatically Liberal Democrat perspective on policy failure and the genesis of our current social and economic problems, it was destined not to produce a convincing or politically distinctive narrative about the changes and challenges we face.

"No one should underestimate what our recent and current economic woes portend for liberal democracy"

The working group failed, in other words, to play its full part in helping the party to frame the political agenda and prepare the ground for public debate about the policies that are likely to prove most important and politically significant in advance of the next general election.

Despite the deliberations of the working group, Liberal Democrats still lack a coherent and

politically engaging account of their own about what is happening to British society. Where does the party stand when it comes to making judgements about raising or lowering marginal tax rates for the wealthiest Britons, and why?

What view does the party – as opposed to the Treasury and BIS – take about the balance to be struck between monetary and fiscal stimulus in efforts to revive the British economy, and why? What ground does the party occupy – as distinct from DECC – when it comes to investing in new and in green technologies, and why? Will the party remain wedded to accelerated deficit reduction, even if economic recovery continues to falter? Does the party have a clear position of its own – based on its own analysis of the state of British capitalism and the condition of the financial sector in the UK – enabling it to respond confidently to the recommendations of the Vickers' Commission about the future of banking in Britain?

Unless Liberal Democrats are confident that they have their own view of the great drivers of change in our society, how can they develop and present a genuinely Liberal Democrat prospectus for political and economic reform? It simply isn't good enough to make an inventory of challenges and attach a shopping list of policy reviews.

Ed Randall is a senior lecturer in politics and social policy at Goldsmiths, University of London; chair of Greenwich Borough Liberal Democrats; and author of 'Food, Risk and Politics' (Manchester University Press, 2009)

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ONCE MORE WITH FEELING

Two recent statements of Liberal Democrat values lack a sense of humanity, morality or passion, says Simon Titley

First, the good news: Despite the alleged ‘end of history’ and the hollowing out of politics, not to mention the Liberal Democrats’ notorious parochialism and anti-intellectualism, the party has published not one but two statements of its ideology. Now the bad news: Both documents lack something vital.

What has prompted this flurry of publishing activity? The first document, *Facing the Future*, been prepared by the Liberal Democrats’ Federal Policy Committee for debate at this September’s conference. Its purpose is to identify the priorities for policy development in the next few years and, along the way, it restates the party’s values.

The second publication is *Freedom, Liberty and Fairness: Liberal Democrat Values for the 21st Century*. If the title sounds familiar, it’s because this publication originally appeared in 2002, prepared by a working group chaired by Alan Beith, and was adopted by that September’s party conference. It has been updated (“with minor amendments and additions to reflect the changed political context”) by Michael Meadowcroft, who explains his motives in an article elsewhere in this magazine.

KNACKER’S YARD

As regular readers will know, I have for many years deplored the lack of political thinking within the party. Why, then, am I not celebrating these first shoots of spring? Indeed, why am I looking a gift horse in the mouth, kicking it up the arse and consigning it to the knacker’s yard? Because the party, at heart, doesn’t want to frighten the horses.

I was originally alerted to the problems with *Facing the Future* when David Boyle proposed we jointly write an alternative version that really did “face the future”. He felt that the original document should be looking ahead towards the party’s future policy challenges but wasn’t looking in the right places.

Elsewhere in this issue, Ed Randall criticises *Facing the Future* for being a descriptive paper that dodges some important ideological questions, particularly with regard to the economy. The implications of the recent financial crisis are profound yet the party seems reluctant to do any more than suggest trying to patch things up.

Ed points to an inability to look forwards (“a great failure of political imagination”) and an equal inability to explain (“the absence of any overarching analytical framework or set of political ideas capable of helping party members... make sense of the multiple challenges that Liberal Democrats insist British society must now face up to”).

Once I had read *Facing the Future*, I could see what David and Ed were driving at. It bears the hallmarks of a document written by committee, being rather anodyne and avoiding controversy, at least in terms of the internal politics of the party – it should have been

titled ‘Never Mind the Policy, Feel the Width’. Even so, the influence of social liberals over the draft seems to have been more powerful than that of economic liberals. In microcosm, there is little any social liberal could disagree with. And yet, and yet...

As I ploughed through the document, I felt increasingly dissatisfied. There seemed a failing more fundamental even than those detected by Ed Randall. I wanted to read something that paints a picture of how life could be better with Liberalism. But the whole damn thing is completely abstract. It seems to have been written as an academic exercise. Its sterile language betrays an emotionally detached approach to politics. There is no passion, no feeling and, above all, no sense of the point of life and how politics should serve that point.

I accept that *Facing the Future* is intended for an internal party audience. It is not designed to be a campaigning document but to steer a process of policy development. But that’s no reason to be bland. And it’s no excuse for cognitive dissonance, a complete disconnect between an expression of political purpose and the human needs that justify that purpose.

DESICCATED DOCUMENT

The result is a desiccated document that fails to relate to real life. It lacks moral clarity, tending to survey moral choices rather than make those choices. Each time the document sets out another disinterested menu of options, the thought recurs: “Yes, but what is *your* view?”

And the document rarely relates its aspirations to what the coalition is doing in practice. It keeps begging the question: “You’re in government, why aren’t you *doing* something about it?”

Throughout, it is obvious that *Facing the Future* skirts around the central moral question: what is life about? The document begins with this laudable statement: “Liberal Democrats’ starting point is the flourishing of the individual. The wellbeing and self determination of individual citizens are central to our values” – but it fails to explain why this matters. As the working party that drafted this document apparently has no idea, I will remind them.

Liberalism is essentially about freedom of the individual but that cause has a point. Life is short. Each of us has relatively few years on this planet and, in the short time available, each of us seeks to lead a good life. However, what constitutes a ‘good life’ cannot be prescribed for us by others because each of us has a unique personality. Only *we* can decide what constitutes a good life. But we cannot make those choices unless we have agency, which means the capacity of individuals to make meaningful choices about their lives and to influence the world around them. Hence our political analysis is rooted in an understanding of the distribution of power, our prescription is based on the redistribution of power

– and our enemy is the unwarranted concentration of power, where powerful people monopolise agency for their own selfish ends or deny it to others.

If *Facing the Future* were rooted in an experience of life and had a clearer moral standpoint, the problems identified by Ed Randall would have been less likely to arise.

In particular, there would have been no inhibitions about condemning the sheer moral unacceptability of the neoliberal economic ideology that has got us into the present mess.

As it stands, *Facing the Future* is simply unfit for purpose because it doesn't do what it says on the tin; it is unwilling to face the future. Conference should refer it back, not because the document's heart is not in the right place but because of the lack of moral courage to analyse and confront the most pressing issues, and above all because we must get away from the idea that policy making is an academic exercise divorced from life.

Compared with this failure, how does the updated version of *Freedom, Liberty and Fairness* fare? I'm afraid it's *déjà vu* all over again. Like *Facing the Future*, it contains little with which one could disagree in microcosm. But because it shares that document's arid detachment, it is deeply unsatisfying.

I attach no blame to Michael Meadowcroft. As his article elsewhere in this magazine makes clear, Michael is well aware of the fundamental problems within the Liberal Democrats, in particular a failure to express clear values or to link those values to the party's grassroots campaigning. It is well worth reading his paper for the Scottish Liberal Democrats' recent 'liberal vision' conference (<http://bit.ly/qiFMfS>), in which he "seeks ways of getting from problem to solution and who therefore regards values and policies as key parts of the 'toolkit' which must underpin tactics and strategy."

Michael rightly believes there is a gap in the market for a statement of the party's values and he wanted to fill that gap. He chose to update *Freedom, Liberty and Fairness* because the party has no other comparable publication available to update. But one can't help feeling that Michael has tried to put lipstick on a pig.

During the 1980s, Michael wrote a succession of pamphlets that explored liberal values. It would have been preferable if he had taken his own advice and had the confidence to write something original once more. Let us hope he does so before long.

In the meantime, it is left to David Boyle and me to fill the gap. Our alternative to *Facing the Future* will not be as long as the original but, without the dubious benefits of a censorious committee, it will at least be pithy and opinionated. And with any luck, it will offer a vision sufficiently positive to enthuse some people.

We intend to confront the most pressing issues, even if the Federal Policy Committee won't. We won't be afraid to say that neoliberal economic orthodoxy has been a disaster and must be replaced by a macroeconomic system that starts from the position that people matter. We won't be afraid to challenge

"We must get away from the idea that policy making is an academic exercise divorced from life"

the materialist precepts of a society focused on the acquisition of consumer tat. We won't be afraid to tackle the issue of climate change for fear of what Jeremy Clarkson might say. We won't be afraid to confront vested interests and propose public services that are human scale and capable of reaching out into their surrounding communities. We won't be

afraid to suggest what a real 'localism' would actually mean for society and the economy. We won't be afraid to challenge the party's own shibboleths when it comes to restoring meaning to 'community politics' and the profound implications this would have for the party's campaigning style.

We aim to link liberalism to life as it is lived. After all, what do people actually want? Realistically, they are not demanding a luxury mansion, a Ferrari in the driveway and a supermodel in the bed. They simply want a fulfilling life. Beyond basic material needs such as food, clothing and housing, they want a loving family, friends and community. They want a secure job that pays a decent wage. They want access to education and healthcare. They want a stimulating range of recreational and cultural activities. They want safe streets and a clean environment.

These are reasonable aspirations that should be accessible to all. They are well within society's capacity to provide. The point is not that they are unique to liberalism – most believers in all political ideologies would broadly agree with them. The point is that liberalism is better placed to meet these aspirations because liberals understand the crucial importance of the distribution of power and the need of people for agency – the power to control their lives instead of just accepting what someone else gives them.

Our party may be in government but it has not taken a Trappist vow of silence. Its message should be: "This is what is wrong. This is what we plan to do about it. This is why you will benefit." And this message should be sufficiently clear and powerful to enthuse people – even at the cost of repelling people who disagree.

So, Liberals of the world unite! You have nothing to lose but your fear of causing offence. If that's alright with you.

Simon Titley is a member of the Liberator Collective

'Facing the Future' may be downloaded from the Liberal Democrat website (<http://bit.ly/rse8F3>). 'Freedom, Liberty and Fairness' may be ordered from Michael Meadowcroft at Waterloo Lodge, 72 Waterloo Lane, Leeds, LS13 2JF for £6 including postage (cheques payable to Michael Meadowcroft). The alternative to 'Facing the Future', written by David Boyle and Simon Titley, will be available on Liberator's website (www.liberator.org.uk) from mid-September

TURN A MIRROR ON OURSELVES

The riots sprang from complex factors including social exclusion and misbehaviour by those at the top, so the last thing needed is instant responses, says Claire Tyler

The August riots started in the London Borough of Haringey where I live (although Crouch End is a very different world to Tottenham, in a way that typifies many parts of London). Being away then, I listened with incredulity when the main street of my home town of Enfield then turned into a near war zone.

How could this have all happened in a few short days and what does it tell us about the state of our country?

As so many people have said, much of the rioting, looting and arson attacks were nothing but mindless criminality and delinquency. Mob-generated copycat behaviour, often fuelled by social media, led to a complete breakdown in social norms, any sense of personal responsibility and the mutual bonds of trust and reciprocity on which communities are built. How else can you explain setting light to local shops and businesses in your own community, irrespective of the danger to the lives of people living above those premises, their homes and livelihoods?

There are no excuses for this sort of behaviour but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't look long and hard at the underlying factors that might go some way to explaining what happened, particularly the total breakdown of social cohesion.

I am struck by how much of the immediate political debate has centred on criminality, policing – both adequacy of numbers and tactics – and sentencing through the criminal justice system. Some politicians have started to acknowledge the complexity and multi-faceted nature of the causes and consequence of the riots.

KNEE-JERK REACTIONS

However, in some quarters the knee-jerk reactions have been as predictable as they have been un-illuminating.

For the right, it seems to be a case of moral decay, delinquency, lawlessness, an 'entitlement culture' fuelled by multi-generational benefit dependency, lack of personal responsibility and poor parenting.

For the left, the causes of the violence and looting are to do with inequality, unemployment and the impact of spending cuts. While politicians will always be called upon to provide instant comment, Liberal Democrats need to adopt a more nuanced and thoughtful response to the riots, recognising that simplistic solutions to deep-seated social problems don't exist. If they did, they would have been found and used by now.

I want to hear what community leaders, youth workers, faith organisations, local community groups and others have to say, and why it is that so many, particularly young, people feel they have no stake

or voice in society and why they are so distrustful of anyone in authority or the rule of law. Academics and social policy analysts will also have valuable contributions, not least by looking at international comparisons and responses.

We are starting to hear a lot from the USA about projects in places like Chicago, Baltimore and Los Angeles aimed at reducing gang violence using outreach workers and 'violence interrupters' to quell street violence and stop it from escalating. The key to their success seems to be that they are recruited from the community they work in and some of the workers have personal experience of gang involvement.

I also found a recent article by Aditya Chakraborty (Guardian, 11 August) particularly intriguing. He quotes a number of economists who have found causal links around the world between increases in economic growth and decreases in the prevalence of civil disorder and rioting.

These studies have found that, when people suffer abrupt drops in living standards, social unrest often results, attributed to feelings of hopelessness and despair. However, such responses differ significantly from one country to another for reasons often hard to ascertain.

We are looking at some very deep-seated problems in our society, a complicated mix of failure within families, the community, the economy and politics.

Poverty and deprivation clearly play a part, but are by no means the whole story. Just look at the background of people going through the courts. Some are clearly from deprived backgrounds; others had good jobs and came from stable families. Some were young, but many were from older age groups. Reactions from those being charged and sentenced also varied wildly. Some seemed quite unrepentant, others guilt stricken. Some parents were appalled at their children's behaviour but others were quite unprepared to accept any responsibility or were absent.

So, along with the immediate help and support for riot victims, we need a much deeper examination of the underlying causes. This needs to include turning a mirror on ourselves and the values we espouse as a society – so much of it materialistic, consumption-led, acquisitive and dominated by self-interest and disregard for the common good.

And we need to do it from top to bottom. As Peter Osborne said in his excoriating Telegraph article (11 August), "The moral decay of our society is as bad at the top as the bottom"; the example being set by those at the top, be they are bankers, top business people paying large bills to legal experts to avoid paying tax, journalists and indeed politicians, is what sets the

tone for everyone else. It's unlikely to be a pretty picture or an easy task for those with their hands on the levers of power, but is surely part of the medicine.

We must admit that the size of the gap between the rich and poor does matter, indeed is one of the main contributors to the

lack of social cohesion. Tony Blair famously said that he didn't care how much the very rich – in particular David Beckham – earned. The last government's focus was on bringing up the poorest in society to that of the average and the rest could look after itself. That no longer feels adequate as a philosophy.

All citizens must feel that they have a stake in society. If the things that are important to them and which they see others taking for granted – such as a decent home or a job – feel unattainable, the basic understanding on which society is built, including the rules of decent behaviour, can start to crumble. So we need to start a national debate on what is an acceptable gap between those at the top (in either an organisation or of the income scale more generally) and bottom.

One thing that the riots have done is put the concept of exclusion – both social and economic – back on the map. This in itself is a complex matter. In areas of London worst affected by the riots, many young people chose not to join in. Different people respond differently to the same social conditions and I would like to see more analysis on the 'resilience' or 'protective' factors, which mean that some young people in deprived areas are doing great things and are a real asset to their community, and how this could be spread to others. And let's not forget about the young people who came out the next day to help those affected to clear up and rebuild their lives. So, and this is my main point, nothing is simple or straightforward in terms of the problem or the solution.

In the last couple of years, the prevailing discourse has been more about social mobility – simply put, the ease with which people can move up the social ladder, particularly in terms of occupation or income, from the circumstances of their birth. This is clearly an important issue but there is a growing recognition that focusing on social mobility alone is not enough. Social inequalities between rich and poor are growing in many areas and there is a blatant inequality in life chances between someone born in a run-down estate in Tottenham and more affluent parts of London.

Unless there is a greater sense of hope and opportunity for young people in more deprived areas, some will surely continue to end up in gang culture where they rarely leave their area for fear of what will happen to them in the territory of another gang.

Two aspects of our policy response are critical to the way forward. Firstly family relationships and parenting, and secondly a coherent youth strategy.

Inevitably much has been made of the impact of family breakdown on the violent behaviour of the looters and rioters. It's never as simple as some would have you believe. There will be people from stable families who became caught up in the rioting and those

“We must admit that the size of the gap between the rich and poor does matter, indeed is one of the main contributors to the lack of social cohesion”

from very difficult family backgrounds who didn't. But strong and supportive family relationships – in whatever form – are key ingredients to nurturing hope, aspiration and a sense that achievement is possible, as is a willingness for adults to establish clear boundaries of acceptable behaviour in

bringing up children to understand their rights and responsibilities. Good quality parenting is key, and likely to be more effective where adult relationships are healthy and strong.

NANNY STATE

As a party, we need to be prepared to make bolder statements about the importance of parenting and family relationships and not shy away from it as sounding like the nanny state. CentreForum recently produced a good report on parenting (*Parenting Matters*). Appropriate help and support can make a real difference in these areas. We also need to recognise that, for some children, it's not a question of poor parenting but simply not enough parenting.

For example, where single parents (often mothers) are working long hours in low-paid jobs and can't afford any childcare, the result is that some young children are 'looked after' for long stretches by their not much older siblings.

And for the very small group of seriously dysfunctional and chaotic families, the type of intensive challenge and support provided by the Family Intervention Projects has provided some much needed understanding of properly functioning family relationships, sometimes for the first time and often with transformative effects. We need to stick with this sort of intervention and, if people say we can't afford to, I would say that recent events have taught us that we can't afford not to.

We urgently need to articulate a youth strategy focussed on 16-25 year olds. This includes improving youth services with detached outreach youth workers in communities and estates, and ensuring that there are activities available over the school holidays. I don't think it's a coincidence that riots took place in areas where youth clubs have been closed and there's very little else for young people to do.

We also need to increase the amount of mentoring available to young people both from their own communities and from outside (employers have a key role) and volunteering opportunities. Effective and independent careers advice must be available from trained professionals who understand other aspects of young people's lives and how to link with other help and support. There must also be a good range of vocational opportunities, with a clear message that a vocational route to a job is not a second-class option.

There is much to do, but let's get it right this time rather than shooting from the hip and asking the questions afterwards.

Claire Tyler is a Liberal Democrat member of the House of Lords and a former chief executive of the Social Exclusion Unit

LEARN FROM THIS RIOT

Very little changed in Tottenham in the 26 years between its riots, says Brian Haley

I served as a councillor in Tottenham for 16 years until last year. The area had received a lot of investment after the 1985 riots – but that had not altered the fundamental problems.

Very little has changed. Some politicians are saying it is different to 25 years ago, but I disagree. They were not there; I was. There have been promises but no delivery. Northumberland Park ward (near the scene of the rioting) is one of the most deprived areas in Europe. It has been like that for decades.

There is high unemployment, low educational achievement – but none of this is new.

The media will be gone in a few days and the people of Tottenham will be the ones who have to pick up the pieces.

This is what the newspapers were saying about Tottenham, to give you some background to the animosity and tension towards the police and social justice issues.

“The Broadwater Farm Estate, in Tottenham, north London, historically described then as one of the worst places to live in England, was the scene of the 1985 riot that saw a policeman stabbed to death by a rioting mob.

“The racial disorder developed after Cynthia Jarrett collapsed and died as police searched her home for stolen property.”

PC Keith Blakelock died after being attacked by rioters in the ensuing violence.

Cynthia Jarrett said she was pushed. The police denied it. But what is indisputable is that she collapsed and died – bringing into the open long-standing racial tensions in the area and triggering some of the worst rioting in Britain’s recent history. Sadly, like this August’s rioting, it was a protest outside Tottenham police station that sparked the conflict then. The events at Broadwater Farm led to much soul-searching about community relations and the economic viability of one of London’s poorest areas.

“Mr Sylvester was 30 when he died nearly six years ago, after being handcuffed and restrained for 20 minutes by officers who arrested him at his Tottenham home under the Mental Health Act.

“The jury found that Mr Sylvester had died from brain damage and cardiac arrest triggered and exacerbated by breathing problems that occurred while he was being restrained, and by cannabis-induced delirium.

“Sylvester’s brother Bernard Renwick said ‘From day one we were told to expect openness, accountability and transparency. We merely wanted truth and where necessary, justice.’”

“Mark Duggan was in a minicab on Ferry Lane Bridge in Tottenham. Police stopped the minicab, with the initial intention to arrest. An officer’s radio was hit by a bullet, a further shot was fired and Mr Duggan was killed.”

At first glance, the parallels from these three pieces of media coverage appear to be striking. Little information was given to family and friends, little visible accountability by the police, and when people ask for justice it appears to be very lacking.

That said, policing in Tottenham has come a long way, but not far enough.

While I do not in any way condone the violence and opportunistic looting of shops that erupted, it must now be observed what lessons have been learnt, if any, since the Broadwater riots 25 years ago.

The economic and social deprivation that has blighted Tottenham for decades is still to be addressed – in terms of poor quality of housing and more than 10,000 people claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance. Government figures showed there were 54 people chasing each job in Tottenham.

I witnessed firsthand how money was wasted on, among other things, buildings and projects with no sustainability, no outcomes, no accountability and no monitoring. The last of this funding was a Sure Start programme – £50m given to the local authority for the local community to set up projects. However, speaking to the people of Tottenham, they seem to have had little or no impact. Do not take my word for it – go and ask the people of Tottenham yourselves.

While much time in the week following the riots was spent looking for young ethnic minorities to be photographed with, the people of Tottenham have been clearing up the streets. One can only hope that lessons have been learnt from the underlying social problems.

While we wouldn’t want to use that as an excuse to justify that sort of violence, there is no way we can ignore what has happened. There will be lessons to learn but this time we have to learn them. What we are missing is the issue of representation.

Brian Haley was a Labour councillor in Haringey before joining the Liberal Democrats in 2010. He sought the London mayoral nomination

BACK TO BASICS

The recent riots should warn Liberals to distinguish between fake liberalism and real liberalism, says David Boyle

There is nothing like a riot to make you go back to basics. Not the kind of basics that John Major espoused in his Edwina Currie days – but the basics of Liberalism.

Because it is clear to me as never before that there are two kinds of liberals. I don't mean Orange Book and social liberals, since at either extreme these are only barely liberals at all – they are Conservatives or social democrats.

I have never anyway quite believed in that distinction, which seems to be to be based on an irrelevance, the question of how much the private sector should be involved in public services.

No, I am talking about the division between liberals and *Liberals*.

I was reminded of this by a headline in the Times, which claimed that we should “blame liberalism for the riots”.

Because there is a sense in which this is true, if ‘liberalism’ refers to the creed by which we all now live in the educated West – where everything is relative, where ethics, morality and community are always trumped by individual conscience.

There are elements of Liberalism here, and similar roots, but this is different. This is liberalism as criticised by the new generation of thinkers like Phillip Blond, at least before he discovered Jo Grimond. It is liberalism, but it also tends towards nihilism.

The problem is that when the creed we recognise as liberalism emerged in the eighteenth century, it forged a long-term alliance with utilitarians and economists, aware – as radicals had known since the middle ages – that money drives out privilege and power.

In the end, money is more powerful than aristocracy or ecclesiastical authority. It is and was the great leveller. There is no aristocrat so proud that he cannot be bought and sold like everyone else.

But here lies the problem. It was like forging an alliance with the Little Porridge Pot, the one that couldn't stop making porridge. Having corroded the power and privilege, the sheer social force of money just kept corroding.

Soon, family and community were looking a little threadbare too. So was human purpose and values: liberalism found itself in alliance with an extreme relativism that accepted no values or purpose – and fell victim to pernicious creeds like Ayn Rand's that only selfishness could create a better world. It could find itself caught up in liberal heresies like neo-liberalism.

It was in this sense that Tony Blair might seem like a liberal, as Julian Astle suggested earlier this summer (Guardian, 21 June). But once you cut through the foliage from the outskirts of John Stuart Mill, and looked into the heart of the society New Labour created, what did you find?

Retailing. Not much else except consumption, and the injunction to yearn for tat.

In that sense, and that sense alone, liberalism was responsible for the vacuous materialism, the valueless self-interest, that contributed to our bizarre summer of looting and rioting.

That is why the riots were also a wake-up call for Liberals as well as liberals.

Because whenever we fail to look beyond Mill's liberty – and ask ourselves what it should be used for – we find our Liberalism unravels into simple common-or-garden liberalism.

Because it seems to me that Liberalism – real Liberalism – goes beyond localism or liberty, or public service choice for that matter. It demands that we ask what we believe they are for. Real Liberals have an idea about the purpose of the freedom we demand.

It has a glimmering of an idea about what human societies we aspire to create and why, and the relationships, communities and institutions that make them possible.

There will be liberals who say these are contradictions: that injunctions about what freedom should be for undermine those freedoms. I don't agree. Real Liberalism has always gone hand-in-hand with morality; without morality, it can't work – and it needs to be shared morality too, and a morality that leads somewhere.

So I am not a liberal in the sense that I see no difference between relationship-free virtual communities, or value-free hedonism. Nor am I a liberal in the sense that I see no difference between factory-style public services that process human beings, and the human-scale institutions that make relationships – and therefore change – possible.

The riots seem to me to make these distinctions particularly urgent, because Liberalism that is little more than the prevailing orthodoxy will never have the energy to build a political movement.

The riots gave us a glimpse of the abyss of a relationship-free society – freedom as in freedom from ties and responsibility. Just as the banking crisis, and the banking bonuses, gave us a glimpse of a relationship-free economy.

Feral youths and feral elite; there isn't a whole lot of difference.

The riots showed us what happens when fake liberalism tries to buy off the mob, as Marie Antoinette did with cake, with the injunction to yearn for tat.

Real Liberalism needs to move forward by asking: freedom for what and towards what?

David Boyle is a member of the Liberal Democrats' Federal Policy Committee, a fellow of the New Economics Foundation and the author of 'The Human Element' (published in November)

ORANGE, BLUE AND GREEN

The government is delivering on Liberal Democrat environmental policies but the party may need to consider its position on nuclear power, says Chris Huhne

After an interval of 65 years, Liberals are in government once again. It's obviously crucial that we demonstrate that the coalition is implementing Liberal Democrat policies, and is not just a Conservative government with some Lib Dem window-dressing.

Over the last year, that's what I and colleagues have been trying to do on the green agenda. Environmental policies are one of the areas that defined the Liberal Democrats in opposition, and it's vital that we keep that definition in government.

What we're trying to do is to build a new low-carbon economy. From my department's perspective, that means action in three main areas: reducing energy use, through improving energy efficiency, particularly in buildings; reducing emissions from power generation, through developing low-carbon sources of electricity; and setting the overall framework for action on climate change, both across government and internationally through the UN climate process.

Our main initiative on the energy efficiency front is the Green Deal. The standard of British housing has historically been so poor that households spend more on heating their homes than do their counterparts in Sweden, where the winter temperature is considerably lower. We aim to see every domestic and commercial property insulated to high standards, stopping the enormous waste of energy and money through leaky roofs, walls and windows.

From October 2012, householders and companies will be able to access Green Deal packages in which insulation work will be carried out by businesses at no up-front cost to themselves. The companies making the investments will recoup their expenditure over time through a charge on the energy bill – which will of course be substantially lower as a result of the improvements. There will be additional help available, through the Energy Company Obligation, for hard-to-treat homes, such as those with solid rather than cavity walls, and for low-income groups. This will tackle fuel poverty at its source.

Even though we are making it as easy as possible for households to carry out this work, experience suggests that uptake may be slow. That's why we've regulated to ensure that private-rented sector tenants will have the right to request the work, and landlords must improve their lowest rated properties (F and G ratings) by 2018.

Local authorities also have a key role to play in implementing the Green Deal, helping with promotion, engaging in partnerships with national or local contractors or even acting as Green Deal providers.

Many Liberal Democrat-run councils, such as Birmingham and Bristol, are already engaging with the Green Deal. Councils have the power to introduce Council Tax rebates to encourage uptake of the Green

Deal in their areas.

Privatisation in the 1980s helped to drive down electricity prices in the UK, but also created a power generation infrastructure largely dependent on gas, then the cheapest fuel. This market structure does not, however, suit low-carbon sources of power, including most renewable sources (wind, wave, tidal, solar) and nuclear, which generally have high construction costs and low running costs. The fact that the wholesale electricity price tends to vary, sometimes quite dramatically, means it is difficult for investors to be certain that they will receive a worthwhile rate of return.

YEARS OF INACTION

After years of inaction, the Labour government introduced the renewables obligation, which helped to increase renewable electricity generation, from a very low base to about 7% of total electricity supply today (still the third lowest proportion in the EU). It has not really solved the basic problem of uncertainty over future returns, however, and is also a relatively costly way of supporting renewables.

On top of this, we face the challenge of ensuring the lights stay on. By the end of this decade, old coal and nuclear stations will have closed, amounting to about a quarter of current electricity capacity. We need to see an estimated £110bn worth of investment in new power stations and related grid connections – twice the rate of the last decade. The current market structure does not provide the incentives to deliver it.

This is why we launched the white paper on electricity market reform in July. Its key proposal is a system of long-term contracts for low-carbon generation – increasing the incentives for investment by providing greater revenue certainty. The contracting authority will agree a long-term contract, and price, with low-carbon electricity generators. The generators will sell electricity into the market at the wholesale price, and the authority will then pay them the difference between the wholesale price and the agreed long-term price (these are the so-called 'contracts for difference').

Compared with the current system, this minimises costs to consumers, and it also provides us with a means of subsidising technologies, including newer (and in the short term more costly) renewables such as offshore wind, or marine renewables; as deployment increases, their costs will gradually fall. For more mature low-carbon technologies, such as nuclear, the contract price will take account only of the environmental costs of avoided carbon emissions, and to smooth out the variability in the market price, providing a guaranteed return but without any element of public subsidy – something the party agreed in the coalition programme.

Other aspects of the reform package include a new capacity mechanism to guarantee supply at times of peak demand, and an emissions performance standard to limit carbon emissions from the fossil fuel power stations we will still need for some time.

This new structure for the electricity market should increase the incentives for investment in renewable generation. Correspondingly, we also need to ensure a sufficient flow of capital for those investments, which tend to be viewed at present as rather too risky for the big institutional investors, like pension funds. That's why Liberal Democrat ministers have pushed for the establishment of the Green Investment Bank – the world's first explicitly green investment bank – to de-risk major low-carbon investments such as offshore wind.

The Bank will start operating from 2012, with an initial capital allocation of £3bn – initially more or less as a fund, making investments and developing expertise in the market. Legislation will guarantee its independence, and from 2015 it will be able to borrow on its own account, magnifying its capital base and making a real difference to the low-carbon sector and the economy.

Obviously, climate change is an issue that cuts across many government departments. This year, we'll be publishing the government carbon plan, which will set out the policies we need to implement. In addition to those mentioned, there is a host of others being put in place, including the renewable heat incentive, support for carbon capture and storage demonstration projects and subsidies for electric cars.

The overall targets we need to meet are set out in the carbon budgets the government accepts under the framework put in place by the Climate Change Act 2008, which sets a target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the UK by at least 80% from 1990 levels by 2050. The Act requires government to set carbon budgets – limits on greenhouse gas emissions in the UK for consecutive five-year periods – designed to put emission reductions on a cost-effective pathway to the 2050 target.

The first three carbon budgets were set in 2009 by the previous government. Effectively, they simply accepted the trajectory UK emissions were on, in line with the target agreed at EU level. They required no major effort by Labour ministers in deciding new policies. The fourth carbon budget – the limit on emissions for the period 2023 to 2027 – is different, and much more ambitious. Back in May, we accepted the independent Committee on Climate Change's recommendation for a limit on total UK emissions of 1,950m tonnes of CO₂ equivalent – equivalent to a 50% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from 1990 levels.

This is a key step in sending a clear signal to investors: the UK is now sure ground on which to build

“The coalition is implementing Liberal Democrat policies, and is not just a Conservative government with some Lib Dem window-dressing”

a sustainable low-carbon business. Businesses can plan for the future: nascent industries can grow, and established ones can adapt, with the understanding that the market will demand technologies and practices that reduce carbon emissions. By providing this kind of long-term clarity, we place the UK at the leading edge of the global low-carbon industrial transformation, with the aim of establishing our competitive advantage in the most rapidly growing sectors of the world

economy, generating jobs and export opportunities – while maintaining energy security and protecting the economy from oil and gas price volatility.

This decision also puts the UK at the forefront of the international debate, helping to build momentum toward a legally binding global climate change deal. No other country has set carbon targets in this much detail this far ahead. It is consistent with the EU setting a more ambitious target than its current 20% reduction by 2020; we will continue to argue for an EU target of 30% cuts by 2020.

CLIMATE SCEPTICS

In most respects, this set of policies is in line with the proposals Liberal Democrats set out in our policy paper on climate change, *Zero-Carbon Britain*, in 2007. It is far more coherent than anything Labour came up with in its term of office – and much more ambitious than anything the Conservatives would have achieved in government by themselves, with their climate-sceptic right-wingers holding them back. Just look at how their MEPs voted in July against the EU adopting more ambitious climate targets.

Clearly, there are aspects of Liberal Democrat policy that we'll need to come back to throughout the rest of the parliament and in the run-up to the next election. As the economy recovers – and the major investments in energy efficiency and in renewable energy I've talked about will themselves make a major contribution to that recovery – we'll need to consider how best to deploy additional support for new technologies and energy efficiency improvements.

We'll need to consider our position on nuclear, if the investment is forthcoming for the private sector to build a new generation of new nuclear stations without public subsidy. And we'll need to think about how the UK can best promote ambitious action on climate change if the international process does not respect the scientific imperative to peak global emissions by 2020.

Right now, though, we can be proud of our party's contribution to the coalition government, making a real difference by putting into practice the green policies we have campaigned on for so long.

Chris Huhne is Liberal Democrat MP for Eastleigh and Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change

PROPPING UP THE BAD GUYS

Is that all the coalition amounts to? Perhaps, when Liberal Democrats have lost the ability and willingness to make their own policy, says David Hall-Matthews

They say you should never meet your heroes. So it proved, at an academic conference late last year, when I found myself sitting opposite Bill Clinton's former Treasury adviser Joe Stiglitz.

I was about to congratulate him on single-handedly destroying the neoliberal Washington consensus when, as chief economist of the World Bank, he had poured vitriol over the IMF's austerity measures following the 1997 Asian financial crisis. But before I could open my mouth, I was introduced to him – as a Liberal Democrat. He did not beat around the bush.

“What the hell are you guys doing?” he exclaimed. “How can you possibly justify going in with the Tories?” Quickly, I explained how Labour had not been interested, the ‘progressive’ numbers did not stack up and staying out of government would just have meant a quick and disastrous new election. He changed tack. “OK – but what are you doing with it? All I see is you propping up the bad guys. How are you going to make it look good for you?” What hurt most was that he is a card-carrying Liberal. And a Democrat. We need to find ways to convince our natural supporters that there is real value in having Lib Dems in government. I had to say something sensible, fast. So I asked for his advice.

“What your man Clegg should have done, as soon as he was in office, is make a speech saying what the Lib Dems hope to achieve in office. Nothing too specific. Three or four areas where you hope to make a distinctive difference. Then you could stop people going on about you helping the Tories. Challenge them to judge you on your own agenda. Keep telling them what you're there for. And make sure you achieve some of it.” Clever man, that Professor Stiglitz. Something more substantial than “two heads are better than one” would have helped.

But, wait, we did tell the nation what we aimed to do last year. In the manifesto. And there's our succinct four-point plan, shining like a beacon in the Coalition Agreement: pupil premium – done; income tax threshold rise – done, in part; green investment bank – on the way; new politics – aye, there's the rub.

Constitutional reform has not gone all that well to date. Being the least sleazy doesn't get you very far either, when we're not whiter than white. And it is hard not to sound like a prig, saying “I told you so”, having warned about dodgy relationships with News International for years (in fact, Nick Clegg made a pretty good fist of it, showing admirable lightness of touch). Nonetheless, New Politics is the line we have to push. I do not think Stiglitz was talking about policy goals. What we need to articulate is nothing less than what difference Lib Dem presence makes to

government itself. A Liberal Democrat narrative for better governance, built on our strengths – above all, our internal democracy. If we start saying more clearly now why voters should be glad that we are there – and what they can expect as a result – then we will have built up a more convincing platform from which to fight the next election.

BIGGEST MYSTERIES

What are the three or four differences of approach that make us distinct from the others? Nick Clegg put a lot of emphasis on them during the election campaign, with considerable success: not being beholden to unelected power; being better in touch with people on the street; keen to make changes so that the whole political system is more transparent, accountable and responsive. The basis of a decent Lib Dem narrative was ready to go. So it is one of the biggest mysteries of the last sixteen months: why have Liberal Democrats failed to capitalise on New Politics?

Lib Dems have been liked, for 20 years, as agents of protest. What we need to show is how we are serious about challenging over-concentrations of power, instead of just whinging about them. Recently, events have started to help, rather than conspire against us. The extent to which Tories and Labour courted the Murdochs – and the extent to which we refused to, for years – do us credit. Even there, though, we would have looked better still if we had dared to speak out a bit more in advance. The revelation that Nick Clegg had been one of only two voices in Downing Street persistently warning David Cameron not to employ Andy Coulson (the other was Steve Hilton) made me proud of him. But also frustrated that he had never said so in public at the time.

Was I alone in thinking that December's sting against Vince Cable, though it harmed him personally (and, initially, helped the Murdochs), made the party look good? For almost the first time since the election, here was a Liberal Democrat minister saying things that were both sensible and radical; popular and uniquely liberal. We cannot afford to be coy. Nick Clegg was pilloried for condemning “scratch my back and I'll scratch yours” internships, having benefited from one himself. But that was down to a fairly small piece of naive communication. He should have started with “I had one and it was wrong”, not waited till a Labour backbencher challenged him. But he was right. It was a strong, brave Lib Dem message. He must not be once bitten, twice shy. We remain the third party – we still have to fight harder to be heard, and repeat our more challenging messages long and loud. Coalition is to some extent an opportunity, but

it is also in some ways an obstacle.

Part of the problem is, of course, that party strategists have, quite wrongly, decided that we cannot be too publicly at odds with the Conservatives. The argument for more distinctiveness and less loyalty has been well-rehearsed. But even if we did accept the need to be responsible in supporting every aspect of government policy to the hilt (which I do not), surely we should still take every opportunity to publicise our fundamental ideological differences. It has become self-evident that voters do not much like coalitions that look like sell-outs. There is no evidence that they will oppose collaboration between two distinct and different parties, which are confident enough to air their differences, then agree a reasoned compromise – and, sometimes, still disagree. British voters have simply never seen that.

In New Zealand, after ten messy years of various shades of coalition, there is now a formal protocol whereby the minority party can state on which parts of the government programme it ‘agrees to disagree’. If we could introduce something similar here in the next year or two, it could only help our electoral chances. At the moment, pragmatism has left us hamstrung. Ambitious, radical, liberal ideas – to constrain the political power of the media, for example – have been rejected from Lib Dem policy proposals as ‘impractical’. We have never been at our best when we are timid. Now that we are in a corner, we need to come out fighting.

So here’s a suggestion for another way in which Liberal Democrats could start to change the culture of government, which goes to the heart of our identity as a party. We could democratise policy-making. Part of the current malaise of British politics is the rise of cross-party consensus, often at odds with what the public thinks. Provocative though it was, Julian Astle’s claim in the Guardian (21 June) that this reflects the dominance of all parties by ‘Liberal alchemists’ held some water, if by ‘Liberal’ he meant ‘Orange Book reformist’, which he did.

PUBLIC ANGER

The Labour left and Tory right would like to change this by re-radicalising politics, resorting to populism – and stoking public anger. Liberal Democrats’ ideological response and historical tradition could see us trying to harness public creativity. Why not try to replicate internal policy structures, from local meetings up? Not just top-down consultation but bottom-up ideas. Public debates before key policy decisions are made. It would take a lot of work to make this start to happen, but could Lib Dems change the relationships between ministers, backbenchers, councillors and voters when it comes to policy deliberation? If we can start to bridge the gap between government and the people, that would be a distinctive Liberal Democrat legacy to be proud of, whatever our

“Party strategists have, quite wrongly, decided that we cannot be too publicly at odds with the Conservatives”

fate in 2015. And trying might improve our chances too.

Yet, at the moment, there is no sign of that happening. Far from moulding the political system in our own democratic image, we are in danger of going in the opposite direction. Autumn conference this year has fewer debates (relative to speeches and Q&A sessions) than ever before.

Cowley Street is more concerned to give junior ministers the chance to make government policy announcements (which should be saved for parliament) than let the party determine party policy.

Most egregiously, with discontent still raging over the revised NHS reforms – and despite the kudos the party has gained thanks to the passage of a transformative amendment in Sheffield – a debate over what Lib Dems should insist on in the final Health and Social Care Bill has been spurned by Federal Conference Committee in favour of a Health Q&A that can change nothing. Watch this space for a reaction.

Nor is it only conference delegates whose opportunity to be heard is threatened. Our backbenchers are too rarely consulted before Lib Dem ministers agree policy with Conservatives, even when the policy agreed is outside the Coalition Agreement or, heaven forbid, inconsistent with Liberal Democrat policy passed by conference.

With the Cowley Street Policy Research Unit virtually disbanded, what is the system now for developing independent party policy? The parliamentary committees of backbenchers and peers are a good innovation, though some see their role as merely to support the relevant ministers. Meeting for an hour a week without support staff, there are huge limits to what they can do anyway. The party needs mechanisms for ordinary members to feed in to them. Instead, there is a sense that now we are bearing the ‘responsibility’ of government, we should copy the other parties and give ministers a free rein, untrammelled by internal democracy. What dangerous nonsense. Democracy is in our DNA. It should be our unique selling point, at the heart of our narrative for government. Compromise is fine in most people’s eyes if you do it from a position of strength. Yet we are at risk of compromising on our source of strength; of giving up on what we hold most dear; and our ability to compromise itself.

Among six Social Liberal Forum fringe meetings at this September’s conference will be a discussion of party policy-making, featuring Evan Harris in conversation with chief whip Alistair Carmichael and deputy leader Simon Hughes. Come to Hall 5 of the ICC on Tuesday at 8.15pm to show your support for democracy – both internal and external. It will be the perfect opportunity to show whether we are cowed by government, or really willing to take the chance to make Britain more liberal and democratic.

David Hall-Matthews is chair of the Social Liberal Forum

TIME FOR PLAN C

The government's Plan A isn't reviving the economy and Labour's Plan B is very similar, so let's try Plan C, says Prateek Buch

Consider the dramatic scenes played out recently in major developed economies: a debt-laden Greece rescued yet again by the European Union; bond traders circling above Italian and Spanish securities; German and French growth stalling; and of course the (largely self-inflicted) American debt crisis that threatened to bring capitalism to its knees. Add to this stock market volatility not seen since the demise of Lehmann Brothers and the threat of a worldwide double-dip recession looms.

Meanwhile, the world of high-flying high-finance, where these crises originated, remains largely unreformed. Unable to wean itself off the crack-cocaine highs of short-term gain, the industry passes off the depressing lows of failed gambles onto the public's shoulders, all the while insisting on gargantuan rewards completely at odds with performance and with the public and personal austerity.

The coalition government's narrative remains forthright; reducing the budget deficit mainly by cutting public spending, allied to loose monetary policy – Plan A, if you like – has spared Britain the ignominy of having its debt downgraded and ensured stability. Indeed Chancellor George Osborne prescribes similar medicine for other nations navigating choppy economic waters, advocating more of the market-oriented monetarism that spawned the very crisis it's meant to cure.

ROTTEN CORE

However, even a cursory glance at a number of economic indicators, from GDP growth to retail sales and inflation, suggests that the veneer of stability over the British economy masks a rotten core.

Business Secretary Vince Cable's favourite analogy sees the 2007/08 crash as a heart attack; it's as though that acute shock to the system has resulted in us suffering from chronic heart failure, with a deficiency in pumping money and jobs, the lifeblood of economic vibrancy, around the nation's vital organs.

Hardly hard-hitting analysis so far; simply talking down our prospects won't do. We need to elaborate a vision for an economic settlement that tackles both the failure to grow in the medium term and the failure of the proceeds of growth to trickle down into the hands of ordinary people. In doing so, we'll explore the values on which the new economic era should be based, and how these broad principles might translate into policy.

Labour's Plan B has to date amounted to little more than a wilful blindness to quite how culpable yesterday's policies make them for today's woes, while conveniently forgetting how similar their spending plans are to the coalition's.

At most, we may hear of the need for another round of quantitative easing (no matter the inflationary

risks or the failure of printing money to revive the real economy). Other than that, we're offered little to inspire a recovery or a change of direction.

My call for a Plan C, focussing on sustainable, equitable and investment-driven growth, was given a flattering and unexpected endorsement at June's Social Liberal Forum Conference. Vince Cable acknowledged in his speech that deficit reduction was necessary but not sufficient to foster a real recovery. Preferring to call his approach Plan A+ (to stay on message), Vince advocated a mix of classic supply-side reforms such as deregulation, extensive lending from banks to businesses and loose monetary policy, and boosts to the demand-side such as green investment, emphasis on manufacturing and apprenticeships.

So we're agreed – along with Vince's friend Lord Robert Skidelsky, the Guardian's Julian Glover and London mayoral hopeful Mike Tuffrey – on the need to go beyond the theory of economic textbooks and implement a Plan A+/C (I'll stick to my nomenclature). But since the Chancellor appears fixated on 'expansionary fiscal contraction' – which, as the IMF's new chief Christine Lagarde pointed out, risks stalling the global recovery – it appears it's up to social liberals to supply the demand-side of the equation.

So what of the details of such a Plan C – what should we do differently to avoid the short-term damage to society from joblessness and weak growth, while ensuring a greener, fairer and more secure economic future for all?

I believe that understanding the social liberal economics of Hobhouse, Keynes, Amartya Sen and Will Hutton help address the three broad areas that a Plan C needs to cover: the short-term need to keep people in work; the mid-term need to rebalance the economy; and hard-wiring sustainability and fairness into the economy in the long run. At the SLF conference, Hutton in particular spoke with great passion of the need for a new economic paradigm. There's also much to be learned from the emerging field of behavioural economics, as well as more orthodox thinkers that social liberals might not be so comfortable with such as Joseph Schumpeter. Wherever our inspiration comes from, in pursuing one of these three aims we must not jettison the others; they're intimately linked, each one depending on and following from the rest.

Plan A is predicated on the theory that if only government budgets were balanced and its functions slimmed to a minimum, private and social enterprise would spring up and replace that which is cut; jobs first and foremost, but increasingly whole streams of activity once considered public functions.

Trouble is, this fails to account for the dampening of aggregate demand, and more importantly of confidence, in the face of uncertainty. Aside from the straightforward Keynesian consequence of lower

demand, investors seem to be ever more risk averse. A perverse consequence of Osbornomics appears to be investors' reluctance to support the real economy, preferring to lie low in the safety of government bonds. Given record private-sector surpluses, which indicate a dearth of viable investment opportunities and risk deflation, what's needed is policies that unlock this capital – implemented in a way that 'crowds in' private investment and helps create jobs.

So Plan C, Part One, should mean more of the thinking behind the government's enterprise zones, which are set to create thousands of jobs. Key to economic revival is the location of these zones and the nature of the enterprises supported – although small in scale and ambition to date, these initiatives may allow deprived areas to benefit from the stimulatory effect of new jobs and an emphasis on sustainability. Ensuring that a significant proportion of new jobs are focussed on green technology would also help foster the transition to a low-carbon economy, which allied to the Green Investment Bank should form a central plank in public policy.

FREE MARKET ZEALOTS

The creation of enterprise zones indicates a recognition that a successful economy truly is a joint venture between public and private spheres – not in a PPP/PFI fiasco sort of way, but in the way that Korean economist Ha-Joon Chang describes. Perhaps the state-owned enterprises Chang advocates would be hard to swallow for British free-market zealots, but there's little doubt that, if both exposure to risk and potential for returns on investment are fairly constituted, a new breed of stakeholder-driven corporations can revive investment in our chronically underfunded infrastructure and ensure that the fruits of said investment don't just accrue to the few.

Part Two of Plan C needs to look at rebalancing the economy through radical reform of the financial services – not out of some vengeful drive to put bankers back in their box, but because we recognise the centrality of a healthy and transparent sector to real growth and prosperity. The Social Liberal Forum successfully argued for tougher action on banks and bonuses at the Lib Dem Spring conference, and I'm hopeful that the Vickers Commission on banking will propose far-reaching reform to how banks are run.

What the country needs, however, goes beyond the separation of retail and investment banking, crucial though this is. A non-exhaustive list of financial reforms required includes: creation of an ecosystem of varied, local financial institutions that are connected to the businesses they're investing in; a number of regional stock exchanges to bring capital closer to where it's being put to use; more horizontal investment between companies, akin to what was the norm in Germany until recently; and investment vehicles more attuned to the long-term stability of a firm.

Financial transaction taxes may also form part of

“A perverse consequence of Osbornomics appears to be investors' reluctance to support the real economy”

Plan C, but only if they can be implemented without their costs being passed onto pension funds and the like.

The Liberal Democrat proposal to give away shares in currently nationalised banks is admirable and liberal – but instead of dispersing 100% of the shares in this way, we could use some to fund a National Investment Bank along

the lines of Lord Skidelsky's proposal. Finally, we need to retain democratic oversight and sovereignty over our economies, which are both under threat from unaccountable and self-interested credit ratings agencies; nothing short of a complete overhaul, including publicly funded ratings and greater transparency, will suffice.

CHILL WINDS

Plan C Part Three must review the rotten corporate governance that has spawned disproportionate rewards for the few whilst eroding security and wages for the many. Gone are the days – where they ever existed – when companies were loyal to workers from apprenticeships right through to senior posts. With stagnant wages in a globalised labour market, ordinary workers feel the chill winds of market forces in the form of job insecurity. There might be no one-stop solution, but rather a basket of policies that may help.

As well as an enhanced but less adversarial role for unions, we need more industrial democracy; not just token employee representation on remuneration committees but a real voice for workers in the direction a company goes in, not just in mutuals but in all corporations. Such a move would engender fairness intrinsically in the workplace, redistributing both income and power before the tax system even gets involved.

Schumpeter described how capitalism works through waves of 'creative destruction.' The centre-right claims this validates laissez-faire policy, but I'd say that if periodic fluctuations are to be a fact of economic life, we should help shield ordinary people from the worst consequences thereof. Many European countries embody this through a welfare state based on the principles of 'flexicurity', recognising that if labour is to be flexible then losing one's job shouldn't mean being put on the scrapheap and losing one's home and family too. With an emphasis on training and employee security, welfare reform needs to aim to foster full employment and flexicurity can help secure this aim.

Plan C should be a mix of reforms that rescue our economy from the doldrums in the short term without propping up the rotten structures that lead us there, and it should focus on sustainable long-term prosperity without condemning the current generation to misery. Bold, progressive and focussed on enhancing the capability and liberty of ordinary people, we should back Plan C as the way to a fairer political economy.

Dr Prateek Buch is an executive member of the Social Liberal Forum

WAR ON DRUGS, NOT ON USERS

The drugs policy motion to the Liberal Democrat conference shows a serious alternative to the futile ‘war on drugs’ says Ewan Hoyle

Julian Astle, in a recent blogpost for the Daily Telegraph (26 May), relates an anecdote which says much about the previously persistent prohibition of debate on drugs policy within the Liberal Democrats.

He writes: “When the Lib Dem conference voted, in 1994, to establish a Royal Commission to look at the case for decriminalising cannabis, Paddy Ashdown was so exasperated... that he kicked over his chair and stormed off the conference stage.”

One also hears tales of the dismay among the leadership when Liberal Democrat policy was again amended in 2002. That motion – which included a commitment to the legalisation of cannabis – was passed despite the whip ushering MPs into the hall to vote against, only for the party leader essentially to disown the policy and for it to be packed away in the box marked “political suicide”.

It is now 2011, and it is time to leave those days behind and construct an argument for a new drugs policy.

This time has to be different. This argument must sit well with our party from its roots to its highest branches of ministerial office, and must appeal to the majority of this nation’s citizens and media. Only then will this vital issue attract the debate and attention that is required to tackle the many ills that drugs, and the prohibition and criminalisation of their use, have inflicted upon our society.

There has never been a better time to push for change. We are a party of government, in coalition with a Conservative Party led by a man who knows the issues from his select committee experience and understands the need for reform.

In addition, recent events have concentrated minds on the opportunities available to young people and the potential reasons for delinquency. In the days after the riots, David Cameron announced he would review all policies. In the wake of debate at Birmingham on the motion ‘protecting individuals and communities from drug harms’, Liberal Democrats should apply pressure for him to review drug policy.

While the drug policy motions previously passed by conference could have been described as liberalising the law and tolerating drug use, this motion is targeted at finding out how we can best intervene to reduce harm to drug users, their families, and the communities they live in.

In no way could it be described as “turning a blind eye” or endangering our children. Too many young people take drugs. Too many become addicts. Too many remain addicted and a burden to society. Passing this motion should be the first step to finding out how

we can best prevent all these things happening, and make Britain a far more pleasant place to live.

CONSERVATIVE RESISTANCE

There are so many issues that this motion touches upon that it would be impossible for me to do them justice in my seven minute proposing speech. Yet each one of these issues adds another blow, which might help to break through Conservative resistance.

Cannabis is not a harmless drug. The concerns about links to psychosis and schizophrenia have a strong foundation in scientific evidence. Currently though, the message about this risk is not being adequately delivered and the ability of dealers to distribute their product to vulnerable children is not being adequately challenged.

The model I favour would see cannabis sold to over-18s from pharmacists, but only after these individuals had been educated on the warning signs of psychosis and other harms. This model, rather than relying on illegality to send the message that cannabis is harmful, could ensure that message is delivered every time an individual intends to purchase the drug. Properly regulating the cannabis market should not be seen as a danger to mental health. Rather, it is a step that could effectively promote awareness of psychosis and allow early intervention to protect individuals at risk.

Cannabis is also unique among prohibited drugs in that the vast majority of the cannabis available in the UK is also grown here. Many thousands of potential family homes have instead been converted into cannabis farms. These farms are frequently staffed by children specifically trafficked for the purpose from China or Vietnam.

Illegal cannabis cultivation is an unpleasant business. State-regulated cultivation, distribution and sale could bring much-needed jobs to local communities and the associated taxation could generate hundreds of millions, perhaps billions, of pounds for the Treasury. All we are asking is that models of legal regulation be investigated and the potential benefits and risks be seriously considered.

In calling for decriminalisation also to be seriously considered, we are now able to point to the Portuguese experience, where a peer-reviewed study has concluded that problematic drug use, drug-related harms and prison overcrowding have all reduced.

It is also important to note that there has not been any increase in drug use relative to the country’s neighbours. Portugal’s reforms are a particularly important model given their ambition to direct users into treatment, rather than merely not to prosecute. With large increases in people being treated, reforms

have been so demonstrably successful that only fringe far-right politicians are calling for their reversal. Criminalising drug use again in Portugal is not a matter of political debate. It's simply not going to happen.

It is also important to consider the effects of a criminal record on otherwise law-abiding young people, the studies indicating no relation between toughness of sentences for possession and levels of drug use between countries, and also the impact on police-community relations of laws that over one third of the population have broken at some point.

It is widely thought that the successes in Portugal might not have come about if the country had not also invested substantially in its treatment services. Leading the way in this area, however, is another relatively small European country, Switzerland, which was the first (since the British stopped doing it routinely) to adopt heroin maintenance prescribing as an additional treatment option for heroin addicts who have not responded adequately to methadone.

Providing pharmaceutical heroin for consumption in a controlled clinical environment has been demonstrated to achieve far greater reductions in street heroin use and criminal activity than prescribing methadone in the many studies that have been conducted in a wide variety of countries. One of these studies was conducted in the UK and had equally encouraging results. If we were to roll out this practice more broadly, then we should be able to reduce acquisitive crime, drug-related deaths and the viability of heroin dealing.

In Switzerland and the Netherlands, which has also adopted heroin maintenance clinics, the prevalence of heroin use is reducing rapidly. The reforms are popular too. Switzerland's approach to problem drug use has been consistently backed in referenda, and by a 2:1 majority in 2008.

POLICY DOLDRUMS

Perhaps one of the greatest frustrations of reporting these drug policy successes is the fact that these countries had drug problems that were dwarfed by our own, yet they recognised the urgent need to innovate and find more effective solutions. In contrast, the UK has been stuck in the drug policy doldrums, paralysed by the fear of our reactionary tabloids. There was a sense in both Portugal and Switzerland that their drug problems were getting rapidly worse at the times when they chose to act, and the recent riots in the UK have created a desire for bold action to avoid such things happening again.

On examination, it is quite easy to see how drug policy may have been of central importance to the criminal culture that allowed the riots and looting to spread. For too many children, the local drug-dealing gangster is the most wealthy and powerful role-model in the neighbourhood. Trying to challenge that

“It is quite easy to see how drug policy may have been of central importance to the criminal culture which allowed the riots and looting”

wealth and power through enforcement is hugely expensive and scientific study shows increased enforcement is likely to increase, not decrease, violence in communities.

If David Cameron is committed to “an all-out war on gangs and gang culture”, then we have to persuade him that enforcement is not the only way to fight the war. To achieve the upper hand in the war on gangs (and drugs), the wise route is

not to rush in, all guns blazing, but might instead be to remove the source of wealth and power and place it in the careful hands of the state. The drugs market in the UK is likely to be worth at least £5bn annually. To win the war on gangs, serious consideration has to be given to cutting their funding. At last, a funding cut that the British public might thank us for.

The passage of this motion could be important for the Liberal Democrats' electoral prospects, but it could also be hugely important to our nation's future and whatever indicators of economic health or well-being we use. For the Conservatives to accept the motion's demands, we have to reject the approach of repeated speeches on personal liberty and instead overwhelm them with evidence that there can be a better way.

If we get the Conservatives on side, there opens up a genuine opportunity to change the course of world history. We could be the first major world power to address the UN and say that the drug control conventions need to be revised to protect those three things that the UN holds most dear: peace and security, development, and human rights.

There are states around the world suffering the overwhelming corruptive influence of the drug trade. Mexico's war on drugs is claiming tens of thousands of lives while rendering whole regions ungovernable, Afghanistan's economy is dominated by heroin when, all around the world, countries could undermine the Taliban by confronting their addiction problems with a safe, domestically cultivated and manufactured alternative.

This motion is not about ending the war on drugs. It is about taking that war to the drugs themselves, and hounding them with the relentless application of evidenced policy until their negative impacts, and the negative impacts of the laws designed to combat them, have reached an equilibrium of minimum harm. If we fail to communicate these reforms properly now, another generation risks suffering for our repeated mistakes.

Ewan Hoyle is the founder of Liberal Democrats for Drug Policy Reform

BAPTISM OF FIRE

South Sudan, the world's newest independent state, has been born amid a border conflict the west neglected to settle, threats from North Sudan and repression at home,
Becky Tinsley reports

International diplomats and politicians have been celebrating the birth of Africa's newest country, South Sudan, like over-stimulated toddlers at a party. The media has followed suit, with trivial and sometimes patronising stories about the new national anthem and flag, and the admittedly strange plan to create cities in the shapes of African animals.

Sadly, those involved should have focused on the agenda items they failed to address before sending out the independence day invitations. Postponed until an unspecified time were:

- the location of the border between north and south, quite important, you would have thought;
- who has citizenship, and what becomes of the millions of southerners living in the north;
- how much the north would charge the south to tranship its oil across northern territory to Port Sudan.

Consequently, and entirely predictably, the region is falling apart before our eyes.

The northern regime of President Bashir, based in Khartoum, is bombing South Kordofan state, in the disputed border area, on an almost daily basis; satellites reveal freshly-dug mass graves (www.satsentinel.org); and Human Rights Watch estimates that 150,000 civilians have fled their homes to hide in the Nuba mountains where they face starvation. Given these unpromising events, celebrating the birth of the Republic of South Sudan seems premature.

It is the Nuba people's bad luck to find their home, South Kordofan, on the northern side of the notional border, cut off from the ethnic, religious and political groups with which they identify in South Sudan. Since 5 June, Khartoum has effectively branded all black African citizens in South Kordofan as enemy insurgents, and is hunting them down, dragging them from their homes and executing them in the streets.

Church members and educated people have been targeted, while United Nations peacekeepers stayed in their barracks; eyewitnesses even accused some Egyptian UN troops of joining in the killing on 8 June, supporting the northern Sudanese army.

On 20 June, northern Sudanese security forces, dressed as Red Crescent workers, lured 7,000 terrified Nuba people away from the UN compound to which they had fled in the optimistic and unfounded hope the UN might protect them. Their fate is unknown.

DECADES OF SLAUGHTER

It wasn't supposed to be like this. Back in 2005 when

the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed, it brought to an end a war that had claimed two million lives. Dedicated UK, US and Norwegian diplomats achieved the almost impossible by pressing Khartoum to stop decades of slaughtering its southern citizens.

The ethnic groups of southern Sudan, mainly black African and non-Muslim, had endured brutality and genocide at the hands of the mostly Arab and Muslim north for hundreds of years. It is fashionable to blame colonialism for current divisions, but that ignores the historic role of Arab northerners in the slave trade for centuries, selling black Africans to the Middle East and then the white man. Sadly the same vile assumptions about Arab racial superiority persist to this day.

In the early 1900s, Churchill, visiting the Nuba, was impressed by their desire for independence. He was also shocked that the Arab Sudanese army used the Nuba for target practice.

When the Peace Agreement was signed, the plan was to use the following six years to resolve issues such as the border location, culminating in a self-determination referendum in January 2011. Despite the warnings from all who knew Khartoum's track record, those involved failed to grasp that any non-Arab or non-Muslim left on the northern side of the border would be in peril.

South Kordofan, Abyei and Blue Nile states were thus assigned to the north, with local consultation on their future status pledged. In the case of Abyei, the Dinka (ethnically black African) were promised a referendum, but the tough decision on who was eligible to vote was ducked. Hence in May, Khartoum's troops ethnically cleansed the area of black Africans, moving in the nomadic Misseria Arabs so they could claim voting rights.

The international community avoided rocking the boat for fear the north would drop out. Hence they appeased Khartoum, tolerating its stalling tactics, and averting their eyes as Khartoum broke its own promises, including in Darfur. Every failure to hold Khartoum to its commitments was rightly interpreted as the west's lack of seriousness.

The result of this dithering diplomacy is there for all to see: the black African citizens of North Sudan are being hunted from helicopter gunships like animals; farmers who should be planting crops are hiding in the mountains where they face starvation whatever now happens.

How long will black Africans and Christians in the south, and the neighbouring Blue Nile state in the north, stand by as Nubans and Dinka are killed by Khartoum and its proxies? Will they settle for co-existence, as West Germans did, knowing their cousins

were being oppressed?

Understandably, the people of the south want to build their new nation, rather than return to war with Khartoum. But the Nuba are unlikely to surrender. On 1 July, Bashir ordered his soldiers to “continue operations in South Kordofan until they clean the state of rebels”.

If the black African people of Blue Nile state and the south cannot tolerate mass murder next door, there could be war along the border, from Darfur to Ethiopia.

The UN Security Council met privately on 15 July. It discussed a leaked internal report on South Kordofan, and was urged to intervene by the International Red Cross, the Red Crescent and UN senior staff.

However, the US envoy to Sudan, Princeton Lyman, cast doubt on the UN’s own report, numerous eyewitness accounts and the satellite pictures, saying there was no clear evidence of mass graves. So, while the US will use the Responsibility to Protect to justify intervention in Libya, it will not do so in Sudan. Why? Khartoum is ‘helping’ Washington in the war on terror in Somalia and Yemen. A former US envoy has also suggested that the Obama administration wants to repair its relations with the Arab and Muslim worlds. Good luck with that, as they say in the States.

FEAR OF REPRISALS

During the war, millions of southerners fled to Khartoum to escape the bombardment. They found work and had families. Now, they are being fired from their jobs because of their ethnicity, or their parents’ ethnicity, and are being intimidated. Thousands have fled, giving up homes and possessions in fear of reprisals from a northern population that has never welcomed them.

Last December, President Bashir proclaimed that the new northern Sudan would be a monolithic Islamic Arab state. “We will change the constitution, and at that time there will be no time to speak of diversity of culture and ethnicity,” he declared. “Shari’a [law] and Islam will be the main source for the constitution, Islam the official religion and Arabic the official language.”

It is estimated as many as five million people of southern background live in the north. Given Khartoum’s track record, it is easy to foresee a situation where the regime uses its non-Arab and non-Muslim population as pawns in any argument with the south, treating them like hostages. It was therefore careless of the international community to have left the details of citizenship unresolved, and to walk away from Sudan without demanding constitutional civil rights for minorities.

Economically, the south has one thing going for it: 385,000 barrels of oil a day. An estimated 75% of the former nation’s oil reserves are beneath its territory.

Until independence, the oil was exported to its Chinese buyers through a pipeline running north to Port Sudan. It would cost an estimated \$1.5 to 3bn to build a pipeline to a suitable Kenyan port, but the south’s reserves are not big enough to justify the

“Regrettably, Africa’s newest country is a one-party state, where journalists and opposition are arrested and beaten up”

capital outlay. Hence Khartoum is taking advantage of its monopoly position by charging \$33 a barrel duty, 16 times the highest going rate. In neighbouring Chad, they pay \$0.4 a barrel for transshipping. At the time of writing, the south had halted exports.

History teaches us that it doesn’t always go well

when rebels become politicians. A foreign diplomat in Juba points out that, of the \$12bn in oil revenues going to the interim southern administration since the 2005 peace deal, \$3bn is unaccounted for.

Regrettably, Africa’s newest country is a one-party state, where journalists and opposition are arrested and beaten up, and where jobs go to loyal rebel Sudan People’s Liberation Movement or Army comrades. Of the 170 seats in parliament, only four are held by non-SPLM parties; a local civil servant told us 40 of the 170 were illiterate. The SPLM controls an estimated 40-60% of the economy, with savvy Ugandan and Kenyan traders benefiting most in the six years since the ceasefire.

The US alone has poured \$2bn into the south since 2005. Yet, visitors find a land with a stone-age economy and infrastructure, with the highest maternal mortality rate in the world (one in seven pregnancies ends in the mother’s death). Female illiteracy is 80 to 90%, and a 15-year-old girl has more chance of dying in childbirth than she does of finishing primary school.

If farmed efficiently, the south could feed all of Africa, but training people to grow crops has not been a priority. The president, Salva Kiir, skilfully provides western nations with the development clichés required to unlock donations. He speaks of cracking down on corruption, and of appointing officials on the basis of merit rather than tribe. But African citizens know from experience that words count for little.

On 20 July, Foreign Office minister Henry Bellingham made his second recent trip to Bashir’s Sudan. He “reiterated the preparedness of his country to assist Sudan in building a prosperous future,” the regime’s news agency gushed, describing his trip to Port Sudan and joint development projects: business as usual, then. His stance is at odds with the honourable position taken by international development secretary Andrew Mitchell, who also remains concerned about the upswing in regime-sponsored bloodshed in Darfur.

If the UN had the political support of its powerful members, it would impose a no-fly zone to stop Khartoum bombing its own people. The UN would also demand access for its agencies and for humanitarian groups to both South Kordofan and Abyei. But Ban Ki Moon is not the man to face down Bashir, particularly when America has disengaged.

The killing and ethnic cleansing will continue while the people responsible face no consequences. And as for South Sudan? Good luck with that.

Becky Tinsley’s book ‘When the Stars Fall to Earth: A novel of Africa’ is available from www.amazon.com. She founded the human rights group Waging Peace (www.wagingpeace.info) after visiting Darfur in 2004

ANGRY MPs IN PRESS PROBE SHOCKER

The degeneration of the press into celebrity entertainment has robbed the public of the ability to influence governments, but the hacking scandal is an opportunity to reverse this, says Adrian Sanders

Despite riots and economic crisis, no one can have missed coverage of the phone hacking scandal. Events are still developing fast and are likely to for the foreseeable future.

The true extent of phone hacking in the News International press has been revealed; this has somewhat vindicated Vince Cable's 'War on Murdoch' and stopped the BSkyB deal in its tracks.

An added bonus has been seeing the News of the World having to make its excuses and leave the news stand. We've now got the in-depth, formal enquiries being set up that MPs like Tom Watson, Paul Farrelly and I have been arguing for over the last year.

We will have to wait to see what the various investigations produce but I find it highly unlikely that culpability was restricted only to News International.

The question we have to face is what sort of print media we will see after the scandal has settled down and what to do about the regulation of the media.

It has been abundantly clear for some time that the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) has not been an appropriate regulator for the press; indeed, it was only ever intended to be a reactive arbitrator in complaints, not a proactive regulator in the sense that other sectors are governed.

The reluctance to reform the system stems from two factors. Firstly, a genuine need to maintain the freedom of the press and, secondly, a more pragmatic fear of decision-makers who do not want to feel the wrath of a hostile media.

We now have a brief period where the second factor doesn't apply; we have the summer to collect our thoughts and approach the issue of media regulation from a cool, rational standpoint.

LACKLUSTRE AND TOOTHLESS

The Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee has reviewed press regulation a number of times in recent years. In 2007, the examination of the original phone hacking convictions and the hounding of Kate Middleton by tabloid journalists showed the PCC to be lacklustre and toothless. Similarly, our 2010 investigation that followed up, among other cases, the libel case involving the McCanns reinforced this conclusion.

In the past twelve months, the phone hacking scandal has developed to the crescendo of Rupert Murdoch's appearance in front of our committee, before being obscured by a foolishly ill-timed intervention from some shaving foam.

During this period, it has been very difficult to

see what the PCC did, or even discover if it had wondered if it should be doing anything at all. A slavish acceptance of the excuses put forward by News International and a string of unconvincing media appearances, together with criticism that the PCC was "as useful as a fishnet condom", brought an end to Baroness Buscombe's career as its head, and the body's fate is now seemingly in the hands of Lord Justice Leveson.

It is evident we can't sustain the current format of the PCC. It's also clear we need to maintain the separation between government and regulation of the media. And to me, it's obvious that, after sixty years, self regulation just isn't buttering any parsnips anymore, and should be replaced by robust, independent and pro-active regulation.

At present, the direction of the PCC is determined to a great extent by newspaper editors, seven of whom sit on its panel. The perception of bias towards the national papers does the PCC absolutely no good and its track record of throwing out complaints without any meaningful reason, and failing to do anything against very serious libels, gives the impression that self-regulation simply amounts to self interest. Removing editors from this decision-making process must be a first step.

The PCC, or whatever replaces it, needs to be given a new remit to act proactively. Today, investigations take place only if the person directly affected by a story registers a complaint, and all too often the PCC will advise against making one or hide behind even the potentiality of legal or police action. The public should have as much right to scrutinise and complain about the conduct of journalists as the subject of stories. There is also no scope for instigating more wide-ranging thematic investigations that would hold the media to account; assessing, for example, the level of adherence to any informal promises not to use paparazzi images.

If a new system is going to work, media outlets should not be allowed to opt-out of the regulatory system, as the Daily Express and others have done in the past.

Most importantly, the new PCC needs to have sufficient powers to have an impact and it needs to use these powers effectively. We need to explore fully powers such as being able to impose meaningful fines, stipulating where and how apologies are published, providing a statutory right of reply to those unfairly covered by newspapers and, most importantly as an extreme sanction, a ban on publication for a short

period of time for papers that routinely and severely break the code of conduct.

Banning journalists or editors from participating in their profession for serious breaches must also be considered.

All of these issues will be debated over the coming months, and will determine how radically we want to alter the PCC; whether its institutional memory is worth retaining, whether it needs wholesale replacement; what the statutory implications of this will be and also to what extent we might want to draw Ofcom or the courts into any new structure of regulation.

There is, however, a wider opportunity to harness the public dissatisfaction with the press to do more to make it better.

It is easy for politicians, who are often on the receiving end of the irrationalities of the press, to envisage radical reform and indeed this 'us and them' mentality between politicians and national papers is something that should come to an end.

The history of national journalism over the past hundred years or so has seen the press eschew rational discourse for more marketable reality-based entertainment.

While this trend has seen media owners profit, it has diluted the role of the press in holding public authority to account and allowing civil society to participate in the intellectual direction of government.

WORRYING CONCERNS

This presents some very deep and worrying concerns for the nature of our democracy as a whole. A central liberal axiom should be that rational public discussion is essential for forming just legislation; the inability of the press to mediate adequately between the public sphere and the state subverts this whole process; it encourages politicians to pursue unjust solutions to political problems and discourages the public from thinking critically and rationally about these same problems.

At its extreme, journalism became sensationalist for the sake of it, abandoning all professional ethics. This extreme has become the norm in recent years and brought us the phone hacking scandal, Piers Morgan's hoax pictures of British troops abusing Iraqi prisoners and so on. This sensationalism might have little long-term impact on the public, apart from costing them money, but we must consider the wider problem of the media having effectively placed the public in a state of tutelage; at its worst this ends up as ruthless manipulation. You only have to read Nick Davies's book *Flat Earth News* to discover the extent to which proprietors such as Murdoch use their considerable clout not only to make the news but also to control the political agenda.

This ability in part comes from market dominance. One of Rupert Murdoch's points to the Select Committee was how on earth could he possibly know the minutiae of phone hacking at the News of the World when it constituted less than 1% of his business.

To many, this has raised the prospect of, like the equally unethical banking sector, breaking up large media conglomerates. I wouldn't countenance such an intervention in the entire sector, but consider it a useful tool that a regulator might have as an option.

If we are going to have sanctions for papers that recklessly disregard the code of conduct, there have to be sanctions that editors, proprietors and shareholders actually take seriously, rather than miniscule fines or printed apologies that have virtually no impact upon the business of the newspaper.

A dangerous consequence of these large corporations is the scope for responsibility and accountability to become lost in a mire of complex processes. Our first committee enquiry found the executives at News International suffering from collective amnesia. This time around I raised the prospect that what News International and News Corp. were suffering from was wilful blindness, the abrogation of responsibility and ethics that brought down Enron and has contributed to corporate and political scandals throughout the last century.

It's not necessarily a matter of breaking up the corporations into smaller ones, but breaking up the corporate culture that has too often prevailed in recent years that is the fundamental thing that needs to happen.

I'm hoping that the wider enquiry into the nature of the press will address its wider role in democracy and assess whether it contributes to a fairer, dare I say more liberal, society.

In *On Liberty*, John Stuart Mill bemoaned the "moral coercion of public opinion" and that very same public opinion, as marshalled by the tabloid press, seems to provoke already callow and capricious politicians into abandoning reason still further.

Having a free press that misuses and abuses its responsibilities is a major stumbling block to realising a liberal society; fear of irrational public opinion is what prompted liberals from Mill to Tocqueville to endorse representative, rather than direct, democracy.

The pernicious influence of the media is why, for example, I don't think directly elected police commissioners is a good idea; it will make having a rational debate about what works best in policing even more difficult than it is at the moment and will accelerate the trend towards short-term superficiality in public policy.

As the media perpetuates ill-informed public opinion, politicians and civil servants have every more reason to reject people's views, which has brought us to the rather unedifying situation we are in now where the public and politicians barely understand one another.

The party, and especially the leadership, have a great opportunity to take some significant steps forward to achieving a more liberal society. Experience over the past couple of years has sadly revealed that we aren't too good at making the most of opportunities that present themselves, so I will hope for a more modest ambition of a regulatory system for the press that actually works.

They are, after all, the guardians of our democracy but as is so often asked, *quis custodiet ipsos custodios?* But not usually in Latin.

Adrian Sanders is the Liberal Democrat MP for Torbay and member of the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee

UNMADE CASE

All kinds of pernicious nonsense will infect politics so long as liberals are parochial and afraid to argue for their own positions, says Michael Meadowcroft

In common with other European and North American countries, Britain is in thrall to a politically right-wing mentality that is hardly being challenged to any rigorous extent by mainstream progressive forces. Day after day, Conservative ministers and spokespersons – just like their Labour counterparts before them – are allowed to get away with outrageous statements that pander to populist opinion for the sake of votes.

Liberal Democrats in the country have great hopes of their colleagues in government and are keen to support them. There are, of course, many liberal initiatives in government, particularly in civil rights, fiscal changes and some welfare improvements, that are a direct consequence of our participation in the coalition.

There are other changes, such as in immigration, policing structures and the by-passing of local government, that are bleakly a consequence of an unregenerate conservatism. I am not referring to tuition fees, where the policy for the next academic year is much better than the existing arrangement and only the election pledge was hugely impolitic.

The party can rightly expect its representatives in government to act to extend liberal values, but its ability to do so is inevitably constrained by the weight of an illiberal ethos that increasingly prevails among the electorate.

It is not a set of logical beliefs, but rather knee-jerk reactions that utter reactionary opinions and seek scapegoats and which believe in imaginary deterrents.

If the party wants its ministers to enact liberal policies, it has to campaign to promote liberal values and policies in the country. It must be a partnership between those persuading the electorate and the ministers persuading the government. I see little current sign of the former happening.

It hit me that the party was failing its parliamentary leadership when, during the first leaders' television debate, Nick Clegg was struggling to defend the liberal – and correct – policy of introducing, in effect, an amnesty for long-staying illegal immigrants. He was under attack from both Gordon Brown and David Cameron, who sensed an issue on which Liberal Democrats were very much at odds with public opinion. Where, I wondered, was the party on the streets making the case for this sensitive and practical policy? Where were the Focus leaflets campaigning for broader liberal issues than the traditional local ward problems?

ALARMING WEAKNESS

The current weakness of the party is alarming. The liberal cause is intellectually powerful and is desperately needed today. Why then is it so feebly presented?

It is not only a consequence of the declining numbers of party members – though today even the Plymouth Brethren have more members than the Liberal Democrats – but rather the lack of intellectual and philosophical support from those members that do exist. There is no lack of campaigning and tactical support, though much of it is, I believe, deeply misconceived, but rather that few people in the high echelons of the party seem interested in anything else.

It is symptomatic that, when I discovered that there was no publication on party values available at headquarters, and I did an update of a 2002 party paper, it had to be published in Leeds – and Cowley Street isn't interested in even having a stock of the booklet to promote and sell!

We are seeing the cumulative ill effects of the seat targeting strategy. It may well have delivered extra seats at the 2001 and 2005 elections but it was at the high price of writing off vast tracts of the country where campaigning was not encouraged or even allowed.

As a consequence, when, after the first leaders' debate at the last general election, the party's poll rating rose by nine points, we were unable to harvest it when, as in Leeds, only one seat out of eight was fully contested, and in the others only five wards out of twenty-nine were fought. It also means that, unlike in earlier times, the party does not encourage, or even find, younger candidates in difficult wards prepared to commit themselves to years of sacrifice to win their own area. It is embarrassing time after time to have to tell interested new contacts that there is no activity in their patch.

The political problem is more serious than ever today, but it is not a new phenomenon. In fact, I reckon that the one depressing fact that has characterised my 50-odd years of liberal activism is probably the lack of confidence of Liberals in their own beliefs.

Even more curiously, the more that Liberals were seen to be right, the more rapidly they retreated from pressing their case. Take the Iraq invasion as a vivid recent example. The Liberal Democrats had 100% of their MPs present in parliament for the key vote on 18 March 2003 and, alone of the three parties, every Liberal Democrat MP voted against the invasion. Even though the party had taken the definitive decision to oppose the war, it took wild horses to get Charles Kennedy to speak at the huge anti-war demonstration in Hyde Park.

It was a 'brave' decision then, before, for instance, the later facts on the absence weapons of mass destruction were known, but the more the decision was proved to be right, the more the party leadership and membership increasingly failed to bang the drum and to drive home the message that only the Liberal Democrats had opposed the war. Even today, Iraq is

very much on the political agenda, not least with two million Iraqis in exile and the Christian minority destroyed, but we are silent.

It is the same with European unity, where we have abandoned the argument to the Euro-sceptics and, worse, to the xenophobes. The Liberal Party was committed in its 1955 general election manifesto to Britain being part of the burgeoning European structures. It

was brave then but, as the arguments for a federal Europe became clearer, we have been less vocal and have hardly campaigned at all on the principles and values of European unity. We have had the longest period of peace in human history in Western Europe and, even though there is an acknowledged global economy and an accepted need to act in concert on climate change, it is the facile and nationalistic anti-European arguments that dominate the debate.

The same could be said on immigration, Trident replacement, penal policies, the revival of local government and on civil liberties issues, on most of which the Liberal Democrats have stood alone but hardly lead the debate in the country. I'm inevitably indulging in generalisations, but it would be salutary to survey how many local parties have put leaflets out on any of these issues or who have organised public debates on them. The liberal case is going by default outside parliament and this is bound to make it more difficult to win it in parliament.

DANGERS AND FUTILITY

Quite apart from the importance of promoting the liberal case on each of these key issues, there is an even more urgent case for exposing the dangers and the futility of the prevailing ethos in society. At the heart of the present malaise is a basic selfishness that regards economic values as more important than human values. Allied to this is the associated antipathy to 'society' and to concepts of community integrity. This has its roots in the encouragement of materialism that epitomised the 13 years of Thatcherism between 1979 and 1992.

Remember Sid and the advertisements for buying shares in privatised public utilities – which previously we had all owned? Remember the de-mutualisation of building societies with the bribe of a payout for members? Remember the sale of council houses, which gave the new owners a 60% discount on the value of the property, which could be cashed in after three brief years? Remember also John Major's inauguration of the National Lottery in 1994, with "it could be you"?

Is it any wonder that those who feel excluded from the opportunity to become better off financially become alienated from any concept of a human society that treasures the values of "love and friendship, art and music, and learning" as identified in a Liberal Party document of 1974. Years ago, whatever its faults and its naiveté on economic policy, Labour could be expected to be 'sound' on social welfare and civil rights.

“If the party wants its ministers to enact liberal policies, it has to campaign to promote liberal values and policies in the country”

Today, this is far from the case. John Kampfner tellingly quotes Robin Cook as commenting, "Blair's dominant style is concessionary. He spots where the next attack on the left is going to come from and pre-empts it by making it himself." It is up to the Liberal Democrats to make the progressive case and they are largely shirking the challenge. There are few instinctive liberals among the electorate but there are

many who can be persuaded if the case is well put.

Those thus alienated all too often blame others for their plight. They see 'immigrants' as the cause; they blame 'Europe' for oppressing them; they believe that 'the government', with its austerity programme, is denying them jobs; and they argue that the government is soft on law and order, thus encouraging anti-social behaviour.

None of this is true but it is dangerous nonsense and needs to be challenged. The decline of the BNP electorally does not mean that its views have also diminished. As Matthew Goodwin notes in a recent book on the BNP, "There exists in British politics a sizeable amount of latent support for the extreme right which is far greater than is apparent at the polls. Put simply, extreme right parties have consistently failed to realise their potential."

All this brings me neatly to the recent riots. Violence, arson and looting are inexcusable and deserve careful commensurate penalties, but to liberals the reasons are clear. A feeling that there is little hope for future improvement, plus a materialistic society in which individuals are urged go and get what they can, which sees bankers and other failures generously rewarded, and which has less and less sense of the unity and the 'commonwealth' of the community, is, alas, a tinder box waiting to be ignited.

How have liberals allowed this to happen? Are not we the party that understands the nature of the community? Apparently not. Almost without exception, community politics has drifted into a populist parochial technique for winning wards. It no longer seeks to look at the community as a holistic identity with its own meeting place and, by drawing together schools, planning, social welfare, health policies, housing and the arts, and by underpinning a voluntary sector input into every activity – including job creation – creates a strong, secure and increasingly self-sufficient neighbourhood. It's a much more difficult and longer-term task than surveys on the location of potholes, but it is the foundation of real community politics.

The tyranny of Focus, the drumming up of casework and the use of every passing gimmick are no substitute for the rigorous politics that are needed if we are to change the ethos of our society and are genuinely to support our ministers.

Michael Meadowcroft was a Leeds City councillor for 15 years and MP for Leeds West 1983-87. Website: www.bramley.demon.co.uk

DON'T SPEAK FOR ENGLAND

The English party tier within the Liberal Democrats is undemocratic, pointless, self-important and divorced from campaigning realities. It's time to scrap it, says Chris White

The Liberal Democrat party is a series of separate entities, vying for position. This allows some healthy checks and balances. The leadership cannot tell conference what to do. The national executive, arcanelly termed the Federal Executive (FE), has no real official policy role and a limited role over conference. Local party chairs are autonomous in their little empires. Council group leaders can get on with scrutiny and policy without being told what to do by their local or regional party.

Like the US constitution, its complexity is admirable. But, again like the US, its elegance can lead to nonsense and contention, as institutions flex their muscles to protect their rights. Local party chairs square up to council group leaders when they have no business in so doing. Group leaders draft manifestos, which properly belong to the local party.

Meanwhile federal committees grandstand: Federal Policy Committee (FPC) members famously denounced the party leader at his first major conference in 2009 over the issue of tuition fees, thus ensuring that positions were entrenched.

Federal Conference Committee (FCC) discards motions and amendments in ways that conference representatives find increasingly difficult to understand but seems shy of explaining its decisions or accepting that a decision might have been erroneous (FPC is told to accept FCC's rulings as essentially ex cathedra).

Meanwhile FE has discovered an appetite for policy when it comes to the coalition agreement, something for which it has no mandate.

SPATS AND RIVALRIES

In good times, the party can live through these spats and rivalries. But in tough times we need to remember more clearly that the party is the collection of its members, and all of us who hold office are the servants of the membership: none of the entities described so far has rights that are larger than the rights of the party collectively.

And it matters. If local party chairs and group leaders are at loggerheads, local campaigning suffers. If policy is out of touch with the electorate or with political reality, the party's electoral credibility suffers. If conference is debating the wrong issues or is prevented from debating issues the membership cares about, the party is in danger of open warfare.

A former MP said recently that we needed to work back from the letterbox when forming policy: if it won't help us on a leaflet, let's not spend time on it. The same can be said for every activity that is not engaging

directly with the electorate: if it doesn't help us get votes then why do we do it?

That is not to say that we must tailor our cloth to the rantings of the Daily Mail: we must obviously be true to ourselves as well as relevant. But the first thought of every activist every day must be: how do I campaign more effectively?

The failure to do this has become most acute in the English party. This is the body to which most Lib Dem members belong. They think they belong to the Federal Party, governed by a Federal Conference, but the reality is different. The Federal Party has no say over aspects of membership policy, over candidate approval processes, over the governance of local parties or over the English regions. We, after all, believe in localism and democracy and we are practising what we preach.

Or are we? What does a member do if he or she does not like the way the English party is governed?

Let us take a specific example: the English party has decided, without the slightest effort to consult with councillors or councillor organisations within the party, that the forthcoming police commissioner elections are not to be treated as local elections. The logic, if one can call it that, is that all sorts of odd people might be tempted to stand for these posts and we need processes in place to make sure they are properly screened. The fact that all sorts of odd people end up successfully running very significant local authorities without this screening is brushed to one side.

RIDICULOUS POSITIONS

The principal objectors are of course councillors – not because councillors are keen to stand for these ridiculous positions but because they fear the worst if we do not get on with selections and campaigning this summer. The English party hierarchy is impervious to the campaigning problems associated with candidates who will be selected in mid-November, just (at the time of writing) six months before polling day. What does not work in council elections will apparently be just fine in the more testing atmosphere of giant electoral constituencies.

So: what can councillors and their leaders do? Can they lobby the councillor representatives on English Council or on English Council Executive? No: unlike FE and FPC, there are no councillor representatives (FCC doesn't have them either, which may explain why councillors have a relatively limited role at Federal Conference – but that is an issue for another day).

Can they elect people who are more sympathetic to their views? In a way, yes. But the elections are indirectly indirect. Members elect regional conference

representatives who elect English Council members who elect the members of the English Council Executive. The chances of influencing the outcomes are very small. I have elsewhere compared this unfavourably to the election of the Doge of Venice.

Can councillors or others make a fuss at conference? No: there is no English conference. English policy-making is done by Federal Conference. Federal Conference cannot take English business motions even if the Scots and the Welsh promise to stay in the bar.

It didn't used to matter that much, although the increasingly arcane rules governing parliamentary candidate selection were giving rise to concern, and meant damagingly late selections across the country in the run-up to the 2010 general election.

SLAUGHTERED

Now it matters big time. If we are slaughtered in the 2012 police commissioner elections, there is a good chance that we will suffer major setbacks in the council elections on the same day. Again.

The Local Government Association Liberal Democrat group has led the charge on this, attempting to get the FE to persuade the English party to see sense. But the response has been essentially: "It is our right to do this, therefore we are right to do it." We were also told that the decision was unanimous: hands up who hasn't agreed something unanimously and then subsequently regretted it bitterly.

If there are no mechanisms that allow for the English party hierarchy to be challenged, removed or persuaded, then we have failed to be true to our principles. Most of us feel that it is beyond reform. More to the point, we feel that it is not actually necessary.

A couple of decades ago, there was a constitutional review, the function of which was to tie up some of the nonsenses that arose from the merger negotiations and to make the English party a bit more sensibly structured. It used to have conferences where policy was debated – but it soon became apparent that English policy (as distinct from policy that affected England and Wales) was confined essentially to the Church of England. It made sense, therefore, to deal with policy at Federal Conference.

Times have changed, of course, as a result of Scottish

*"A simple proposition:
we get rid
of the
English party"*

and Welsh devolution but no-one seriously wants to remove the role of Federal Conference to debate matters of national consequence to the majority of the electorate. So English policy-making will remain a federal matter with Scottish and Welsh colleagues being asked not to vote.

We are also frequently told that, in the absence of the English party, the English regions would be obviously bigger, in some cases,

than Scotland or Wales and that our non-English colleagues would find this threatening. Personally, I believe they are made of sterner stuff.

So, a simple proposition: we get rid of the English party. Its functions over membership should be transferred to the Federal party, and parliamentary candidate approval processes vested in the Joint States Candidates Committee, where regional chairs elect the English nominee.

All other functions, including candidate approval processes for non-parliamentary elections (like police commissioners), would be devolved to regions. English representatives on federal committees can be abolished: it is possible that Federal Conference representatives might perversely elect no English members but that is, let's be honest, unlikely.

Simple? Yes. So how do we get there? There's the rub. The English party can be abolished only by its own consent. That is not the consent of the membership, who, you will recall, don't get much of a look in, but English Council – which is indirectly elected.

Will they vote for this? Only if you make sure now that your regional conference representatives are committed to abolition and see the enormous financial and other benefits that would then accrue to the regions as a result.

This is not just an obscure constitutional squabble. The English party has forgotten the importance of letterboxes and is standing on its own – rather than its members' – dignity.

We can't go into any more elections with one – let alone both – arms tied behind our back. Get lobbying!

Chris White is a member of the Federal Executive and Federal Policy Committee, and deputy leader of the LGA Liberal Democrat group. He writes here in a personal capacity

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MACHIAVELLI'S REVENGE

The eurozone crisis will soon force Britain to make a stark choice and this is an opportunity for Liberal Democrats to reassert their values, says John Stevens

Recently, I spent a few days in Tuscany. I say this up front, not to establish how in touch I am with the spirit of the coalition, but because I visited Sant'Andrea in Percussina where, of course, Niccolò Machiavelli wrote *The Prince*, and where he died in disgrace for his Republicanism, mourning the failure of Italy to unite: a failure that greatly illuminates the present crisis of European integration.

Machiavelli predicted that failure would precipitate the end of everything he held dear. But he never fully believed it. He could not conceive the completeness of the collapse to come. In the first quarter of the sixteenth century, it has been estimated that the combined GDP of the principal Italian states, excluding the Papacy, accounted for nearly two-thirds of the total productive capacity of Europe: the essential economic foundation for the astonishing achievements in art and science that continue to delight and amaze us.

Move on two centuries, the contribution of their successors had shrunk to less than a seventh of the whole, a rare case in economic history of an absolute, as well as a relative decline. The glories of the Renaissance had gone. The elegant palazzi that formerly housed the banks of Florence had mostly become brothels for tourists. Prosperity had moved from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, and from the city state to the nation state. When a liberal spirit eventually returned to European politics, it wore the frown of Calvin rather than the smile of Botticelli.

UNPRECEDENTED CHALLENGE

It is obvious that we are living in a time when our old certainties in the West are under unprecedented challenge. Decline is everywhere in the air. Our economies are not just overburdened by debt, but seem also to have lost the capacity to generate sufficient growth to sustain employment, let alone welfare provision. Our rich have become rootless, riding the opportunities for capital, and the immunities from taxation, afforded by globalisation. Our poor have become rootless, crushed by the marginalisation of their labour and the pace of competitive change. Our middle class, the last patriots, since they alone are still rooted, by employment and mortgages, are squeezed remorselessly, so that their sense of security, which had previously allowed them to be such powerful promoters of the ideals of liberalism and democracy, is becoming fatally undermined.

Still, like Machiavelli, we can see the direction of travel, but we have not yet felt the full force of what may befall us. China is only just beginning to assert herself upon the world stage. India and Brazil are some way behind. We remain, perhaps, even now, too comfortable, too complacent, too constricted by the past, to find the urgency and energy to effect the

radical changes that alone can save our prosperity and our values.

The dream of ever closer union amongst the peoples of Europe arose to express a determination to reverse the decay of our civilisation. Its success in overcoming the moral, and not just the material, legacies of war, racism, imperialism and communism has been considerable. But its greatest challenge may only be beginning. Its essential economic foundation was, and remains, the completion of a true, continental-scale single market. The present crisis has demonstrated, most powerfully, that this demands a single currency.

Without the euro, even those countries that have sustainable fiscal deficits and trade surpluses, such as Germany, would have seen their growth crushed by revaluation, while those with high levels of foreign debt and a marked tendency to inflation, like Greece, would have been driven to immediate national bankruptcy. A substantial portion of the internal market integration, in goods, services, capital and labour, built up over many decades, would have collapsed, at enormous cost.

The stresses in the system now derive directly from the monetary union not being complete enough: principally the absence of a fully unified government debt market, sustained by rules that are properly enforceable and transparent, and a Central Bank legally, and not just practically, equipped with all the tools of supervision and intervention of the US Federal Reserve.

All serious supporters of the creation of the euro always knew that market pressures would force these further developments, and always hoped for the political leadership that would realise them, and grant them democratic legitimacy. No one, I fancy, anticipated quite how strong those market pressures, or how hesitant that political leadership, would be.

It is too early to determine the extent to which contemporary Europeans resemble late Renaissance Italians. However, that which does not kill us makes us stronger. The penalties for failure are horrendous. The rewards of success are substantial. Already, we are witnessing structural reforms and cultural changes in the most affected states, which have become possible only because of the complete discrediting, by the crisis, of past corruption and inefficiency. The difficulties of dealing with the outstanding accumulation of liabilities by sovereigns, and thus by banks, are great, but they are far from insuperable. The shape of a more solid structure going forward is as obvious, as was the creation of the euro the right response to the collapse of the ERM.

The overwhelming probability remains, therefore, that by the other side of the next French and German elections, we in Britain will be faced with a much more fiscally, and therefore politically, united eurozone of some kind. One that will have been purged, by past

failure, for a generation at least, of financial fantasy, furnished with the institutions for enforcing financial reality, and thus capable at least of providing a sound foundation for future growth. It will be no more than that. The policy and, even more, the philosophy that will return European performance to levels

that ensure full employment and social decency will still remain undefined. That is liberalism's greatest recent challenge. Perhaps, we may now look more to Botticelli than to Calvin? But it will be enough to pose the question of our national relationship with the European dream in the starkest of terms.

Those who imagine that the crisis has vindicated our decision to remain outside the euro have much to explain. How, for example, have we piled up debt almost to Greek levels? How, despite the second largest devaluation in our history, are we still running a significant trade deficit? Why are our rates of inflation and of unemployment, especially of youth unemployment, so substantially ahead of those of Germany? Why is the City of London now so uniquely vulnerable to the emergence of any joint facility for supporting the eurozone banking system? How will we operate in a world in which the dollar is losing its status as the unique global reserve currency and where the pressures of protectionism seem likely to become more and more pronounced?

The point is not that joining the euro, of itself, technically, would alleviate all these problems. It is that to do so would be the keystone of a coherent national strategy for repairing our weaknesses, and for adapting to a profoundly more hostile international trading and, perhaps, political environment. In short, the time is fast approaching when we will either have to join what will effectively be a new European union or, by default or design, find ourselves increasingly retreating into isolation from it.

The role of the Liberal Democrats in this, clearly, should be crucial. The opportunity for 'The Party of Europe' in such a momentous national decision, all the more elemental for having been evaded so cravenly, for so long, is enormous. It affords probably the only circumstances in which we can win back those, on the left, whose hopes have been dashed by the coalition, and win over those, on the right, whose hopes have been raised: the only way, in fact, of reviving our own 'progressive coalition'.

ABSURD LEGISLATION

However, our negotiating team at the coalition agreement last year was not thinking ahead. The parliamentary party has supported preventing any strategic reflection at all, even behind the scenes, about euro membership. Some luminaries have even proclaimed their eagerness to retain sterling indefinitely. It has celebrated the absurd 'Referendum Lock' legislation, which makes increasing British semi-detachment from the EU well-nigh inevitable. It has failed to exploit the very considerable fissures that exist within the Conservatives and Labour on Europe.

“The opportunity for ‘The Party of Europe’ in such a momentous national decision is enormous”

It has not adequately condemned the last government's monstrous failure of engagement, the trigger for their fiscal profligacy, which now some of their spokesmen hold up as their greatest triumph. It has not adequately supported this government's solitary success of engagement: the Anglo-

French Defence Treaty. Perhaps this was because our principal continental allies, the hapless German FDP, opposed our intervention in Libya? Certainly, they are now the primary reason for Angela Merkel's apparent irresolution on the euro.

It is not yet too late to recover the credibility of our pro-European credentials. But it is getting close. To do so, we must recognise that we are not dealing here just with a foreign policy question, however important. The future of the European dream, and whether Britain is a part of it or not, will determine whether we can resist the centrifugal processes that are polarising and atomising our society and shrinking popular faith in precisely those freedoms and obligations that we, as a party, have sought to make most especially our own, here at home. It is about the Liberal Democrats' very existence as a defined and distinct force in British politics.

Of course, some would say that is already at issue. Certainly, rising to this challenge will be difficult enough, given the apparent inability of too many of our MPs to appreciate the scale of the alienation of the electorate from the democratic process generally, precisely because of a long-standing reluctance by the professional political class to address, honestly, controversial but crucial issues, for fear of their careers. Now is not a time for undue caution. But we also have a particular problem, which has become almost iconic of this: the major loss of trust we have suffered from failing to proclaim, courageously and clearly, our liberalism, as seen most notably in the debacle over tuition fees. Nowhere is trust more necessary than in seeking to persuade the people of the most fundamental issues concerning their future. Historic decisions put patriotism, and idealism, and truth, at a massive premium.

Rousseau thought, rightly, that Machiavelli wrote his most famous work as a subtle satire, intending that the cynical totalitarianism of its precepts would prompt a revulsion in favour of his idealistic Republican principles. But it was also, clearly, an application to be granted office by the Medici, the gilded destroyers of Florentine freedom. Unsurprisingly, it proved totally unsuccessful in achieving either objective, and only buried, especially outside Italy, most of its author's earlier, deserved, reputation for patriotism and for fearlessly "telling the truth to power". "Old Nick" became a common name for the Devil.

John Stevens was Conservative MEP for Thames Valley from 1989-99. He co-founded the Pro-Euro Conservative Party in 1999 and joined the Liberal Democrats in 2001. He fought Buckingham as an independent in 2010

LETTERS



LEICESTER NOMINATION

Dear Liberator,

Your Radical Bulletin remarks (Liberator 346) about Parmjit Singh Gill were not fully justified. The party has good reason yet again to be grateful to Parmjit. He put the perceived interests of the party before his own.

Having won the nomination by some 47 votes to five over Zaffur Haq, he was persuaded that the party would do better if it could capitalise on a row in the local Labour Party.

A prominent Muslim councillor who was expected to become the Labour candidate was ousted by a Miliband apparatchik. Parmjit believed, wrongly, that if he stood down, Haq as a well-known Muslim would have a good chance of winning.

In fact, this didn't happen, and Parmjit as the popular local man would probably have done better – and kept his council seat.

Jonathan Hunt
Camberwell

RATIONAL SUPPORTERS

Dear Liberator,

Umpteen years ago when studying social psychology, I came across a thesis that purported to show that about 25% of the population were rational altruists. If I remember correctly, the point of the thesis was that this 25% remained constant whether the populations were measured at age 25, 35, 45 etc., so, if rational altruism is equivalent to maturity, then we don't mature with age.

A longitudinal study was required to confirm whether or not the composition of the 25% remained constant.

I have since believed that most of those 25%, rational in that they were prepared to work things out rather than stick to tribal loyalties,

and altruistic in the sense that they were prepared to give at least some consideration to the welfare of society as a whole rather than pursue mere self-aggrandisement, were potential Liberal voters.

However, as Simon Titley points out (Liberator 347), we need to have the guts to tell them what we stand for if they are to identify with us. Announcing boldly that we are convinced supporters of the UN and EU, that we welcome the diversity in our society which multiculturalism brings, that we prefer to reform criminals rather than just incarcerate them, that we feel people can be trusted and believe in the devolution of power to the lowest possible level will frighten many people away.

But it will gain the solid support of most of that 25%, a valuable and loyal core to match the level of permanent support on which class interest, however mistaken, provides for the Tories and Labour.

Peter Wrigley
Birstall

ASTOUNDED AND HORRIFIED

Dear Liberator,

James Graham's article and the response from Simon McGrath (Liberator 346 and 347) about the failure of the AV campaign have been illuminating. I did wonder how a campaign with such experienced campaigners in it could be of such poor quality and such an embarrassing failure.

I was a very reluctant late convert to the AV cause. I had been impressed by the intellectual content of the Lib Dem conference launch, with Art Malik, and by the initial enthusiasm of the political and non-party activists. Grassroots activist stunts in Westminster, London, Manchester, Bristol all set the calls for reform off to a flying start.

So I was astounded that I couldn't even download a useable

printable poster from the website (not a useable window bill, fine as A3 if low impact), nor did attempts to use clickable buttons for Facebook work.

On a more fundamental level, I was both astounded and horrified that the No campaign explained the AV system more effectively in its literature than the Yes campaign did. The No campaign presumably did this quite deliberately, as it thought that would put people off, but it was still astounding.

Every explanation of STV that the Electoral Reform Society used to produce included a simple and convincing explanation for any member of a trade union, a student union or of a charity that used a 1,2,3 voting system. Millions of voters use or have used the equivalent of AV. I couldn't understand why this core message was ignored.

I disagree with Simon in that celebrity endorsements could help a lot, Billy Bragg is a leading reformer of our era, Eddie Izzard and Dan Snow appealing for the comedy and thinking TV audiences, but the failure to use mock elections that James mentions is beyond belief. It would have got media coverage and got young people involved, and has always helped the lesser-known liberal cause in schools and among students.

The referendum was hampered by the big cash spending on the dishonest No campaign – the public conniving in their own being deceived by tax exiles – and by the rigged leaflet of the Electoral Commission.

I don't know how the Yes campaign let that pass without any apparent fuss. There was no need for a factual leaflet on the referendum to explain how a voting system worked (seven pages) – it only needed to explain what voters did and the result. Surely the first-past-the-post explanation from the Commission should have explained how the counting process worked by analogy.

Most embarrassing for me was the continual parochialism of the Liverpool party. Despite efforts by some, including current group leader Paula Keaveney, there was nothing in support of the referendum in the Liberal

Democrat election campaign. An obsession with local council seats meant the referendum was hidden and there was no opportunity for us to expose the anti-reform hypocrisy of most of the Labour Party to its public.

It was embarrassing to see Liberals in Gladstone's city failing to make the case for reform.

Kiron Reid
Liverpool

PRIVILEGED POSITION

Dear *Liberator*,

Simon Titley (Letters, *Liberator* 347) appears to see gender and class discrimination as a zero sum game where one 'trumps' the other. I do not. Both can and should be tackled, albeit via different means.

In a country where women constitute the majority of the population yet only 12% of Liberal Democrat MPs, it seems extraordinarily churlish to complain that "if the party tackles gender imbalance while doing nothing about class, the net effect will be to promote privileged women at the expense of non-privileged men" (a proposition which is in any case unproven).

Instead of taking a pot-shot at initiatives to increase the egregiously low number of women parliamentarians, Simon's legitimate concerns about class might better be directed at the existing 88% male majority.

Dinti Batstone
London

SOCIAL LIBERAL FORUM FRINGE EVENTS IN BIRMINGHAM

Policy Forum: Open Public Services: Another fine mess they'll get us into?

Saturday 17 September, 20.15-22.15 –
ICC Hall 5

What should we support and what should we oppose in the Open Public Services White Paper?

Chris Nicholson – CentreForum
Linda Jack – Social Liberal Forum
Mark Serwotka – PCS union
Lord Matthew Oakeshott

Chair: Dr. Prateek Buch (SLF)

Phone hacking, privacy and libel, and the future of the press

Sunday 18 September, 13:00-14:00 –
ICC Hall 8b

Hugh Grant – Actor
Alan Rusbridger – Editor, *The Guardian*
Jo Glanville – Editor, *Index on Censorship*
Don Foster MP – LD Spokesman on DCMS

Chair: Dr. Evan Harris (SLF & Hacked Off Campaign)

How unions can support business to grow the economy

Sunday 18 September, 13:00-14:00 –
Dolce Room, Hyatt Hotel

Peter Kunzmann – Social Liberal Forum
Prof Mark Stuart – University of Leeds
A speaker from the Musicians' Union

The SLF reflects: Where do we go from here? Lib Dem priorities until 2015

This meeting is co-sponsored by *Liberator*

Sunday 18 September, 20.15-21.30 –
ICC Hall 5

What should be our key policies and strategies for the rest of the parliament?

Will Hutton – The Work Foundation
Julian Huppert MP – Social Liberal Forum

Jackie Ashley – *The Guardian*

Chair: Dr. David Hall-Matthews (SLF)

The SLF debate: Pension reform – public, private and state – What's fair?

Monday 19 September, 20.15-21.30 –
ICC Hall 5

Will we all get what we deserve when we retire? Can we justify changes to contributions & entitlements?

Steve Webb MP – Pensions Minister
Dave Prentis – UNISON
Janice Turner – Social Liberal Forum
Danny Finklestein – *The Times*

Chair: Sandra Gidley (SLF)

In conversation: Are we democratic, independent and radical in coalition?

Tuesday 20 September, 20.15-21.30 –
ICC Hall 5

Unity or Distinctiveness? Can conference votes influence government policy?

Alistair Carmichael MP – Chief Whip
Simon Hughes MP – Deputy Leader

A Q&A on party independence and distinctiveness

Moderator: Dr. Evan Harris (SLF)



OBITUARY: LIZ RORISON, 1947-2011

Life-long Sheffield Wednesday supporter, avid bird watcher, church organist, Glee Club pianist, Liberal and outside broadcast engineer Liz Rorison 'signed off' listening to BBC Radio 5live on the 24 June.

She died after years of indifferent health, born stoically and gracefully. Hers is a life to celebrate, because of her many spectacular talents, her devotion to her friends, music, public service broadcasting, more music, her party and her community, and, above all, for her kindness and wit.

Born in Yorkshire of a musical family, she graduated from Nottingham University with a degree in music, and applied for only one job;

with the BBC as a trainee sound engineer, and became their first female outside broadcast engineer. If you were around in central London in the early morning, it was not unusual to see her in the 'Broadcast Taxi' on her way to get a politician on the Today programme without them having to come to the studio.

Liz initially worked for the World Service in Bush House before moving to Cardiff, where she developed a lifelong love of the language and the country, so much so she learnt to speak Welsh. She returned to London in 1978 with the introduction of parliamentary broadcasting.

Her confidence was rewarded, and she enjoyed a long, fascinating career with the BBC, covering all manner of broadcasting; political, music (the Prom season especially), funerals (when it was decided that Princess Diana's funeral procession would go past the Royal Albert Hall, it was Liz's suggestion that the branding and posters on the front of the hall be shrouded) and countless other events, including Any Questions, Top of the Form, Racing from Royal Ascot, and Church of England synods.

She was a great organiser – for many years she masterminded the planning for election outside broadcasts, previewing the many sites that were involved – and a quick thinker. When Pope John-Paul arrived at Gatwick in 1982 and his train was set to depart from a different platform, Liz moved the mic cables across the tracks to the correct platform.

She loved broadcasting and the people in it. She never possessed a TV as 'broadcasting' to Liz meant the radio and in her view there was only one variety – BBC Radio. Her colleagues described her as having a 'great set of ears' and, although no longer working with them, she was included in the team as their unofficial quality monitor – offering advice when they were making particularly challenging broadcasts, whether in the UK or abroad.

However, music also played a big part in Liz's life. She refused to take the anti-arthritis drugs prescribed for her, as she feared they would affect her hearing, thus cutting her off from her greatest love. She was a governor of the National Children's Orchestra, creating an annual prize in her name for the young musician who made the most significant contribution to the life of the orchestra; note, not for talent, but for service to the whole. That was Liz.

Hand in hand with her broadcasting career marched her political one. She stumbled into the Liberal Party almost by accident when a holiday in Scarborough in 1971 coincided with the annual Liberal Assembly. She joined immediately, having found a home for her political philosophy. She was an instinctive, natural liberal. She worked tirelessly for Islington, as agent, as activist and as governor of three local schools.

For many of our readers, though, their memories of Liz will be in her role as the pianist for the Glee Club – probably the safest seat in the party! She first became involved in 1975 – again in Scarborough – when the Glee Club was a more informal affair than now. The few that had gathered found themselves without a pianist and a call went out – Liz duly responded and, for more than 25 years, she was a fixture, accompanying the singing of whatever quality with the same musicality and professionalism she gave to playing the church organ and mixing sound for the BBC. Many of us, coming to this year's Glee Club night, will close our eyes and remember the wonderful Amazon with flowing hair, and imagine her, taking

once more her rightful place at the piano and at the heart of the party she loved.

To her friends, she was a source of comfort and care, whatever you had done. She thought hard to find solutions to the problems of others, and would listen for hours to tales of misery and woe, but also be the first to cheer another's success or happiness to the very rafters.

She stipulated that wine and champagne must be served (and drunk!) after her funeral and that the day must be a celebration of her life. This was so very Liz too. She played a part in making her own funeral arrangements, including selecting all the music – which of course included 'Jerusalem'.

This obituary was written by Liberator Collective members Wendy Kyrle-Pope, Catherine Furlong and Ralph Bancroft, with contributions from former broadcasting colleague, Rod Dollimore, and Islington Lib Dem Laura Willoughby



**Richard Wainwright,
the Liberals and Liberal
Democrats. Unfinished
Business**
by Matt Cole
Manchester University
Press 2011 £65

This is essential reading for anyone who is serious about getting anything done through Liberal politics. While I concede that Wainwright was fortunate in his constituency and that electoral techniques have moved with the times, his career tells you how to do it; there are no short cuts.

Wainwright, to recap, won the Colne Valley seat from Labour in 1966, lost it in the 1970 meltdown and regained it in February 1974, holding the seat for the rest of his parliamentary career. The Lib Dems lost the seat when he stood down in 1987, but Saddleworth had been transferred out of the new constituency and much of suburban Huddersfield added.

Since the coalition reputedly aims to reduce the number of MPs to 600, Lib Dem strategists, nationally and locally, should look to this lesson and get their fingers out.

I asked friends and members of the Liberator Collective for their recollections of Wainwright. Nick Winch, who worked for the Association of Liberal Councillors, wrote: "One of RW's major contributions to the well-being of the Liberal Party was his role in supporting ALC in the early days. He was instrumental in securing financial support from the Rowntree Trust (of which I think he was a trustee for many years) as well as, I suspect, making a significant personal contribution.

"In her unofficial biography of ALC, Phoebe Winch dedicated the book to RW, calling him 'ALC's oldest and truest friend'."

His words were echoed by Simon Titley: "This would be Wainwright's most important contribution to the party. The conversion of ALC from a sort of councillors' equivalent of ALTU into an effective campaigning organisation was the single most influential step in the revival of the party. Tony Greaves was the key mover, of course, but it couldn't have happened without the Rowntree money".

Cole very much concurs with this and doesn't mince words about another issue mentioned by Titley: "I



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also recall Evelyn Hill [head of the Liberal Publications Department] telling me that Wainwright led efforts to stop Jeremy Thorpe becoming leader in 1967. If only that had succeeded! Sadly, not enough people believed his Cassandra-like warnings about where Thorpe's leadership would lead".

I suspect this issue is one that will have ongoing interest to the more salacious historian, so it is good to set the record straight.

David Grace wrote, "Richard Wainwright visited Gainsborough twice when I was the candidate (in 1987). I said that I found a climate of pessimism and no-can-do in Lincolnshire, particularly amongst local councillors.

"He said he knew the problem – 'They never want to spend any money.' I also told him that David Steel had visited and told my supporters to get their candidate a better car (I drove a Mini Clubman). Richard said if you have a cheap car you may alienate better-off voters but if you have an expensive one you will alienate the poorer voters.

"He also told me that he couldn't stand Prime Minister's Question Time. He said he wasn't proud of it but tried to avoid attending. It was typical of a man concerned with the realities of politics and not interested in the froth."

Grace also recalls, "My abiding memory of Richard was when he spoke at the first Liberal Movement Conference in Wolverhampton (17 July 1988) and congratulated us on 'Do-it-yourself politics'." Cole makes a brief reference to this, noting Wainwright's ambivalence about the new party and his desire to keep the Liberal family together.

I found this book compelling, having read more than half of 217 core pages before I first put it down. One always enjoys reading about events that are close to one's

experience, but I was immediately struck by the book's practical usefulness.

Wainwright's pacifism was fairly well known, but Cole benefits us with the detail of his war career with the Friends' Ambulance Unit, which probably brought him more frontline service than the average infantryman. I was particularly impressed with his billeting FAU members separately on German homes to curtail the revenge of occupying French troops.

To conclude, one of Wainwright's analogies between Socialism and Liberalism: "The Liberal does not liken himself to an architect, who can condemn a building and have it demolished, to rebuild it with plans from his own brain, with dead and uniform bricks.

"He is rather a gardener, dealing with living things which grow according to nature. He can discover the necessary conditions for their full growth and ensure that these are present, but more than this he cannot do."

Stewart Rayment

**When the Stars Fall to
Earth: A novel of Africa**
by Rebecca Tinsley
LandMarc Press 2011
\$14.95 (from Amazon.
com)

Rebecca Tinsley started the human rights group Waging Peace after visiting Darfur in 2004. Evidence of genocide collected by the Waging Peace team has been accepted by the International Criminal Court and, in 2009, it persuaded the Labour government to stop deporting Darfuri asylum seekers to Sudan. Her humanitarian charity, Network for Africa, trains local lay counsellors to help survivors break the cycle of post traumatic stress disorder in Rwanda, Northern Uganda and the Darfuri camps in Chad.

Her novel tells the horrific story of Darfur and asylum seekers to Britain via several characters, obviously based on real or composite characters of real people. One of her protagonists sums it up very well: "No one is interested in 500 children, but a good journalist can make them care about a pretty little kid, if you spin a nice sentimental story about him."

There is nothing nice or sentimental about this book. The story, which begins in 2004, charts the fortunes of a varied group of Darfuris set in and against the background of the genocide in Darfur and the world outside. There are few happy endings. Even the title takes its name from bombs falling to earth.

As Tinsley says in her introduction, the novel is set "in Sudan, in the heart of Africa, and in a war zone," and is designed to make the reader care about the Sudan. And to this end she succeeds, despite passages which have obviously been dumbed down for an American readership, despite the use of the irritating device where characters in the story comment on the political goings in the wider world, which they could not possibly know (though even those dwelling in the remotest regions understand global warming and its cause and effect).

Her knowledge of the everyday life of the Darfuris, the progress of the genocide/war, the political intrigues, cop-outs and astounding ignorance of the world's politicians is encyclopaedic. When her editors let her true voice come through, she manages to transport you from your comfy armchair on a cool London evening to the dust, the dirt, the heat and the terror that engulfed the Darfuri people. You feel the sudden beat of horses' hooves that signals the arrival of a Janjaweed raid, the thwump of helicopter blades which heralds an attack by government forces, the agony of the beatings; the use of rape as a weapon; the thirst and the hunger. Small acts of kindness stand out like beacons of hope, tiny pinpricks of light in an abysmal darkness.

What the Darfuri people actually wanted from the world is beautifully summed up by a woman in a camp for refugees: "It is nice of your country to send food, but this is Africa, and we are used to being hungry. What we ask is that you

take the guns away from the men who are killing us.

"The UN monitors were useless: 'I'm sorry', said one Nigerian soldier when asked to help stop a mass rape and massacre at a school, 'I hate this, you know? They won't let us have any weapons, and we don't have the authority to stop them, even if we did.'" The book is filled with real conversations like these, which do so much to bring it to life, and not even the editor's pen can destroy the immediacy, accuracy and poignancy of these exchanges.

When one family did eventually managed to find asylum in the UK, they experienced appalling ignorance of the situation in the Sudan, and a failure to understand that anyone sent back would die, and racism from many they encountered, but not all.

Again, the small acts of kindness shine, but the family's experiences are shameful for us to read. Most tellingly, it is the comparatively vast wealth we enjoy here and do not appreciate; the family was staying in a council estate in a run-down part of Doncaster, one not noted for its moneyed classes or its elegant facilities. And yet, because every household had indoor lavatories, electricity and washing machines, these luxuries placed it on another planet from the refugees. "They were so rich, these people, and yet no one sang in the morning."

Tinsley was asked by the survivors she met to take their story to the world and "be their voice". She felt hers was a very imperfect one; not so. Were this book to be more sympathetically edited and the author's words allowed to stand, it would be more of a work of both historical and political importance. But as it is, it is so well worth reading, to understand what is really happening in Darfur, and to remind us to sing in the morning.

Wendy Kyrle-Pope

Eleven Reasons to Resist the Con-Dem Cuts

by Neil Faulkner
Counterfire 2010 £2

Oh dear, is this the best the Trots can come up with? Not much to worry about there, then.

Stale old arguments; not all of the issues even joined up. "Europe is a continent of revolution" – yeah and the 1989 one (incomplete alas) was about throwing out socialism.

A socialist government's refusal to take timely measures to deal with the current recession is at the heart of the problems faced by the coalition. Were we faced with Brown, Darling or Miliband trying to solve those problems, their solutions would be much the same, probably worse (they would probably have introduced the VAT increase sooner, for example).

But who is Counterfire, you might ask? A quick look at the names and the stench of the SWP comes to mind.

Stewart Rayment

A World on Fire: An Epic History of Two Nations Divided

by Amanda Foreman
Allen Lane 2010 £30

An account of the American civil war with a difference, devoting a considerable amount of space to its effects on Britain, and the influence of British opinion on the war.

Relations between Britain and the United States were strained by British neutrality, which included recognition of the belligerent status of the Confederacy although not diplomatic recognition.

There were some strange divisions of British opinion on the war, with Gladstone, who had family connections with slave interests, being pro-Confederate and Bright and Cobden supporting the Union.

Liberal MPs such as shipping magnate William Lindsay supported the South but more surprisingly so did John Roebuck. The Tories were happy to embarrass the government but reluctant to risk bringing down Lord Palmerston's government to take office and face the consequences of any intervention.

John Laird, whose shipyards

were illicitly building warships for the Confederacy, was pro-South but Disraeli avoided any partisan approach. Diplomatic relations became strained over the Alabama affair and the revelation that shipyards were building warships for the Confederacy, but conflict was avoided.

Gaining sufficient evidence to act was not as straightforward as the American diplomats thought. Although slavery was at the heart of the causes of the Civil War, total emancipation wasn't, with Lincoln's emancipation proclamation being made only in 1862 and applying only to those slave states that were in rebellion. The few slave states that remained in the Union were exempted, as Lincoln's prime concern was to save the Union.

Some parts of Britain were heavily pro-South, particularly Liverpool, whose shipowners were organising blockade runners and where Federal spies lurked in dockside bars collecting information on blockade running. Lancashire in particular was sympathetic to the Confederacy.

Foreman gives a cursory mention of the working class support for the Union. The famous meeting called by the trade unions in Manchester, when workers were being laid off by the shortage of cotton, receives no mention, but the activities of two agitators William Aitken and Mortimer Grimshaw, who were Confederate sympathisers and unrepresentative, do.

Volunteers from Britain defied the Foreign Enlistment Act and fought for both sides, and in some cases were illegally abducted into the armies.

And which side did Britain actually support? It depends on where your sympathies lie. In practice, probably neither. Interestingly, people who make an issue of fundraising for the IRA in America might like to remember that there were people in Britain actively supporting an armed rebellion in the United States.

For all its limitations, the book is a detailed account of the British dimension in the American Civil War, and certainly compares favourably with John Keegan's recent book on the American Civil War for its details of British politics.

Andrew Hudson

Frozen Britain by Gavin Cooke John Blake 2010 £7.99

Essential reading for anyone concerned about climate change. Cooke explains why Britain is likely to experience severe winters for some years to come and why winters have started to get colder. The author suggests that it is a consequence of global warming and not in contradiction to global warming.

One of the results of global temperature increases is the melting of Arctic ice, resulting in fresh water being released into the North Atlantic and slowing down the Gulf Stream, resulting in colder winters in the area. However, this is a regional effect and overall temperatures are rising. Cooke also deals with the controversial hockey stick graph, which is used as evidence in favour of global warming but ignores the Medieval Warm Period when there were agricultural settlements in Greenland. Official records of temperatures before 1900 are non-existent and data is obtained from sources such as ships logs. The Medieval Warm Period is, according to the author, like the current cold winters a regional phenomenon.

Cooke warns that warming will eventually counteract the local cooling and global temperatures outside the region are continuing to rise. The author also points out that there is no agreement on the exact causes of global warming, and the extent to which it is anthropogenic or on whether the increase in CO2 levels is a result rather than cause of global warming. Variations in output of solar energy in the sunspot cycle may act as a means of slowing down global warming.

While being good on analysis, Cooke is not so good on solutions and advocates a programme which, apart from acknowledging that global warming is taking place, seems to be straight out of UKIP's policies, including withdrawal from the EU, tough immigration control and local autarchy. International action seems to have been overlooked as a solution.

Cooke's arguments follow the classic Enoch Powell line of taking current trends to their logical conclusions. While acknowledging both Malthus and later Ehrlich

got it wrong about sustainable populations, he suggests Lovelock's more recent gloomy predictions are correct. He proposes that the UK insulates itself from the mass migration of population that may ensue from global warming but doesn't acknowledge that, if winters become as dire as he suggests, there will be widespread emigration from the UK. His gloomy predictions about peak oil ignore the potential of offshore oil fields and that peak oil will reduce the emission of CO2. Large-scale burying charcoal produced from agricultural waste or microwaved wood is mentioned as an effective means of reducing CO2 levels but not developed.

However, for all its limitations, the book is essential reading for all of us concerned about climate change and a warning to those who try to dismiss unorthodox views as climate change denial. Although there are some similarities to Christopher Booker's *The Real Global Warming Disaster*, which queries whether global warming is taking place and is by an author who is anti-EU, Cooke is not in denial.

Explaining the causes of colder winters will be difficult but essential in selling any policies to combat climate change, particularly when we are in coalition with a party that is in hock to the fuel lobby and the prospect of a Pujadist fuel protest movement raises its head. This will require a bit more than hot air from histrionic speeches by Simon Hughes. If there is a temporary lull in global warming, it offers a chance to buy time. We need to ensure that the opportunity isn't wasted.

Andrew Hudson

In a few short days, we shall meet in Birmingham – home of municipal Liberalism, metal basing and the Clement Davies Group. Moreover, we meet as partners in a coalition government. Moreover (if one is allowed to say ‘moreover’ twice), we meet as partners in a coalition government *with the Conservatives*. Every day, letters arrive from worried young activists, asking me how we should conduct ourselves in our unwonted situation. I generally reply that we should maintain our nerve – or ‘Keep Calm and Carry On’, in the words of the poster campaign I devised during the dark days of the last war. In other words, we should maintain our principles while accepting the inevitable compromises of office – and give the Tories one up the snoot when they are not expecting it.

As loyal readers will be aware, I have long been at the forefront of new technology. Was I not the first person in Rutland to have a telephone? (I have to admit that it proved something of a disappointment as it never rang. When I enquired about this failure, I was told it was because no one else in Rutland had a telephone). Similarly, I was something of a pioneer of television, as I could often be seen casting a fly or gralloching a stag on the popular *Bonkers Country* programme broadcast from Alexandra Palace before the last war. By popular demand, or at least by my own demand, this show was resurrected when I won the independent television franchise for Rutland in 1955.

Ever one to move with the times, as I flatter myself I have established, I have long been enjoying the test cricket on Sky. I did not pay for a satellite dish, but rather set up a receiver of my own using a wire coat-hanger (Nanny is always throwing them out, saying that only wood will do) and a wok that Cook had taken against (“Nasty foreign thing.”) However, this digital television is another matter entirely, so I decided to call in an expert “aerial erector” (as his business card describes him). When he arrives at the Hall this morning, he turns out to be an engaging young man. He exclaims over the size of the old place (“I couldn’t be doing with all that dusting”), but does admire my dado in the Breakfast Room. He is also adamant that his is a skilled trade: “It’s not just a matter of pointing it at Sandy and hoping for the best.”

Back in the 1960s, when I served for some years on Party Council, I often found myself out of sympathy with majority opinion. Notably, when public disorder broke out, I frequently found it difficult to find a seconder for my proposal that we should send for the Rutland Fencible Cavalry. So I was pleased to see from the electric Twitter that Dr Evan Harris is now of my opinion.

I have been wondering why this should be so when he is otherwise to be found on the Advanced side of every question, and I think I have put my finger on it. Whenever he is on the point of making

Lord Bonkers' Diary

a scientific breakthrough – creating artificial life, as it may be, or putting the atom back together – the local peasantry turns up with pitchforks and flaming brands to drive him from his laboratory, before hurling his retorts, test tubes and Bunsen burner into the nearest stream. Is it any wonder that he is every bit as keen as I on calling out the militia? After all, the Reverend Hughes’s ping pong club does sterling work in keeping the local

youth occupied, but there are times when only cold steel will do.

All technologies have their drawbacks, of course. Make no mistake: I welcome the development of the mobile telephone and I am pleased to see that the latest ALDC guidance recommends its use over the conventional field telephone in all but the most compact urban wards. With it, however, has come the development of “phone-hacking” – an unlovely phenomenon, even if it has led to the welcome demise of the *News of the World*.

There is, however, as I once observed in one of my more philosophical essays for the *High Leicestershire Radical*, “nothing new under the sun”. Those of us called to bear the heavy burdens of public life used to go in fear of “butler-hacking”. In those days, members of the yellow press would make it their business to find out the public house in which a chap’s butler drank when he was not butling, buy him a pale ale or three, and quiz him as to one’s diary and opinions. More than one cabinet minister was obliged to resign after having his butler hacked.

I, too, fell victim to this practice – not at the *Bonkers Arms*, where anyone poking his nose into what does not concern him would have the dogs set on him – but at another, less well conducted, establishment. Many fair-minded commentators have argued it was the publicity given to my views on Asquith that persuaded him not to include me in his first Cabinet.

For many years, my favourite pair of opening bowlers were J.K. Galbraith and J.K. Lever; I was happy whenever I could persuade them to turn out for my XI together. Galbraith’s height and his talent for exposing the inadequacies of *laissez-faire* economics with witty aperçus, together with Lever’s ability to bring the ball back in to right-handers, made them a fearsome combination indeed.

These days, the only J.K. I know is J.K. Rowling, and her only appearance for me proved that she cannot bowl for toffees. I once tried reading one of her books, but could get nowhere with it. As I remarked to the Well-Behaved Orphans at the time, who wants to read about children who live in a vast gothic institution?

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