

# liberator

*“No, Mr Clegg,  
there isn't a  
three-legged race”*



- 💣 Will the promise of an Olympic legacy be kept? – Dee Doocey
- 💣 Wrong again on accreditation – David Grace
- 💣 South Sudan's birth pains – Rebecca Tinsley

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## LIBERATOR

🔊 was founded in 1970 and is produced by a voluntary editorial collective

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

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**Cover picture - Mark Smulian**

# COMMENTARY

## TIME FOR TOUGH BANK REGULATION

The revelations about Barclays, and maybe other banks, rigging the inter-bank lending rate ought to be something that unites social and economic liberals in disgust.

Social liberals, obviously, because they want the banks more closely regulated in an attempt to avoid a repeat of 2008.

But also economic liberals, since the sort of cheating, possibly even criminal, behaviour that was becoming public as *Liberator* went to press is surely an offence against the free operation of markets.

Not even the most extreme supporters of free markets usually argue in favour of unrestrained criminality, and something very like that appeared to have been going in some major banks as they sought to manipulate interest rates for the whole economy to their improper advantage.

Labour, in thrall to high finance, dependent on taxing its proceeds and intensely relaxed about those who got filthy rich, caused much of the problem in the first place by imposing light-touch regulation that became ever lighter.

The Conservatives, though not directly responsible for the ethical sewer that the banking industry became in the mid-2000s, bear the blame for setting up the whole thing in the first place with the 1986 'Big Bang' and for pressing Labour to regulate less.

Vince Cable was one of the few to warn over the perils of slack regulation, as he did over much else, before the 2008 crash. But while the Liberal Democrats had no real influence over the situation then, they were hardly loud in calling for tougher regulation of financial institutions.

The party went along with the prevailing consensus – if less enthusiastically than others – with its economic liberal wing maintaining a boneheaded opposition to the regulation of anything much in the economy. We now know where 'light touch' regulation leads.

To an extent, it is understandable that the Liberal Democrats went along with this, because there was such a strong consensus across the political, business and academic establishments that light-touch regulation would keep the golden eggs laying.

But now the party should be able to exploit its comparative innocence in the matter to lead calls for tougher regulation and to use its influence in the coalition to bring it about, in particular by splitting retail from casino banks.

Labour can hardly call for the regulation it so signally failed to implement. And since the Conservatives are at heart still the party of greed and

selfishness, they will never want to regulate financial bodies properly unless forced to by public opinion.

Here surely is a chance for the Liberal Democrats to restore some of their credibility and distinctiveness by being on the same side as public outrage.

## LET'S SEE THE EVIDENCE

The saga of whether Liberal Democrat conference goes should be subject to police accreditation has this year descended into farce.

To cut a long story short, last year conference voted to instruct the Federal Conference Committee to devise security arrangements "which protect the privacy of members' personal data and which respect the party's constitution and internal democracy".

Instead the same procedures will be in place as those that caused last year's row about privacy and the principle of the police deciding who should attend.

The decision has, in flagrant disregard of last year's motion, been batted between FCC and the secretive Federal Finance and Administration Committee, with the latter taking a decision to retain police accreditation on the basis of the party otherwise faced with some unspecified financial risk.

Since FFAC has refused to say from where this risk emanates, or to quantify it, it is hardly surprising that it stands accused of cowardice and bad faith in yet again giving into police bullying.

In this issue of *Liberator*, we have attempted to shed a little light on this (see *Radical Bulletin*), and David Grace – the mover of last year's motion on accreditation – sets out eloquently the case against.

But if a conference motion is going to be ignored, party members should not be left to find out why and how this happened by relying on *Liberator's* modest investigative resources.

Nor should opponents of police accreditation be traduced by being told that they are heedless of the safety of venue staff. Nobody objects to airport-style security searches and it is hard to see what danger any accredited person could pose once they had gone through that thorough security.

After last year, it should have been evident even to FFAC that it was dealing with a political hot potato that required careful handling and clear explanation, were it to have any chance of convincing party members to accept its decision.

Instead, it has responded with evasions, abusive denigration of its opponents, the conjuring up of unspecified threats, and unsupported assertions of threats to the party's finances.

If any of the reasons cited by FFAC for ignoring last year's motion are true, let it have the courage to share its evidence with the party.



# RADICAL BULLETIN

## ASK A SILLY QUESTION...

Last year, the Liberal Democrat conference made clear its displeasure at party members having to go through police accreditation to attend.

Despite this clear decision, this year the Federal Conference Committee took it upon itself to consult again on the subject (and got a 2:1 'no' response), then – by a majority of one vote – wavered onto the anti-accreditation side of the argument, then announced to entirely predictable howls of outrage that there would be accreditation after all.

The idea that this will stop some sort of attack at the conference seems absurd. The comparable incidents cited by the police – the Brighton bombing and the last summer's massacre near Oslo – would not have been affected by accreditation since the former was carried out by someone infiltrating the hotel concerned weeks earlier, while the latter took place in the open air.

No-one is objecting to the airport style security at conference, which should stop anyone bringing any weapon inside, so what exactly is achieved by accreditation except to allow the police to add to the copious amount of information they hold on everyone?

There is also a particular issue for transgender people, who fear the consequences of revealing their previous identities.

Yet the party has again given in, the stated reason being the financial risk of going against police advice.

Several people have raised the question of how large this financial risk really is, yet they have received no straight answer. And for a good reason; the party does not actually know.

FCC asked the Federal Finance and Administration Committee for its view, and here things get murky. FCC says it thought it was seeking advice, but instead FFAC took the decision out of its hands on financial grounds.

Thus when FCC members face re-election, they can say that FFAC tied their hands. Since FFAC members don't face any direct election, they can tell malcontents to sod off, a situation that doubtless suits all concerned.

FFAC has put it about that the party would get neither insurance nor a venue if it refused to accept accreditation. But Liberator is aware of at least one party activist who works in insurance (and for one of the country's largest projects), who is adamant that the party could get cover without accreditation in place. And given the cut-throat competition between venues, it seems unlikely that any would be prepared to turn away the sort of business it brings, whether or not there is accreditation.

The problem is that somebody asked the conference's current insurers whether, in the absence of accreditation, they would still pay out were there a claim. No insurance company when asked a

hypothetical question would respond, "Yes, of course", as they like to decide claims on their individual merits. So the company duly responded that it didn't know. However, it did not say that it would definitely not meet any claim. That was enough for FFAC to opt for accreditation.

It was argued by FFAC that party staff and venue employees might be victims of an attack by some unaccredited person. But if a party staff member suffered an injury at conference or anywhere else, it is always possible that an insurer might decline to pay, on the circumstances of the event, and the party could be open to costly legal action.

As one observer noted: "You would think that if we cared about the people who work for us that we'd never put them in situations where they worked 24+ hours and then had to drive home, wouldn't you? We take more of a risk with our staff's health every day than we ever would with failing to implement accreditation."

An exemption of sorts has now been agreed for transgendered people but, since they effectively have to 'out' themselves to use it, it is questionable what advantage it offers.

## SIZE MATTERS

Not long ago, 2010 to be precise, the Liberal Democrats were much given to boasting about the size of their membership, given the influx provided by 'Cleggmania' that year.

Now they are somewhat coy, and not surprisingly since most estimates are that the party has shed 20% of its members since then. Certainly at least one English region has recorded a fall of 20% from November 2010 to November 2011. However, the fall in membership does appear to have bottomed out, according to optimists.

In the absence of published figures, the most reliable source is the number of ballot papers issued for party-wide leadership and presidential elections (one reason why some may wish to avoid a contested election when Tim Farron's first term ends later this year).

In the 2010 presidential election – held before any large number of coalition opponents had left – there were 65,861 ballot papers issued, a long drop from the 1992 high point of 101,768.

A 20% drop since 2010 would suggest that membership is now around 52-53,000, well below what it would have been if only the 'Cleggmania' influx had failed to renew.

One effect of this drop could be found in English Council chair Peter Ellis's report in June, which noted: "I intend to bring to the next meeting of this Council a Constitutional adjustment to the number of Council representatives from each region to bring our numbers back up to the 150 that we had prior to the recent drop in membership."

## LAWKS A'MERCY, IT'S THE ROZZERS

The arrival of Peter Ellis as chair of the English party, replacing Jonathan Davies, has led to a marked change of tone about whether or not the party fights the police and crime commissioner elections in November.

Despite the Federal Executive's shameful cowardice last autumn (*Liberator* 350), it seems that most of these elections will now have Liberal Democrat candidates. Interest may have been spurred by the Labour Party having published a full list of its candidates in mid-June; clearly Labour at least is not going to duck these contests.

Ellis, far from regarding Liberal Democrat candidatures for PCC posts as mutinous, appears to positively welcome them to judge from his June chair's report. He wrote: "It is important that these elections are used wherever possible to support the campaigns for May of 2013. We have a big opportunity in these county and unitary elections to re-establish our electoral position – especially as they are the last before the general election (whilst we have the European elections in 2014, these are unlikely to have the resonance that can be achieved by our successes next year).

"We will need to use all our resources this autumn to launch and support the 2013 campaigns. Many of you have put a great deal of effort into ensuring that you're in a position to fight the PCC elections in November and your arguments for fighting them have been that we, as Liberal Democrats, should fight every available campaign, so we need to make certain that we do get lasting benefit from that campaigning."

However, "unlikely to have the resonance" is an interesting way to describe the party's prospects in the European elections.

## DATING GAME

Just suppose that part of any deal in parliament over House of Lords reform is that Labour secures the accompanying referendum, over which it has developed a baffling obsession. When should such a thing be held? What date would be likely to maximise the turnout of voter sympathetic to reform?

Having learned none of the lessons of the debacle of May 2011, there are those around Nick Clegg who think the referendum should coincide with the 2014 European elections. It is hard to think of a date less likely to secure a 'yes' vote than one when only a handful of people vote and the air is thick with lunatics ranting about defending British traditions.

One interesting option would be for the referendum to coincide with the next general election. Turnout would be maximized (almost certainly to the advantage of the 'yes' side) but the argument about the 'dangers' of change deployed against the AV referendum would be lost in a wider campaign. Hey presto?

## NECROPHILIA

Who now would bother to disturb the corpse of Blairism? You remember them, the people who brought you the Iraq war, light-touch banking regulation and the most sustained peacetime assault on civil liberty by any British government,

the Thatcher one not excepted.

Yet now one prominent Liberal Democrat who should know better is making overtures to the odious crew of Blairite deadbeats who comprise the pressure group Progress, which is sustained by lavish donations from former Owenite backer Lord Sainsbury.

A dispute in the Labour Party about whether or not this group should be expelled has inspired Liberal Democrat president Tim Farron to invite them to the next party conference. If followed, Farron's approach would turn the Liberal Democrats into the political equivalent of a dustbin.

He wrote to Progress: "I know that you very much consider yourselves a part of the Labour movement. But you are modern, progressive reformers and you deserve to be a part of the political debate in this country."

This suggests that Farron's political judgement is not what most people thought it was.

He gushed on: "Whether it is the economy, political reform, climate change, health, education or any of the other major issues facing us as a country, we will be debating them at our conference. You and your members are welcome to join us and I'm sure the debate will be all the richer for it."

This all sounds like nothing so much as the efforts made by Mark Oaten, before the exposure of his unusual hobbies, to indiscriminately recruit Tories into the Liberal Democrats in the early 2000s. He did not then merely invite them to join but organised them into the Peel Group, which briefly became an influential Tory-minded pressure group within the Liberal Democrats.

Blairites, during their 13 years in power, were the sworn enemies of liberty. Are the Liberal Democrats really so desperate for support (or at least for press coverage) that their president seriously wants to recruit these discredited has-beens?

## ONWARDS COMRADES!

You would think that, after five years of financial crisis, it would be both stubborn and reckless to keep peddling the discredited economic ideology that created this mess.

That is obviously not the view of David Laws. He has written an article titled 'The Orange Book: Eight Years On' in the June edition of *Economic Affairs*, the journal of the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), the think tank headed by right-wing libertarian and one-time Liberal Democrat press officer Mark Littlewood (RBs *passim*).

Laws argued that "we must keep the faith with economic liberalism, notwithstanding the problems in the global economy since 2007." This defiance sounded like a loyal member of politburo in the 1980s, urging all good comrades onwards to a glorious victory even as the Soviet system was in its death throes.

Laws added, "The Orange Book was not written in order to make a Lib Dem-Conservative coalition possible, but without the policy changes which the book and its authors anticipated, it is much more difficult to imagine the present coalition being formed and sustained."

This confirms the suspicions of many who thought that Laws was exploiting the coalition negotiations to leverage a rightward shift in Liberal Democrat policy. It also bears out the view that the coalition's austerity

policy has more to do with ideological fervour than economic necessity.

Fortunately, it did not take long for saner voices to prevail. In a paper written for the think tank Liberal Insight, former MP David Howarth forensically took apart Laws's claim that big reductions in public spending and taxation would lead to economic growth.

Criticism also came from the less likely source of Liberal Democrat Voice editor (and economic liberal) Stephen Tall, in a piece for LDV (24 June) titled 'David Laws: let's cut taxes and spending. For once, I'm not convinced.'

Not that such criticism is likely to worry Laws. He is strongly rumoured to be making a return to the cabinet in the forthcoming reshuffle. One likely scenario is that Laws would be made a cabinet office minister, which would enable him to attend cabinet discussions without actually being a cabinet member. This would in effect be an extra Liberal Democrat cabinet minister, but the Tories might wear it because they like his views.

## LORDLY HYPOCRITES

Liberal Democrat Lords leader Tom McNally wrote a piece on Liberal Democrat Voice (6 July), reproduced in Liberal Democrat News, about how determined he was to secure reform of the House of Lords.

He wrote: "All my political life I have believed in reform of the House of Lords. Every SDP, Alliance and Liberal Democrat manifesto and policy statement dealing with the matter since 1983 has promised reform to introduce a democratically elected element into the Lords."

Why this emphasis on ancient history? Possibly because David Steel and Bill Rogers, two of the main authors of the 1983 Alliance programme, are now among the most obdurate opponents of Lords reform on the party's red benches. Poachers? Gamekeepers?

McNally went on to make a plea to "those colleagues expressing doubts about the Bill now before Parliament" that they could hardly be surprised that "the Liberal Democrats have Lords reform deep in their DNA".

However, admitting that whips cannot do very much to discipline peers, McNally instead sought to shame them into line.

"Those of us who have accepted nomination to the Lords as Liberal Democrats must always temper our own policy preference with a willingness to respect so important a tenet of the party's beliefs," he wrote.

Quite so. Those who remember Steel's and Rogers's relaxed tolerance of dissent in the Alliance and merger will find their present position as pro-establishment rebels both reprehensible and hypocritical.

## THINGS THAT GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT

A convivial dinner held in June to mark Nick Harvey's 20 years as Liberal Democrat MP for North Devon was regaled by Harvey with an account of his recent visit to Singapore.

He was billeted at the British ambassador's splendid colonial-era mansion, but slightly misunderstood the instructions about where he was to sleep for the night. Entering a room, he removed his jacket and tie

– though fortunately by that stage nothing else – only to hear an alarmed elderly female voice say, "I think you're in the wrong room."

Harvey was thus narrowly spared the embarrassment of climbing into bed with the ambassador's visiting mother-in-law, but he had to say "We've already met" when introduced to her properly the next morning.

This incident had a coincidental sequel that night for some of Harvey's guests. Former Hillingdon councillor Steve Carey retired to his hotel room only to find the door being shaken. Opening it, he was confronted by a naked woman, who fled down the corridor.

Thinking he would have a funny story to tell to his companions Baroness Tyler and Islington activist Margaret Lally the next day, he then locked himself in.

The naked woman, however, who appeared to be rather over-refreshed, fled into Tyler and Lally's room, and proceeded to rummage through their luggage saying she needed to "find my kit". She then availed herself of their bathroom at some length before casting covetous glances in the direction of their room's spare third bed.

She was presented with two towels with which to cover herself and eventually went away. The next day, as the towels' disappearance was explained to the hotel's bemused proprietor, the woman reappeared noting, "It's alright, I've got my clothes on this time".

## SELECT ELECTIONS

Internal election results published by Liberal Youth show that a mere 74 people voted for their national officers.

LY's blog The Libertine (21 June) at least admitted: "When our chair wins with only 56 votes and some regional positions only had 3 votes, then it is clear that we have a problem."

Officer posts were all uncontested, except by 'RON' (reopen nominations). For the post of north east regional chair, there actually was a contest, won by James Higgin with two votes against Ben Gannon with one. East of England did slightly better with Antony Taylor beating Nick Sutton by, er, four votes to three.

## RETURN OF THE SOGGIES

The Liberal Democrats' East Midlands region sent its members a key strategic insight to help them in the recent local election campaign.

The message simply read: "We have discovered that it is almost impossible to deliver both leaflets and stuffed envelopes at the same time in the pouring rain. One or other ends up soggy!!"

## Liberator 355

Please note that our next issue will be posted to subscribers shortly before the Liberal Democrat conference in September. Security hassles prevent us taking large numbers of magazines into the conference centre to distribute from there.

However, the Liberator stall in Brighton will have copies of the magazine on sale, plus back numbers and the new edition of the Liberator Songbook. Do come and see us, and renew your subscription.



# LUCK NOT JUDGEMENT

## Where Liberals see the flag of austerity unfurled, they should attack it, says Bill Le Breton

“Are These Hardships Really Necessary?” This was the question posed in the 1930s by Roy Harrod, when the world last had to cope with a severe and self-inflicted period of sustained stagnation, and when the poor were made to pay for the incompetence of the political and financial establishments.

Parliamentarians have recently been patting themselves on the back for conducting a debate on the effects of depression, in which three of their number spoke movingly about their personal experiences of this illness.

These expressions of self-congratulation (not the individual contributions to this debate) would draw wry smiles if ever heard in the terraces, tower blocks and estates of our communities beyond the Westminster village.

It is in these homes that thousands of our fellow citizens, receiving treatment for depression from their GPs, are being thrown off Employment Support Allowance. They are told by a Kafkaesque and target-driven bureaucracy to apply instead for Job Seekers’ Allowance, the qualifying regime for which is such that, in Catch 22-style, their illness will later disqualify them from receiving it.

Hundreds more with severe psychiatric problems are having their Disability Support Allowance withdrawn as benefits are removed or sliced in a manner that is incomprehensible to them and dangerous to their health.

Today’s elite have their own game of chivalry that protects them from reality. How did these parliamentarians vote on the reforms to welfare benefits?

Wealth is a collective product. People with property owe some of their success to society and, because of this, they have obligations to those others. But such a view requires the acceptance of the role of luck in life. It challenges the more comfortable fiction of the part virtue plays in the distribution of rewards.

John Rawls wrote: “Most reasonable principles of justice are those everyone would accept and agree to from a fair position.” What rules would we wish for if we knew nothing of our particular abilities, tastes and position within the social order of our society?

The powerful, too often beyond empathy, know nothing that has not come to them through their own eyes. It is convenient to assign fecklessness to the powerless, and rationalise their own success as just desert for their effectiveness, rather than admit the significant role of luck in birth, in circumstance, in what life brings – the chance encounter, the friend of a friend, the cut of your jib.

As an economic policy, austerity is doomed to fail. Gary Cohn, the President of Goldman Sachs, said recently: “Austerity, brings austerity, brings austerity.” But as a political policy, austerity is dangerously persuasive. It affords a seductive

account of fortune. It allocates blame and identifies scapegoats – ‘the feckless PIGS’, ‘the lotus eaters’, ‘the undeserving poor’, ‘the scrounger’, ‘the immigrant’. In hiding the role of luck, it dispels any sense of obligation and protects the existing distribution of power. It substitutes blame for misfortune and ascribes punishment for the ineffectiveness of the feeble. “A dose of reality (austerity) is what you need. Just get off your backside and be more like me.”

As in the 1930s, again today, amidst the ruins of their incompetence, the powerful claim that without austerity recovery is impossible. What they mean is that without this fiction they would be harder pressed to defend their privileges, deny their obligations, accept their share of blame and admit to the legitimacy of the redistribution of power.

Be in no doubt, we can have growth tomorrow. Our political class and their tame economists artificially restrict themselves. They set targets for low inflation that deliberately restrict output and increase unemployment. And when these are more than met, they continue the squeeze, denying that anything can be done.

They extinguish confidence with talk of ‘savage cuts’ and ‘black clouds of uncertainty’. They deliberately confuse the level of debt with the level of the deficit. They say monetary policy is ‘pushing on a string’ and that fiscal stimulus can only be paid for by the sacrifices of our children. They seek to set generation against generation, community against community, culture against culture.

Austerity is the standard flown by the authoritarian, it is the slope to total solutions, it protects and expands property held for power by confiscating property held for use, it deprives the many of the chances they should have to develop and enjoy their full potential.

Where Liberals see the flag of austerity unfurled, they should attack it with the vigour with which they attack poverty, ignorance and conformity, because where ‘austerity’ is the cry, there comes on its heels, totalitarianism, bigotry and impoverishment.

---

Bill Le Breton is a former chair and president of the Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors

# SELLING THE PASS

Last year, Liberal Democrat conference voted against police accreditation for representatives. This year, the party's committees have ignored that and caved in to pressure on dubious pretexts. David Grace wants to know why

There are very few motions that are supported by both David Laws and Gareth Epps but, last year, Federal Conference passed one.

This year, party officers ignored it. They didn't lose it, forget it or fail to notice it. They considered it and just decided it didn't matter. The motion was on accreditation of conference representatives, why it is illiberal and what we expected our elected officers and MPs to do about it.

Imagine news from our Liberal colleagues around the world about the misuse of power by the governments of their countries. What if Yabloko told us that Putin's security people prevented their members from attending a party conference? What if Israeli Liberals told us that the IDF prevented Palestinian members from attending their conferences? Our condemnation in each case would be unhesitating. Freedom of assembly and of association are fundamental rights essential to any democracy. They must not lie in the gift of the police anywhere, including the UK.

In 1903, the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party held its second congress in London. It had been kicked out of Belgium at the request of the Tsar. The British government received a similar request but refused to stop the congress. This was an assembly of professed revolutionaries prepared to use violence to achieve their ends. Britain at the height of its Edwardian imperial splendour under a Conservative government did not fear them. This was in an era when various disgruntled groups had let off bombs in the capitals of the great powers. Fenians had bombed the Metropolitan Line not many years before. Yet today our regard for our civil liberties is so feeble that Conservatives, Labour and now Liberal Democrats have accepted that the police may veto your attendance at your party conference.

## CRIMINAL OFFENCE

You don't have to have committed a criminal offence to be denied the right to attend. It is enough that you refuse to provide evidence of your identity to the state, a choice that we fought the last government over and thought we had won when identity cards were dropped.

If, however, you do provide evidence, the police can still advise that you should not be allowed to attend. We don't know what grounds they have to give for their advice but presumably intelligence acquired by means they will not reveal to you is one source. This was the basis for control orders, detention without trial, a favourite with dictators across the world throughout history, which we opposed and again thought we had stopped. Of course, the coalition hasn't stopped them; it has just adopted the tactic of

marketing people and spinners everywhere. It has renamed them – TPIMs, instantly forgettable unless you happen to be under house arrest yourself with no opportunity to challenge the evidence.

So what did Liberal Democrat conference last September in Birmingham decide? The resolution condemned: "The system of police accreditation adopted for this conference which requires party members to disclose personal data to the police and which is designed to enable the police to advise that certain party members should not be allowed to attend."

Conference specifically called upon the Federal Conference Committee, "to negotiate security arrangements for future conferences which protect the privacy of members' personal data and which respect the party's constitution and internal democracy."

Note that this was a decision, not a suggestion or a polite hint. So why on 14 April this year did the FCC Chair, Andrew Wiseman, invite readers of Liberal Democrat Voice to give their opinions on what should happen, saying that there were "widely differing views within the party" and "strong views on both sides"?

I must have missed the constitutional amendment that lays down that a poll of LDV readers can rule on the validity of conference resolutions. Andrew did say that FCC had "taken into account" the conference resolution. Well, that's nice to know. I would also like to know what FCC did between September 2011 and March 2012 when Sussex police asked for accreditation.

In the end, after LDV readers' almost unanimous support for the conference position, FCC voted by a majority of one that the case for accreditation was not made out. I'll say. The police had cited the bombing in 1984 at the Conservative conference in Brighton, which was planted before the conference began and would now be found by security searches. Accreditation would not have prevented that bombing. Apparently the police also cited Breivik's attack in Norway. Nobody carrying the armament Breivik took uninvited on to the island would get through physical security. Accreditation would not have stopped that massacre. Did the police really have no better arguments for accreditation?

Now we come to what supporters of accreditation regard as the clinching argument – insurance. They argue that if we do not accept police advice on accreditation, then we will not get insurance for our conference and be unable to hold it because of the financial risk. This argument was accepted by the Federal Finance and Administration Committee (FFAC) who took it upon themselves to overrule FCC and insist on accreditation in Brighton. Apparently



their authority, as an unelected sub-committee, to overrule an elected committee and a conference resolution is derived from the fact that finance is involved.

On that basis, I imagine that almost any party decision could really lie in the hands of this modern version of Robespierre's Committee of Public Safety. Opinions differ as to the truth of the insurance argument.

Listen carefully to those who use it. Never have I heard them say, "insurance was refused" but always "insurance would be refused". Has the argument actually been tested? Can anyone tell us how many insurers were asked?

Defenders of accreditation also deny that the police have the final word. FCC has decided that a triumvirate of officers can reject police advice – the chair of FCC, the chief executive and the president of the Party. You will find this power to exclude members from conference nowhere in our constitution. In particular, there is no provision to empower anyone to reject the election of conference representatives by local parties.

## DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM

There is an expression for the idea that top officials can do such a thing – democratic centralism. It was this very doctrine that Lenin espoused in London in 1903 and over which he split the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party into Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. Last year's resolution also called upon Tim Farron as president "to ensure that conference arrangements respect Article 6 of the federal constitution which provides that Local Parties elect representatives and that no other body within or without the party has the power to exclude in advance their attendance at conference."

I'd like to hear from Tim what action he took. Funnily enough, the officials who have arrogated this power to themselves did reject police advice in Birmingham over one individual and, guess what, the party did not lose its conference insurance. Just how far do we have to follow police advice in order to be insured? Does anyone know?

Can we as Liberals accept that internal party democracy can be discarded at the whim of the police or the demands of insurers? There's a public/private partnership we could do without. Conference also recognised that FCC alone would not be able to confront this problem. The resolution called upon "the parliamentary party and Liberal Democrat ministers to question the current police guidance on accreditation and to seek to persuade the Home Office to change guidance on current practice to reflect the rights of association and assembly and the internal democracy of all political parties".

*"I must have missed the constitutional amendment which lays down that a poll of LDV readers can rule on the validity of conference resolutions"*

I will be asking what they did. In particular, what did Lynne Featherstone do? The policy of accreditation at major party conferences is not just at the whim of a particular police force. It's much worse. It comes from the Home Office, which also provides the funding for the exercise. That's why we don't have accreditation at spring conference, because they don't fund it. Obviously terrorists don't go to spring conferences or

ALDC conferences or town hall meetings or any of the hundreds of assemblies attended and addressed by ministers throughout the year.

Like everyone else, I accept the need for physical security at conference, the searches which make all of us, and conference centre staff, safer. Like FCC, I do not consider that the case for accreditation has been made out. You might consider that this is all a storm in a teacup, that it's all a lot of fuss about a minor inconvenience.

That is always how defence against attacks on civil liberties is depicted. How many times did we hear the last Labour government recite the mantra that we have to balance security and liberty? Did we not reply in Benjamin Franklin's words "They who can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety, deserve neither liberty nor safety"? First FCC collaborated with accreditation and then conference rejected it. Then FCC rejected it and FFAC imposed it. So now we have police interference with internal democracy, party officers awarding themselves powers we have not given them, and finally conference decisions ignored and overruled by an unelected sub-committee. Erich Honecker would be proud.

What is left of our party democracy? Liberals have always championed the rule of law and that includes the contract, which we make with each other in our party's constitution. Where are our champions now? What have our party officers and our MPs and, yes, our ministers done to stand up for our basic civil right to assemble, to elect our representatives without interference from above or from outside the party?

This issue will not go away. I don't care which committee with which set of initials tries to stop me going to my party conference. I will not go away. As a party, our devotion to liberty and our commitment to our internal democracy lie at the heart of what makes us different and valuable to our country and our voters. We throw these away at our peril and, if we do, then in a small way but of fundamental importance, the terrorists have won.

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David Grace tabled last year's motion against conference accreditation

# CONFIDENCE TRICK

## To revive the economy, the coalition needs more optimism and flair, and less of the damaging gloom, says Chris Bailey

It wasn't supposed to be like this...

When the coalition government's economic strategy was put together in the summer of 2010, it was radical and crystal clear. Tough action would be taken to eliminate the fiscal deficit ahead of the general election in 2015. This was not just a politically convenient objective, but would also signal to business and the markets that this was a tough government determined fundamentally to re-balance the economy.

In future, growth would come, not from short-lived and artificially created consumer booms, but from exports and investment stimulated by the weaker pound, very low interest rates and growing business confidence. In short, the future British economy would look decidedly Germanic and muscular.

But two years have passed and it hasn't worked out that way. On the positive side, it is true that exports have been doing quite well and this has been pulling up manufacturing, which had been the Cinderella sector under the New Labour governments. On the other hand, in recent months exports have been faltering as growing nervousness in the euro area has hit demand.

And there has been some bad luck. Unexpected increases in global energy and food prices meant that consumer spending on other items was badly squeezed, though this effect may be partly reversed now that these prices are easing.

But the real disappointment has been in investment, which has remained weak. Although the corporate sector is sitting on a mountain of cash, it lacks the confidence to spend it on new plant and equipment on a sufficient scale to boost the economy. And when the media are full of apocalyptic stories about Europe, companies increasingly postpone investment decisions while they wait and see what happens.

Meanwhile, bank lending has been stagnant. Bank lending is crucial for investment in the housing market and for some small business investment. But it also plays a key role in simply oiling the wheels of the economy by financing stocks and routine transactions. It is hard to see how the economy could possibly grow while bank lending continues to stagnate.

The banks blame the sluggish lending on their customers and say that confidence is so low that their customers would rather repay than take on more debt. The customers, however, blame the banks and point out that, although Bank of England and gilts rates are at record lows, the rates banks want to charge on new loans remain very high and the terms are so onerous that customers can't afford to borrow.

Now, there is something really interesting happening here. The banks are currently nervous about each other given the crisis that is sweeping Europe. If Greece leaves the euro, it is a dead certainty that the Greek banks would go bust and that the Greek government would default on its very large debts. And other countries' banks that had lent to Greece

would make huge losses and might go bust too. And banks that had lent to them would face problems too as a nightmare of contagion spreads across the global banking system, just as it did after the Lehman's failure in 2008. So, in anticipation of trouble, the banks are nervous about lending to each other. This lack of interbank liquidity makes banks reluctant to lend.

### IMMENSE PRESSURE

And what is more, for some time the banks have been under immense pressure from banking supervisors in Britain and around the world to make themselves safer and reduce or even eliminate the risk that taxpayers would again be called on to rescue them. To do so, they need to increase their capital-to-lending ratios, as their capital is the fund they draw on when they have to write off bad loans. The higher the capital-to-lending ratio, the safer is the bank. Now they might do this by issuing more shares and other capital through the stock markets. But currently, the markets are not keen on banks, as they know the banks need to sell a lot more shares while they are also subject to increasing interference by governments, which could hurt their ability to make profits. So from the point of view of investors, they are not great bets. So the banks work on the other side of the equation – if it is hard to raise capital, it is easier to restrain lending.

So there now appears to be a contradiction in the government's policy. On the one hand, the government needs bank lending to grow if the economy is to climb out of recession. But on the other hand, its efforts to make the banks safer are adding to the downward pressure on bank lending. Ouch!

Now the government and the Bank of England have been aware of this contradiction for some time. It was clear that having the Bank of England's lending rate was not in itself sufficient to spur bank lending. So the Bank has been pumping money into the economy on an industrial scale through its quantitative easing programme. But to protect itself from taking on bad risks, the Bank has been buying only gilts, rather than corporate bonds or loans. And with nervous investors at home and abroad also flooding into gilts as a safe haven, this has helped to drive up gilts prices and bring yields down to record low levels. That is good news for the government as it can borrow more cheaply – and it is still doing plenty of borrowing – but is terrible news for pensioners and pension funds, which are getting such low returns on their investments. And the overall effect in stimulating the economy has been, to say the least, disappointing.

So one of the themes of this summer has been what else the government and the Bank of England can do to stimulate the economy. We have seen the Chancellor and Governor announce a substantial new scheme to provide cheap loans to banks on condition that they in turn increase their lending to businesses and

individuals. And Nick Clegg has been saying that the government is working on plans to promote lending and business activity by using the government's strong credit rating while, hopefully, not increasing the size of government borrowing.

## MAGIC AND ELUSIVE

But will these new measures, welcome as they are, make much difference? The text book answer is to say they will, but the text books thought that quantitative easing would have a bigger effect. What the text books can't take into account is that magic and elusive quality, confidence.

Without confidence, businesses, consumers and the banks themselves may be too nervous to make use of these new facilities. And at present, thanks to the euro crisis, there isn't much confidence around.

European Monetary Union meant, of course, that individual countries no longer set interest rates to match their own needs, but accepted the rate set in Frankfurt by the European Central Bank. The ECB tries to find the right rate for the eurozone as a whole, but naturally it gives greater weight to the situation of large economies like Germany and France than it does to small countries like Greece, Portugal and Ireland. Similarly, the euro's exchange rate is principally a reflection of the large core economies rather than the small peripheral ones.

So even before the euro was launched, it was clear that countries should join only if their economies were sufficiently 'harmonised' with Germany that the euro interest rate and exchange rate would be broadly right for each of them.

Gordon Brown took the view that the UK wasn't sufficiently harmonised so we didn't join. Now although I am a Europhile, and a critic of his stewardship of the economy, I do have to say that in this case he was absolutely right. What a pity some other countries didn't take the same view.

For some countries, low euro interest rates stimulated unsustainable property booms which ultimately collapsed triggering bank failures and desperate state-funded rescues. Moreover, rising wage rates in the boom years made their labour markets uncompetitive internationally, but with monetary union they lacked the ability to devalue their way back to balance. These factors alone would push these economies into recession and fiscal deficits, though in Greece's case the fiscal problem is worsened by a chronic inability to collect taxes and control public spending.

Greece now looks as if it is in a downward death spiral. Savings are fleeing the country in fear of bank collapses and a compulsory switch into weak drachmas if Greece left the system. So the banks can't make loans, and are trying to call in existing loans. And the Greek government is running out of money so public sector bills are increasingly unpaid. Employment and wages are collapsing. But leaving the euro would mean a complete collapse of the financial system.

*“Whether they stay in the euro or leave, the prospect for Greece is complete economic and financial meltdown”*

What would they use for money? Drachma notes and coins don't exist and nor, crucially, does the software to run payments, transfers and accounting systems. It takes time to set up a new currency. In the meantime, the only economic activity would be that which could be financed by those euro

banknotes still in the country. So whether they stay in the euro or leave, the prospect for Greece is complete economic and financial meltdown.

Meanwhile, the sense of a European identity and solidarity, which the euro was supposed to promote, has largely evaporated. The Germans will finance what they see as profligate governments only if they are prepared to swallow tough fiscal medicine, but the weaker countries resent Germanic discipline. This is beginning to fan the flames of nationalism, not dampen them.

So what should our coalition government do? For a start, it should stop the public nagging of the Europeans from the sidelines. If the government has some positive proposals to help resolve the euro problem, they should use active diplomacy to promote them. But just saying, “Do something!” merely underlines how vacuous and irrelevant is the government's policy towards the euro crisis. And it reinforces the impression that the euro crisis is drifting out of control.

On the domestic front, the urgent need is to build public and business confidence. The government is right to stick to the economic text book – keep fiscal policy tight but throw everything, including the kitchen sink, to promote monetary and credit easing. It is right to resist the temptation to relax fiscal policy – if the budget deficit started to grow again, businesses would anticipate an even tougher credit squeeze down the line and would be even more nervous about investing.

What we do need now is not better economics, but better politics. In the 1930s, Roosevelt's genius was to give Americans a sense of hope – a sense that his administration had a plan that would get the US out of the depression and that “Happy Times Are Here Again”, to quote his campaign song. In contrast, the coalition government seems to promise endless belt-tightening.

The core strategy is to rebalance and strengthen the economy through greater exports and investment. And this strategy will work. The government needs to hammer home this positive message as a strategy to lead us out of the recession. This government needs to show more of the flair of FDR, and less of the gloomy fatalism of Stanley Baldwin.

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Chris Bailey has retired from a career as a City economist and is treasurer of Rochford and Southend Liberal Democrats



# GOING FOR GOLD?

## The London Olympics were supposed to leave a lasting legacy. Dee Doocey asks whether the promises will be kept

When London won the bid to host the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the promise of a lasting legacy was an important part of the bid. After all, if you're going to spend £9.3 billion pounds, you want more to show for it than a sporting event lasting only a few weeks, no matter how successful that event actually is.

We certainly won't be left with derelict Olympic venues like in Athens. But how many of the promises that London originally made in 2005 will actually be delivered?

The legacy was not an afterthought but an integral and important part of London's bid, and a major reason for London's victory. There would be a lasting legacy that went way beyond sport or the re-use of the various Olympic stadiums. The promised benefits included more people of all ages taking part in sport and having healthier lifestyles; the regeneration of one of the most deprived parts of London; new infrastructure and housing; and new jobs and training opportunities. (For anyone worried that the legacy will benefit only London at the expense of the rest of the country, although the site, stadiums and all building works are being funded from central taxation, there is also a significant contribution from Londoners over a ten-year period through their council tax bills).

Will London honour its bold promise? The answer is mixed; there have been both successes and failures. But much of the legacy hangs in the balance, and urgent action is necessary to prevent failure.

### SOME SUCCESSES

Let us look first at the sporting legacy. The government has abandoned its target of using the Games to inspire one million people to play more sport, which was never realistic. But there have been some successes. Kate Hoey, the Mayor's Commissioner for Sport, has raised £40 million to provide training for coaches and investment in sporting facilities. In addition, the London Youth Games has helped to get 2,000 disabled young people in London into sport, and has run 'GamesForce', a volunteer programme which last year enabled 123 young people to qualify as sports officials. More down-to-earth programmes like this will deliver a sporting legacy for years to come.

The future of the Olympic sporting facilities is also a partial success. Media coverage has created a false impression that this is simply an issue of whether Spurs or West Ham will take over the main Olympic Stadium. The long-term future of the Stadium and the Media Centre remains uncertain but the future of all the other venues has already been secured.

More good news is that several Olympic venues will host some major international tournaments. The 2015 European Hockey Championships will take place at the Lee Valley Hockey Centre, the 2015 Canoe Slalom Championships will take place at the Lee Valley White

Water Centre, and the 2017 World Championships in Athletics will take place in the Olympic Stadium.

But while the access of elite sportsmen and women to these venues seems secure, community access is less certain. The Mayor of London set a target of 90% community usage for all the sporting venues in the Olympic Park after the Games but he has not done anything to make it happen. The London Legacy Development Corporation wants to encourage community use of these facilities but is under pressure to ensure that no public funding will be required after the Games. These demands are incompatible, since community usage would be severely limited without public subsidy. If no public funding is available, community access is likely to be sacrificed for commercial profit.

There is a much bigger question, however, over the future of the whole Olympic Park. There is no doubt that the Park will be an economic success. The question is: a success for whom?

A short distance south of the Olympic Park is Canary Wharf. This cluster of skyscraper offices, luxury riverside flats and expensive restaurants has been an undoubted economic success. But it has offered little or nothing for the surrounding communities, and today Canary Wharf is a prosperous island in a sea of deprivation.

Will the Olympic Park repeat this mistake? London originally promised that the 2012 Games would be used as a catalyst to turn an area of great deprivation into one of the most desirable areas to live in London. And local people were meant to share in that regeneration.

The need for economic regeneration is acute, since three London boroughs that surround the Olympic Park (Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Newham) ranked in 2007 as the most deprived in the capital. Before construction of the Park began, the area was an eyesore of electricity pylons, polluted land and silted rivers. The work to transform the area was not done until now because it took the Olympics to unlock the huge resources necessary. It cost £2 billion to bury power lines underground and clean the highly contaminated soil before anything could be built. It cost a further £1 billion to upgrade transport infrastructure, including the transformation of Stratford station and the construction of the adjacent international station.

One undoubted legacy of the Games will therefore be major improvements to the local environment and infrastructure. Besides the removal of contamination, waterways that were neglected for 100 years have been cleaned, wetlands have been restored and many trees and other foliage have been planted. The Olympic Park also has its own energy centre with a combined cooling heat and power plant (CCHP) made largely from reused materials. Stratford station is served by a greater number of rail services, while next to the

station is Westfield, a £1.4 billion privately-funded shopping centre and the largest retail outlet in Europe, opened in September 2011.

Construction is set to continue for another 25 years. The Olympic Park will eventually contain 10,000 new homes, with schools and healthcare facilities, as well as offices, shops, hotels, leisure and other businesses capable of sustaining thousands of new jobs.

The conversion of the athletes' village will create the first completed homes in the Olympic Park; half have been sold to Triathlon Homes (a joint venture between an investment company and two housing associations) to provide much needed affordable accommodation for Londoners, and the other half have been sold to private developers. This mix of social and private homes is essential to encourage thriving communities and to provide a legacy for local people.

The original intention was to build most of the new accommodation in the Park as high-rise flats but the Olympic Park Legacy Company tore up this plan and opted instead for family housing, laid out in five distinct neighbourhoods.

As a result of these developments, the Olympic Park will become not just the largest urban park to open in Europe for 150 years but also a highly desirable place to live. The problem is that there is no public money allocated to fund this transformation. Without this investment, private developers – who would be only too happy to fund the development on their own terms – will be free to determine the fate of the site, which will mean fewer affordable homes or other amenities for local people.

This is why the Olympic Park risks becoming another Canary Wharf – a great commercial success that benefits only wealthy newcomers and foreign investors at the expense of long-standing residents of local communities. This outcome would completely negate the original concept and vision, which was to provide mixed communities and facilities, with homes and jobs for local people.

The promised legacy of jobs and training opportunities for local unemployed people is also in doubt. Although the targets have been met, they were set far too low to be meaningful.

By July 2011, the Olympic Delivery Authority had placed 3,451 people into traineeships, apprenticeships and work placements. 426 apprentices worked on the Olympic Park during the construction programme, exceeding the target, which was only 350. In addition, 30,000 people have been involved with the construction so far and many more will be employed during the Games (there will be a workforce of nearly 200,000 people including volunteers). New developments in the Olympic Park after the Games are forecast to provide 8-10,000 new jobs.

At the peak of construction, over 10,600 people were working on the Olympic Park and Village, of whom more than 2,700 were described as resident in the five host boroughs (Greenwich, Hackney, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest). But it is impossible

***“Much of the legacy hangs in the balance, and urgent action is necessary to prevent failure”***

to tell how many of these are genuine local residents and how many have moved into the area for the work, because there are no systems in place to verify residency.

Several things need doing urgently to rescue the promised legacy. These actions will need political courage since,

in a time of austerity, there is a desperation to avoid headlines that scream “Olympic costs rise again”.

First, if the Mayor of London plans to honour his promise to meet a target of 90% community usage for all of the sporting venues in the Olympic Park after the Games, he must provide sufficient funds to make it happen.

Second, the Mayor, who has responsibility for housing in London, should make the provision of affordable housing in the Olympic Park his top priority. Public investment is essential if London is to honour its original commitment, to provide mixed communities and facilities that benefit local people. Without this commitment, the communities surrounding the Olympic Park will lose out to the interests of private developers.

Third, the Mayor must clarify the definition of ‘affordable housing’. There is a huge need in London for larger family housing but most developers will try to get away with building one-bedroom flats. There also remains an issue about where the affordable housing is to be built within the Olympic Park. It must not be in ‘affordable ghettos’, leaving all the riverside community housing for the very rich.

Fourth, much more stringent measures must be taken to ensure that contractors working on legacy construction put in place systems to guarantee jobs and training for local people, and that statistics monitoring the workforce are robust and meaningful. John Lewis has set a superb example by its commitment to employ 950 local people, 250 of whom were previously long-term unemployed. All future contracts for the running of the Olympic Park should include a requirement to set up a similar scheme.

Finally, there must be coherent management of the legacy plans. The Mayor has obtained new powers in the form of the Mayoral Development Corporation, which has taken over the functions of the Olympic Park Legacy Company. That company had been well managed by Baroness Margaret Ford (chair) and Andrew Altman (chief executive) but, with the imminent departure of this team, it is not clear where this leaves plans for the Olympic Park.

If the Mayor and the government do none of these things but instead prefer simply to attract as much private money as possible with no thought for the consequences, there will be handsome profits for the private developers but few benefits for local communities. And London’s legacy promises will have been broken.

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Dee Doocey is a Liberal Democrat member of the House of Lords. Until this May, she chaired the London Assembly’s Economy, Culture and Sport Committee, responsible for scrutinising the 2012 Olympics

# PEERING INTO THE UNKNOWN

## Reform of the House of Lords faces enough hurdles without Liberal Democrat MPs making things worse, says Tony Greaves

The launch of the House of Lords Reform Bill by Nick Clegg on 27 June was meant to be a big Liberal Democrat Plus Pageant. Instead, he and his colleagues unleashed a wave of anger and annoyance amongst the 90 members of the Liberal Democrat party in the Lords. This was nothing to do with the contents of the Bill, which had been widely trailed and on which members have an equally wide range of views.

What stirred up their Liberal Lordships was a spate of attacks on the House of Lords from top Liberal Democrat MPs – notably Clegg himself, Simon Hughes and Tim Farron, followed by such as John Leech. The line was picked up by journalists such as Andrew Rawnsley and Steve Richards. The gist of these attacks was that peers get £300 a day for turning up for just ten minutes, tax free, and half of them are over 70 anyway so presumably past it. Generally, a load of lazy old drones taking advantage of the best old people's day centre in London.

I have no doubt there are some members of the Lords who fit that description, or a slightly less extreme version of it. The very old members who turn up actually tend to spend much of the day in our warm and comfortable club, with friendly and caring staff – but their critics would be surprised to learn that many of them make a fair political contribution as well. The crossbencher Lord Walton of Detchant will be 90 this year and no-one who witnessed his contributions during the recent debates on the Health and Social Care Bill (he's a former President of the General Medical Council, among much else) would accuse him of being either inactive or useless.

### CO-ORDINATED ATTACKS

Even less can this be said about the Liberal Democrats in the Lords, almost all of whom are active in the House, many as full-timers and the rest as busy part-timers. Hence the anger when MPs, widely seen as knowing next to nothing about the work the Lords does and how it's done, come out with evidently co-ordinated attacks on the Lords as individuals and as an institution.

One angry Liberal peer – a former MP – compared the £300 a day with an MP's salary of £65,738, plus the expenses they can claim to cover the costs of running an office, employing staff, having somewhere to live in London and in their constituency and so on, none available for peers. The very few peers who attend almost every sitting day – there are about 135 in a full year – would be able to claim around £40,000. Most claim a great deal less.

But regardless of the facts, these attacks were politically stupid. It's an understatement to say that getting the House of Lords Reform Bill through

parliament in a coherent form is not going to be easy. And it's going to take up a huge amount of parliamentary energy and time. If it arrives in the Lords more or less unscathed some time this coming back end – which is far from certain – it's due for a right mauling at our end.

It's not clear that there is a majority for the proposals in either the Conservative or Labour ranks, each with over 200 peers, though the Tories may be strongly whipped. The Labour front bench will pretend to be democrats but generate as much bother as they can. The crossbenchers and 'others' – about 215 in total – are mostly against it although the 26 bishops will probably be bought off with 12 seats. That leaves the Liberal Democrat group, which is irrevocably split. A third of the 90-strong group may be enthusiasts, though many of us who will support the principle of electing the Lords may question the wisdom of pushing it ahead now, and there will always be quibbles about the details (it's the Lords and it's what we do).

Up to a third of the group is opposed to an elected House. This may cause muttering and spluttering in the party outside but it's a fact and few of those members will change their minds: their positions are thought out and clear even if not party policy. That leaves the rest of the group, who are not very sure but largely party loyalists who will – other things equal – back the leadership. Upsetting them by telling them they are a set of freeloaders who deserve to be swept away was stupid politics.

Why was it done? Someone decided that, in order to promote reform, the Lords have to be rubbished. It's clear this idea came from Liberal Democrat sources at the top of the government, from the clever but clueless people that unfortunately surround the Deputy Prime Minister. People are blaming Julian Astle, the right-wing Liberal Democrat on maternity cover for Polly Mackenzie in the Number 10 Policy Unit. It seems he was in a position to have stamped on the idea, whether or not it was his in the first place. Instead, Clegg's staff and MPs went out shooting up their colleagues in the Lords.

Of course, one of their Lordships' failings, hereditary for some but equally ingrained for so many others, is the sanctimonious belief that they are wonderful people in a wonderful place, doing a wonderful job. I happen to think it does indeed do a good job on legislation, and it's certainly an enjoyable place in which to play political games in a fairly genteel but very serious way. But this belief too often goes too far, not least when the House is discussing itself and its future. Attacking its present members is not going to change this and it's not going to change views out in the country.

As I write, second reading in the Commons is a week



away and the crunch will be the programme motion to timetable the Bill. If the government cannot get its way on this, there will be congestion on the floor of the House. There are rumours the Commons may sit into August; other rumours suggest Labour may accept a guillotine later on.

The real problem is with increasingly stropky Tory backbenchers, not all on the crazy right.

The other big vote in the Commons seems likely to be over a referendum and there may even be one or two Liberal Democrat rebels on this. If the Commons votes to insert a referendum, the Lords will not take it out. If the Bill gets as far as detailed discussion in the Lords and the referendum is not already there, it will be inserted.

If and when it gets to the Lords, the opponents have a clear choice. They can vote at second reading to kill it off, or shunt it into a slowcoach siding. If this happens, the Commons can reintroduce the Bill in the next session, at least a year after the date of its Commons second reading first time round. This would be 9 July 2013. If it votes again for the Bill it sent to the Lords, the Parliament Act can be invoked and it will pass.

On the other hand, their Lordships can apply their wisdom to the Bill through a no doubt protracted committee stage, report stage and third reading (all on the floor of the House), amend it as they wish (whether as amendments agreed by the government or as hostile ones) and send it back to the Commons. There would then be the normal parliamentary ping-pong between the two Houses, which could lead to agreement. If not, the Parliament Act could again be brought into play, a threat that would hang heavily over the ping-pong process.

The big Known Unknown in all this is of course whether, when the chips are down and in the face of massive hostility from the Conservative press, his troops in both Houses, and the Tory party in the country, Cameron will be prepared to use the Parliament Act to so fundamentally alter the upper House of Parliament. And what happens to Clegg and the coalition if he refuses?

So what are the big issues that might cause a crash? The basic structure of the proposal is now well known: to evolve over ten years from the general election in May 2015 to a House of Lords that consists of 360 elected members, 90 appointed members (non-party crossbenchers), "up to 12 Lords Spiritual" better known as C of E bishops, and any ministerial members – people put into the Lords by the Prime Minister to be ministers. 'Transitional members' drawn from existing peers will be chosen according to rules (standing orders) decided by the House of Lords. In the first parliament, two-thirds of existing members will stay, reduced to one third in the second. It's likely that the party and non-party groups will each choose their proportional share as happened when most of the hereditaries were waved on their way in 1999.

There ought to be bother over the electoral system (a regional list system based on the Euro-constituencies,

## *“Getting the House of Lords Reform Bill through parliament in a coherent form is not going to be easy”*

to coincide with general elections), though I don't think there will – opponents may be only too happy to have a rubbish system to denounce at a referendum. But there are serious potential problems with the size of the electoral districts, electing 16 members at each election in the

South East, 14 in the North West and London, and 10 or 11 in five others. The scope for extremist parties getting a 15-year foothold in parliament is worrying, far more than with the original plan for STV in smaller seats.

The proposed payment system – retaining the present "per diem" system of £300 a day but introducing expenses for overnight stays in London and office costs etc, to be operated by the dreadful IPSA, will not be welcome for many. But their Lordships may have to live with it.

There are likely flashpoints over the bishops, and indeed over retaining any appointed peers – if the principle is that parliaments in a liberal democracy should be elected, they are both in my view unacceptable (and why the Church should feature is a mystery). But that will be a minority viewpoint.

There are bound to be changes to the Bill before it gets to Royal Assent. But once the question of a referendum has been conceded, as I fear it will, we'll be back to the old division from Asquith's time between the hedgers and the ditchers. Who wins that argument will all depend on how far the opponents believe they can stand out against a government formed of two parties elected on the basis of manifestos which promised a wholly or mainly elected Lords, and signed a coalition agreement reaffirming that aim (there will no doubt be earnest debates about the application of the Salisbury Doctrine to this matter); and how far they believe in the threat of the Parliament Act if they decide to ditch.

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Tony Greaves is a Liberal Democrat member of the House of Lords

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# FEEDING THE CROCODILE

The carnage in South Sudan is not just a humanitarian disaster; its causes are ideological and need a political response, says Rebecca Tinsley

Africa's youngest nation, South Sudan, is only a year old, but its prospects are bleak.

The same representatives of the international community cheering its birth in the new capital, Juba, last July now turn a blind eye as its historic foe, northern Sudan, systematically bombs the contested border region. Since South Sudan's future is linked to the whims of its bellicose neighbour to the north, it desperately needs Britain's support.

In the past year, northern Sudan's Islamist regime, based in Khartoum, has resumed its tried and tested campaign: aerial bombardment followed by ground attack by local Arab proxies, coupled with the use of starvation to complete its racist programme of ethnic cleansing. This strategy previously enabled Khartoum to kill two million black Africans in the south and another 300,000 in Darfur.

Credit is due to the UK, USA and Norway, the midwives of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which allowed ten million southerners to secede in a referendum last year. Unfortunately, we let South Sudan claim independence before the parties had agreed on the 1,200-mile border, and how its oil, the backbone of the region's pitifully undiversified economy, would be exported.

In our haste to move on, more than a million black African Sudanese find themselves on the northern side of the notional border. They are unwanted by a regime that desires a pure Arab, Muslim Sudan. Khartoum regards all Christians, animists and black Africans as potential insurgents, so it is eliminating them.

In April 2011, Khartoum began bombing and occupying the disputed border areas, targeting black Africans, both Muslim and Christian. The international guarantors of the CPA failed to impose penalties on Sudan for these violations. Facing no consequences for its actions, Khartoum has continued bombing with impunity, including civilian targets up to 40 kilometres inside South Sudan.

As a consequence, the UN believes that at least 350,000 citizens in the northern states of Blue Nile, South Kordofan and Abyei have fled to camps in South Sudan and Ethiopia. Of the half million internally displaced people, many are hiding in caves in the Nuba Mountains, surviving on leaves and grass, unable to plant their crops. Khartoum bars humanitarian access, knowing thousands will starve to death there this year.

When Winston Churchill visited the Nuba, more than 100 years ago, he saw Sudanese Arab soldiers using these, "noble, proud people" for target practice. Now Khartoum achieves the same end with equipment supplied by its friends in Russia, China, Belarus, Ukraine and Iran.

But despite Khartoum's serial infringement of the CPA, the West is afraid that, if it criticises

the northern regime, it might stop the South's independence, or behave even more savagely. As Churchill said, the definition of appeasement is feeding a crocodile, hoping it will eat you last.

## LOST PATIENCE

In December, Juba lost patience, turning off its 350,000 barrel-a-day oil production in protest at the fees being charged by Khartoum to tranship the oil to Port Sudan, its only point of export. The going rate is less than \$1 a barrel, but Khartoum demands \$33.

Juba's move was condemned by disingenuous Western officials, who suggested the people of South Sudan would be adversely affected by the loss of oil revenue. They must realise South Sudanese politicians are as committed to trousering the wealth of their nation as any other African administration. Recently it emerged that the President, Salva Kiir, wrote to his ministers asking them to return \$4bn in missing government funds, not including the \$5bn of international aid thought to have vanished since 2005.

The lack of oil revenue is indeed causing inflation and hardship, but for the vast majority of South Sudanese, living in medieval conditions, it is more of what they have endured from their rulers for centuries. A 15-year-old girl in South Sudan is more likely to die in childbirth than to complete primary school. Almost every woman in rural areas is illiterate because going to school risks being raped by male teachers and students, such is the lack of security and the rock bottom status of women.

The new government of South Sudan has only the vaguest idea of its obligations to its people. This role does not seem to include defending them from attack, or providing documentation to thousands of South Sudanese stranded in Khartoum at the time of independence.

Nevertheless, Juba hit back at sustained northern aggression by briefly occupying the Heglig oil field in Sudan in March. The world denounced South Sudan for violating the CPA, leaving Juba bewildered by its double standards.

The UK aid agency, DfID, suspended long-term aid to South Sudan as punishment. The tone of the coalition government's condemnation of Juba smacks of moral equivalence (a trick often employed by the UK in Bosnia), when Khartoum clearly bears far more blame for the current mess, not to mention the carnage since independence in 1956.

Once oil was brought into the equation, there followed a flurry of diplomatic activity, with the African Union hosting peace talks that have so far achieved little beyond freebies in nice hotels in Addis Ababa for all concerned.

One of the more pathetic excuses given for the West's lack of engagement in the detail of these talks is the

need for “African solutions to African problems.” It may be politically incorrect to say so, but Africa’s institutions have proved time and again that they are too weak or uninterested to tackle state-sponsored atrocities on the continent.

## **KLEPTOMANIACS AND TRIBALISTS**

If we were genuinely concerned for Africa’s citizens, as opposed to the dismal band of kleptomaniacs and tribalists (with a few exceptions) ruling Africa, we would be more supportive of regional peace efforts and institutions. Our ‘hands off’ approach is not working, and stuttering negotiations will get nowhere.

For instance, at current peace talks between Sudan and South Sudan, the UK has provided a colonial era map to help negotiators. More to the point would be sending veterans of the Northern Ireland peace agreement to support and guide the faltering process of arbitration and mediation (and to make a few timely threats to withhold UK favour in the face of intransigence).

The UK cannot be faulted for its generosity in sending humanitarian aid to South Sudan and Darfur, and funding peacekeeping operations. However, framing events as a humanitarian disaster goes to the heart of the problem: Khartoum’s ethnic cleansing policies are ideological and racial, and they require a political response. Decades of centralising power in Khartoum and marginalising Sudan’s regions have added to the unrest: it requires a new constitutional settlement for all Sudan, including a bill of rights protecting minorities and a devolved, federal system. In addition, the removal of food and fuel subsidies has re-awakened the incipient Arab Spring so brutally crushed in Khartoum last year.

UK ministers and successive UK ambassadors to Khartoum have insisted that only through normal diplomatic and economic engagement will Sudan institute reforms. This presupposes that the regime wishes to reform, which it clearly does not. Hence UK officials attend trade conferences at the Sudanese Embassy in London on the one hand, while offering toothless condemnation of massive human rights abuses on the other.

The most serious examination of the government’s Sudan policy takes place in the Lords with the usual suspects (David Alton, Caroline Cox, Glenys Kinnock and David Chidgey) keeping up the pressure. The coalition’s standard response to questions about Khartoum’s ethnic cleansing policies has been to claim that not enough is known about the “terribly confusing situation” in Sudan, be it in Darfur or the contested border area of Blue Nile, the Nuba Mountains, South Kordofan and Abyei.

Since April 2011, when Khartoum violated the CPA and occupied Abyei, Lord Howell, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office minister, has repeatedly said: “We cannot get access... to establish what is happening,” a claim he made as recently as 23 May 2012. This ignores the plethora of eyewitness reports of Sudan’s ethnic cleansing campaign by internationally respected human rights groups and journalists, not to mention UN reports and satellite imagery of mass graves.

Incredibly, Howell chose to defend the Sudan regime after a Catholic church in Khartoum was attacked and destroyed on 21 April. On 23 May he said: “We have no evidence that there is a state orchestrated campaign against Christians,” despite inflammatory sermons by nearby mullahs who would not dare express an opinion without the regime’s approval, and a rampaging mob that was tolerated by a repressive regime that allows no unapproved public demonstrations.

When pressed, Howell says mildly: “We continue to remind the Government of Sudan of their obligations to protect civilians and allow humanitarian access.” Equally often, questioners are told: “We have set out our concerns,” “We continue to call for full humanitarian access,” and “We have called for a full investigation.”

Yet, UK ministers, parliamentarians and business people continue to discuss trade links with a country ruled by the only sitting world leader to be indicted for genocide by the International Criminal Court. This, the Liberal Democrat peer Baroness Northover calls “engagement, but not business as usual”.

The FCO claims its overall policy is that it is not proactively promoting trade with Sudan. Lord Alton sees it differently: “Either you’re doing business with a regime headed by a man indicted for genocide, or you’re not.”

What should be done? There are several points of leverage the UK and the international community have failed to use. We should be applying carefully targeted personal sanctions against the architects of ethnic cleansing within the Sudanese regime, stopping their shopping trips to Paris. We should use the electronic wizardry we deploy against narco-criminals to freeze bank accounts and make life unpleasant and inconvenient for the ruling National Islamic Front in Khartoum. Mass murderers hate it when their Amex card is denied.

A no-fly zone over South Kordofan would stop the Sudanese air force bombing its own people; so would destroying the airstrips they use to launch attacks on the Nuba Mountains. We should also demand a humanitarian aid corridor to the starving Nuba people, enforced by a Chapter VII-mandated UN force (one is already in the region, paid for by the UK, and could be put to good use).

Sudan’s misery receives less media attention than Syria, but the same messy compromises are in play, revealing the weakness of the international community in the post-Cold War world. We, the West, are back to our default position: we appease Khartoum, just as we appease Assad in Damascus, yet we send drones to Pakistan and Yemen, and threaten Iran. We embrace the indicted war criminal, Bashir, just as we embraced Milosevic, Saddam and (initially) Hitler, for fear of something worse or unknown.

If we learned one lesson from the twentieth century, it should have been that such spinelessness eventually leads to the deployment of our sons and daughters on a hostile foreign field. That never goes terribly well for anyone concerned.

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Rebecca Tinsley founded the human rights group Waging Peace ([www.WagingPeace.info](http://www.WagingPeace.info)), which has provided evidence of war crimes in Sudan to the ICC. Her novel about Darfur, ‘When the Stars Fall to Earth’, is available from Amazon



# THE PARTY'S OVER

The rise and fall of the middle class dinner party mirrors the rise and fall of Thatcherism. Simon Titley argues this is no coincidence

The British middle class dinner party is dying out. And not a moment too soon.

In an opinion poll published this May by YouGov, 27% of Britons said that they avoid giving dinner parties completely because they are too stressful, while a further 38% said they don't host dinner parties very often as they involve too much work, money or time. Only 14% said that they "love hosting dinner parties". The minority that persists with dinner parties is tending to abandon formality in favour of the informal 'kitchen supper'.

Besides having fewer dinner parties, people are also eating out less. A survey published in May 2010 by Mintel found that 53% of Britons are staying in more to save money. Mintel concluded that the recession has accelerated a trend towards 'cocooning'. Rather than host a dinner party or eat out, we prefer to hunker down at home with a bottle of wine and a pizza.

There is one group that has not given up on the dinner party, but it hardly counts as a ringing endorsement. YouGov found that the demographic that remains most keen to host dinner parties is couples with three or more children, but only because it is cheaper for them to entertain at home than hire a babysitter for the night.

## LOST ENTHUSIASM

What has gone wrong? Over the past three decades, the dinner party was a regular feature of British middle class social life. When you consider all the cookery programmes on TV and all the cookery books sold (Britain's best-selling author in any genre is Jamie Oliver), not to mention the fortune spent on fitted kitchens and kitchen gadgets, you would have thought that dinner parties are still all the rage. But most people today seem to have lost their enthusiasm and no longer feel any urge to host them.

The history of the dinner party can be traced back to the nineteenth century but the practice was for a long time confined to an affluent minority. Until the 1970s, most British people were working class and would never have dreamt of hosting a dinner party. Instead, they had 'tea'.

As a child in a family on the cusp of the working class and middle class in the 1960s, I well remember the ritual of 'tea'. It was served on a Saturday or Sunday at about 4pm. The guests who came round for tea were usually relatives. Everyone sat at the dining table but it was never a cooked meal. There were sandwiches and cakes, although in the summer the sandwiches might be replaced by a 'salad' (which meant cold meat accompanied by lettuce, tomato, cucumber and a bottle of Heinz salad cream). The drink of choice was a pot of tea, or orange squash for the kids, certainly not wine.

And then the emerging middle classes acquired aspirations. The moment was captured perfectly in

Mike Leigh's 1977 TV play 'Abigail's Party'. It was viewed at the time simply as an uncomfortable comedy of embarrassment, but we can now see that it was also extraordinarily prescient.

The setting is a suburban drinks party rather than a dinner party, but the play nevertheless satirised the vulgar materialism of the new middle class in quite shocking terms, through the medium of the central character Beverly (memorably played by Alison Steadman), a domineering monster in a bright orange cocktail dress, with a penchant for Demis Roussos and kitsch erotic art.

The historian David Kynaston sees this play as a key text. He argues that, in the pre-Thatcher period of the 1970s, "a lot of evidence shows that society was quite ready for Thatcherism when it came along. Whether one thinks it was a good or bad thing, many people already wanted the 'me first, society second' policies that Thatcher promoted."

The dinner party chimed perfectly with this new mood. It caught on in the early Thatcher era, primarily as a means of showing off. Middle class couples would compete to emulate the dishes they had tried on continental holidays or in foreign restaurants, or had seen on TV. If you are not old enough to remember the aspirational culture of the 1980s, don't bother searching in a history book; simply watch some old episodes of the cheesy TV drama series 'Howards' Way'.

By the 1990s, the dinner party was ripe for satire, notably in the TV sitcom 'Keeping Up Appearances', where Hyacinth Bucket's 'candlelight suppers' were dreaded by anyone invited. But such satire was the exception, not the rule. A boom in TV cookery programmes began in the 1980s and hasn't stopped booming since. It began with the didacticism of Delia Smith and evolved via the tomfoolery of Keith Floyd to the pure entertainment these programmes offer today.

But might some of these TV shows be a reason for the dinner party's decline? The BBC's 'Masterchef' ("cooking doesn't get any tougher than this") promotes the mistaken idea that, for any dinner party host, nothing less than Michelin-starred restaurant standards will do. It makes people feel ashamed to offer a homespun casserole, even though that is much more practical for a domestic dinner party than Masterchef's labour-intensive, chefy food. Another disincentive is provided by Channel 4's 'Come Dine With Me', which creates the impression that the average dinner party consists of incompetent cooking shared with a bunch of arseholes.

The only deterrents to hosting a dinner party mentioned in the YouGov poll were time, effort and cost (the same poll found that the average amount people spend on hosting one is £60, too much to bear for many people in a recession). But there are

undoubtedly other reasons.

People are tending to work longer hours, with longer commuting times, and all they want to do when they get home is flop on the sofa. Friends are increasingly scattered geographically, so that their homes

are no longer a convenient meeting point. Also, the dinner party became the territory of the 'smug couple'. It was used by newly-married women as a device to reorient friendships around other couples and freeze out their husbands' single friends. Now that a third of UK households are occupied by one person, the couply scene of the 1980s and 90s has lost its appeal for both sexes.

Then again, the explanation for the death of the dinner party might simply be that they're just awful. Does anyone really enjoy them? What ought to be a relaxing evening with friends usually turns into an anxiety fest, which no-one looks forward to and leaves everyone feeling worn out afterwards.

A dinner party demands all of its participants to behave artificially, so that when their natural selves slip out (as they tend to when drink is taken – *in vino veritas*), any unfortunate personal traits are amplified. So it is not just the social pressure that causes stress but also the bad behaviour of others.

This was confirmed in a survey of dinner party behaviour commissioned by the insurance company Sheilas' Wheels and published this June. 28% of guests regularly turn up without a gift, 19% get out their mobile phones to make a call or text while in their host's company, 17% swear in front of their hosts, 13% light cigarettes despite not smoking in their own home, 9% admit to snooping around their host's home without permission, and 6% cause over £100 of damage a year through breaks and spills.

This poll only scratches the surface. There are many more examples of inconsiderate behaviour that can ruin an evening.

One thing that has turned hosting a dinner party into a nightmare is women's dietary fads. Most British women seem to be following some sort of quack diet and they often make unreasonable dietary demands of their hosts. And you can bet that your guests' respective fads will be incompatible, forcing you to prepare at least two different dishes for each course. It doesn't stop there; faddist guests often see nothing wrong with marching into the kitchen, inspecting the food, pointing to a vital ingredient and uttering one of the most depressing phrases in the English language: "Don't put any of that in mine."

There's worse. A fixture of any dinner party is the Interfering Woman. As soon as she arrives, she heads straight for the kitchen and tries to take over, even though she has no idea what the host is trying to cook. Some are assertive bullies who put on a pinny and push the host aside, while meeker examples shadow the host around the kitchen, intermittently meddling. Of course, they don't see this behaviour as interference but insist they are 'helping'. (There is a male equivalent: Barbecue Man. He appears only in the summer but has a similar determination to take over

*"The dinner party was a Thatcherite game in which we competed to impress each other"*

despite not knowing what he is doing).

Then as you make your way to the table and hope to continue an interesting conversation with someone, you are invariably frustrated by the Bossy Hostess who bellows, "You can't sit there! It's got to be boy,

girl, boy, girl, boy, girl..."

Once everyone is settled, you are invariably subjected to a predictable and dreary conversation about house prices or finding school places. Still, it could be worse. You could be forced to endure The Most Boring Thing In The World – women's small talk. Words cannot do full justice to the excruciating tedium of having to listen to an interminable stream of mundane details of other people lives. "You remember Mavis who used to live next to the post office? Well her cousin's daughter in Canada has just had her third. Mind you, she had a funny turn last week and had to get some new tablets. Yes, I got this blouse in the sale at Matalan, it was only £7.99. While we were there, Brenda found some curtains for her spare room..." (Already, half of you are in agony, screaming "Please make it stop!", while the other half want to know more about Brenda's curtains).

But you know who the worst type of guest is? Me. Like most Liberator readers, I am perfectly accustomed to rambunctious political argument and easily forget how threatening this is to normal people. I therefore unilaterally sweep aside the dinner party convention of banal conversation and proceed to take apart the cosy assumptions of the other guests. And that's before I've finished my first bottle. Later in the evening, I descend into lavatorial humour before being sick in the back garden.

Perhaps the middle class dinner party should be turned into a sitcom called 'Guests Behaving Badly'. And this deteriorating behaviour is a clue to the real reason for the death of the dinner party: we've given up trying.

The dinner party was a Thatcherite game in which we competed to impress each other. But by now, we all know what an olive looks like, and there's no kitchen gadget you have that everyone else hasn't. So the dinner party has lost its point.

And there's one more clue why the effort is no longer rewarding: the YouGov poll that began this article was commissioned by a manufacturer of convenience cooking ingredients. The company's name? 'Very Lazy'.

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Simon Titley is a member of the Liberator Collective

# TRANSPORT OF DELIGHT

## Investment in trains, buses, cycling and walking is a Liberal Democrat success story, says Julian Huppert

Investment in transport creates jobs, improves social mobility and rebalances our economy away from the City of London, and can even tackle our environmental woes. The Liberal Democrats have long argued for decent funding for sustainable national – and local – infrastructure.

Despite this, successive governments have failed to invest properly. But Liberal Democrats within the coalition government are pushing forward with much needed investment and reform.

Since 1950, the length of UK railways has halved. But since 1980, passenger numbers on our trains have doubled. This has led to congested trains, spiralling costs and declining services. British railways are already 30% more expensive and 30% less efficient than their European counterparts. Labour's solution was year-on-year fare rises to plug the gap – and even now it continues to call for above-inflation increases.

It is simply unacceptable that it can cost three times as much to cross the country by train as by car. If we are serious about encouraging low carbon travel and unclogging our roads, we have to make rail travel more affordable. I was pleased that Liberal Democrat MPs managed to convince the government to reduce the proposed rail fare rises this year by two percentage points to 1% above inflation – but we need to stop increasing fares even that much; they are already too high.

The structural reform laid out by the McNulty Review could bring real savings to the cost of the rail network. We should use the money from these savings – which could be up to £1bn per year – to reinvest in the network and reduce rail fares. Our policy is to limit rail fare increases to 1% below inflation – and we will keep pressing for that.

The coalition is already investing more in railways than any government since Victorian times. This is an achievement that, as Liberal Democrats, we should be proud of. I particularly welcome the potential to reopen disused railway lines. Similarly, electrification of railway lines will play a huge part in reducing the CO2 emissions from train travel. The coalition has committed to electrification of over 800 miles of track. This compares with a woeful nine miles achieved by Labour.

The Liberal Democrats want to see more devolution, community involvement and effective funding of bus services. A reliable, regular and affordable bus network across the UK is crucial if we want to get people to leave their cars at home. Communities need to be more involved in the governance of local bus services. I want to see buses valued by local authorities for the social need they provide – not simply the profit they make for big bus companies.

I welcome the excellent investment the coalition, under transport minister Norman Baker, has put into local bus services, with £120m of new funding announced since autumn 2011. This includes the green bus fund, which will put 439 more low carbon buses on our roads. Investing in new buses is vitally important for improving air quality in our town centres, and meeting our obligations under EU law in this area.

New funds for local authorities under the Better Bus Area Fund project will benefit bus services. We need to go much further with local funding and devolution, but the basics are there.

The £500m Local Sustainable Transport Fund has also benefited walking and cycling projects. I deeply regret the loss of Cycling England – a victim of the previous transport secretary's anti-quango zeal – but the government has shown commitment to cycling, with funding for new Sustrans routes, ring-fencing of Bikeability funds for schools cycle training, and new money for cycle/rail links.

For too long, cycling has been undervalued by government. I am pleased that the government does now seem to understand the potential cycling and walking have to improve health, reduce CO2 emissions and ease congestion. We need to make sure there are resources to match – and support from ministers across government. 20 mph zones should expand to promote safety – and Norman has already made this much easier.

I am also clear that the Liberal Democrats need to push new ideas; that we should be the voice calling for greener and more efficient transport. With rail electrification, cleaner buses, and new money for cycling, our efforts to decarbonise travel across the UK are taking effect. We now have to think about other types of transport.

Iarla Kilbane-Dawe, who fought Edmonton in 2010, recently put the case that electric vehicles (EVs) could be a cost-effective replacement for urban buses, taxis and vans. These services have low mileages and are suitable for central charging – making them perfect for transferral to EVs. EV sales are predicted to increase by 600% over the next decade. The UK has fallen behind many other countries in investment in EVs. Liberal Democrat policies to encourage this sector – favourable procurement policies, for example – could have massive benefits for air quality, emissions, health and jobs.

These measures represent huge successes in the face of daunting odds. But Liberal Democrats must be unafraid to make the case for further investment, radical liberal policy development and a sustainable transport network for all.

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Julian Huppert is Liberal Democrat MP for Cambridge



# DADDY KNOWS BEST

## Why do the coalition's social mobility trackers recognise only fathers' attainments, wonders Dinti Batstone

Basking in the success of her latest BBC series, historian Dr Lucy Worsley recently declared that she had been “educated out of the natural reproductive function”. A few weeks later, Helen Fraser, former managing director of Penguin Books and now chief executive of the Girls Day School Trust, cautioned the next generation against the ‘nappy wall’ that can derail women’s careers.

Fifty years on from ‘The Feminine Mystique’, despite all the advances of the last few decades, many women are belatedly discovering that it is still only men who can realistically aspire to ‘have it all’. No matter how able, women are much more likely than male peers to feel that they must ultimately choose between professional success and ‘the natural reproductive function’.

While women’s shorter fertility window is a complicating factor, the career vs children dilemma is forced on women by society, not biology. Workplaces, originally designed by men for men with stay-at-home wives, have not yet evolved sufficiently to accommodate modern dual career families.

Today’s women outperform men academically through school and university, sail through the early years of their careers, but hit the buffers when confronted with workplace cultures that do little more than pay lip service to family-friendly working.

It’s at that point that many feel compelled to choose between career and family, knowing that if they choose the latter their career prospects will likely nosedive. Research by the Fawcett Society in 2009 found that “motherhood has a direct and dramatic influence on women’s pay and employment prospects, and typically this penalty lasts a lifetime”. Affluent professionals can mitigate the impact with expensive childcare, but this is not an option for average earners. A more typical solution is for one partner to downshift, fitting work in around children, rather than vice versa.

Worsley and Fraser have received considerable flak for their comments, but their conceit is merely to advocate personal strategies for navigating society and workplaces as they currently are, rather than as we might wish them to be.

Liberal Democrats can and should set our sights much higher, articulating a vision of society in which women and men are equally free to fulfil their potential as both professionals and parents. A decision whether or not to have children should not be a career limiting (or enhancing) move.

Seen in this context, a recent flagship policy announcement from the heart of our own government is rather more dispiriting than the comments of Worsley and Fraser.

Heralding 17 new social mobility ‘trackers’ to great fanfare back in May, it appears that no one in the Cabinet Office sought to question whether in 2012 it

is still appropriate or desirable to track social mobility on the basis of paternal – as opposed to parental – attainment or occupation.

The unfortunate (but nevertheless logical) inference to be drawn from the parameters chosen is that the government thinks women’s attainment matters less than men’s. One wonders whether there were any professional women in the room when the policy was crafted.

Consider a couple where the mother is a high-flying academic on track for a professorship while the father is an unemployed stay-at-home dad. Are we really so sexist as to say that, for the purposes of measuring their children’s social mobility, her career is irrelevant? This sends a dire message to women about how little our society values their achievements, and severely undermines an otherwise laudable initiative. It’s also frankly nonsensical in terms of constructing a true representation of a child’s relative life chances (which, after all, is the whole purpose of the social mobility exercise).

Mandarins could no doubt provide a technocratic explanation as to why this gaffe has arisen – historic data methodologies that make it easier to track paternal than maternal data over time. The point, however, is that politicians should be savvy to the political and social messages – indeed biases – inherent in the processes and data they choose to use. When the prevailing methodology is undesirably flawed, politicians should be prepared to mandate change. For all her faults, even Margaret Thatcher moved with the times in introducing individual taxation for married women, while in 2001 Labour replaced the traditionally male-centric ‘head of household’ survey designation with the more gender neutral ‘household reference person’.

One of the benefits of being in government is being able to modernise its thinking in a way that at least reflects, and at best promotes, social change and individual empowerment. Liberal Democrats in the coalition have made great strides in championing change in relation to issues like equal marriage, shared parental leave and the right to request flexible working. Surely we can do better than to perpetuate outdated perceptions of the relative importance of mothers’ and fathers’ respective careers and attainments?

Fraser urged tomorrow’s women to choose partners who will be “cheerleaders and take pride in their wife’s career as they do in their own”. How can we expect that to happen when the government sends a blatant message that women’s careers matter less than men’s?

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Dinti Batstone is a member of the Liberal Democrat Federal Policy Committee

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**Occupy  
by Noam Chomsky  
Penguin 2012 £5**

This is a short (about 20,000 word) collection of talks and conversations between Noam Chomsky and supporters of the Occupy movement. It includes philosophical discussion of defiance and protest and calls persuasively for a more egalitarian future. Chomsky dedicates the book to “7,705 people who have been arrested supporting Occupy to date.”

Chomsky cites the 1970s as a crucial turning point. He even classes Richard Nixon as a liberal president compared with modern politicians (a claim I have seen made in literature of the right too). He argues the 70s was when the enrichment of all of society ceased de facto to include the enrichment of the poorest. Chomsky links this to a rising predominance of finance in the American economy in the 1970s, which he argues made it easier to become rich without doing anything of benefit to others.

From this point, the gap between rich and poor grew, the accumulation of wealth in the possession of a few took off exponentially, and the gulf “between public will and public policy” expanded.

Chomsky is doubtful of today’s Democratic Party as a force for change. He points out various steps Obama could have taken but didn’t. For example, he argues that instead of government re-financing the private owners of America’s car companies, the government could have bought the near bankrupt companies and given them to their workforces to be employee-owned enterprises.

He points to examples of the richest capitalists seeking to prevent employee ownership in principle and argues that America has been in a state of class war for 30 years. Both parties, he argues, have been bought by the rich and he predicts that \$2bn expected to be spent on the 2012 election will come mostly from banks, finance houses and the super-rich to both Obama and Romney.

On the other hand, he does not close the door to the possibility that (unlike, he writes, Egypt before the Arab Spring) some change could be achieved within the existing system. He cites New York City Council’s politicians passing a resolution against corporate-personhood. The “corporations are people” ruling of the Supreme Court has prevented



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real restriction of the super-rich bankrolling politics and a constitutional amendment to the effect that “only people are people” is a single important step needed to take the big money of a few out of politics.

There is reference to the central theme of decades of Chomsky’s writings, that we are living in an oppressive non-democratic society. His argument is that small elites in America and England have learned that they could not use physical force to the extent fascist regimes have in the past on their populations without likely causing us to push back in a revolution to oust them. But they have developed instead equally effective means to control us, as much as a fascist regime, through the media and communication. He cites the Tea Party (as Bill Clinton does in his recent book, *Back To Work*) as people who want reasonable things given the gross misinformation they have been exposed to.

In *Occupy*, Chomsky champions the nobility of the activist. In his view, activists have consistently civilised America. He writes: “The only way to mobilize the American public that I’ve ever heard of – or any other public – is by going out and joining them. Going out to wherever people are – churches, clubs, schools, unions – wherever they may be. Getting involved with them and trying to learn from them and to bring about a change of consciousness among them.”

He is very clear that major change in society won’t happen by itself in some inevitable way imagined by Marx. The people who want change need to make it happen by organising and educating others.

Antony Hook

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**The Patient Paradox:  
Why sexed-up  
medicine is bad for**

**your health  
by Margaret  
McCartney  
Pinter & Martin 2012  
£9.99**

What could be better than finding cancer before it develops, or preventing strokes and heart attacks by measuring cholesterol and giving you drugs to bring high levels down? Politicians and reputable charities promote the benefits of screening and then describe how lives are saved, while celebrities urge you to get checked or check yourself. Who could possibly object to screening?

Yet screening – an emotive and politically sensitive subject – is the first target of Margaret McCartney’s book, which challenges readers to take a critical look at healthcare today.

She examines the evidence for different types of screening, explaining with clarity how effective it actually is at preventing diseases and the serious harm to which it can lead. The evidence for it is often weak, she argues, and it turns healthy people into patients. It’s financially wasteful as well.

This is not just her opinion. McCartney’s statements are backed by research, supplemented with anecdotal evidence drawn from her work as a GP in Glasgow.

The ‘patient paradox’ is that healthcare is structured in such a way that well people are being turned into patients – typically through screening – while those most in need of care can struggle to get it. McCartney cites numerous examples of how and why this happens.

The book is controversial. From the outset, McCartney pulls no punches, saying at the start of the first chapter that the “only normal person is one that hasn’t had modern medicine unleashed

on them”.

It is eye-opening to find out how easily information and figures can mislead. Being able to halve the risk of dying from a certain disease by having a test sounds good but may be a negligible amount if that disease is rare to begin with. This sounds counterintuitive so McCartney demystifies statistics, how they work and how they can mislead, using clear words and diagrams.

McCartney’s other targets include pharmaceutical companies, which cover up research that casts doubt on their new drugs’ safety, and their pervasive influence over medical charities. Awareness raising by charities is criticised for its emphasis on PR and “slick slogans” above evidence-based advice. The GP contract is criticised for its focus on targets (such as those for screening, vaccination and weight management) and how these can detract from providing care that is most needed; another example of the paradox.

Political influence also comes in for criticism. Politicians introduced well person checks because opinion polls suggested they’d be popular, not because evidence said they’d be useful. McCartney points out the link between the NHS and the Department of Health, and regrets there is no “holding pen for daft ideas” or a committee that examines the evidence on ideas and reforms before they’re implemented. She also suggests running the NHS along the same lines as the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, based on evidence rather than politics, and beyond the influence of charities and drug companies.

McCartney is clear that addressing inequalities will lead to major health gains and that the “biggest improvements to healthcare will be social and political”.

Christy Lawrance

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## **The Art of the Loophole: Making the Law Work for You** by Nick Freeman Coronet 2012 £20

Nick Freeman is a criminal defence lawyer specialising in motoring law. He is renowned for finding ‘loopholes’ after thorough legal

research, which he delights in producing at the last moment, to the shock or delight of the courtroom. The book seems torn between being a tutorial of all the technicalities of motoring law, and simply being a list of everyone famous Freeman has defended, with the odd line about why what he does is justified.

The main problem is that its purpose and intended audience are unclear. Written by a ghost writer, it is conversational and entertaining but there are tensions. First, the endless examples seem both to illustrate the legal points, and provide a platform for him to showcase celebrity clients. For example, he spends 14 pages talking about defending David Beckham. Beckham claimed he broke the speed limit because he was being chased by photographers and, although the High Court did not believe this factor could provide a defence, it was a special reason to waive the mandatory points. It is unclear whether Freeman devotes so many pages to this case for the interesting legal points it raises or the fame of the defendant.

The second tension is between Freeman’s wish to showcase his talent and the public reaction to a lawyer who is seen to be helping the factually guilty. Freeman declares that he abhors drink-driving but states that, as a defence lawyer, he cannot contact the prosecution and inform them of the holes in their case instead of helping his client. It is true, as he points out, that if the law, when correctly applied, does not bring justice, then it is for those who can change it to do so. What he does not do is argue why it is important to have rules and ensure that the state’s powers are kept within strict boundaries – in short, the rule of law. It is a shame that the book does not try harder to justify the important work of the defence lawyer in protecting the citizen from all unlawful intrusions by the state, even if this may sometimes mean letting the factually guilty go unpunished.

For most of the book, Freeman reveals his procedures for finding problems in the Crown’s case. A surprisingly obvious area is identification. He gives many examples of letters incorrectly addressed, officers mistakenly identifying defendants in court

months after the incident, and the wrong people filling in forms. Another minefield for ‘loopholes’ is mistakes made by the Crown. These range from the obviously problematic homophobic magistrate to the police making mistakes when taking samples for drink-driving.

The book makes for an enjoyable read. Sadly, Freeman fails to properly engage with the moral debate around his job. He appears to accept that the law is unjust but believes that this is not his responsibility, and prefers instead to highlight all the clever legal arguments he has thought of. There is an argument to be made for the invaluable work done by defence lawyers, but this is unfortunately largely ignored, which may leave the reader feeling frustrated with the blasé attitude of this clever and successful lawyer.

Eleanor Healy Birt

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## **The Founding Gardeners** by Andrea Wulf William Heinemann 2011 £20

It must be of profound disappointment to Tories – Labour and Conservative alike – that the coalition has not been greeted in the Liberal ranks with cries of “time to return to your constituencies and tend your garden”.

It is well known that the founding fathers of the United States were jacks of all trades and fascinating to find Washington advocating indigenous species in his garden, and Madison calling upon his fellow Americans to protect their environment.

What if the Federalists had prevailed and the States had remained essentially maritime and the wilderness unspoilt? Just as the old Persian word for garden is the root of our concept of ‘paradise’, gardens can be living reflections of a philosophy. How then do we see Madison’s ‘improvement’ of his slave quarters at Montpelier (following Coke of Holkham’s improved farm cottages)?

The Declaration of Independence remains, despite that, one of the finest Liberal documents ever written. Where did they go wrong?

Stewart Rayment



## Monday

If I were asked to put my finger upon the point at which the Bank of Rutland showed it had got too big for its boots, I should say it was when it started demanding an annual tribute of seven youths and seven maidens from its customers. We had become used to the inflated salaries it paid its directors and its sniffy attitude if the dividend on a chap's Rutland Oil shares was late in arriving, but it was generally agreed that this last step was Going Too Far.

I therefore welcome this new climate in which the practices of banks are being questioned – as far as I am concerned, the more inquiries that are held the better. Thank goodness we have a Sound fellow serving as Business Secretary! I blush to recall that we used to call him 'Low-Voltage' Cable. No one would call him that today.

## Tuesday

I call in at St Asquith's and find the Revd Hughes listening to two chaps with wings.

"Isn't it terrible about Nicaragua and I feel so sorry for social workers. I blame the coalition," says one. "I am looking forward to seeing that new film with the dialogue in Ancient Manx. I think films like that should be subsidised. Did you read Polly Toynbee this morning?"

"Who were they?" I asked the Revd Hughes after they have gone. "Guardian angels," he explains.

## Wednesday

I have been busy in recent weeks organising an important event here in the East Midlands. I do not refer, let me hasten to add, to the visit of the 'Olympic Torch': for that piece of tomfoolery was devised by the beastly Albert Speer for the Berlin Games of 1936 and I shall have no part in it. So much so that, when it passed through Rutland, I stationed gamekeepers at every entrance to the Bonkers Hall Estate with soda siphons and strict orders to extinguish it should it show its face.

No, I am talking about my role as the regional co-ordinator of Nick Clegg's 'Hair-Shirt' Tour. The newspapers say that this has been designed by "battle-hardened strategists" in his office, but that was not my experience. I was telephoned by a 12-year-old with a cut-glass accent and, he claimed, a first in PPE from Oxford.

"We want Nick to meet all the people he has upset," the child piped.

"How long have you set aside for this?" I returned. "It could take rather a long time."

Nevertheless, I set to with a will and have put together what may fairly be described as an impressive programme of meetings.

Nick will first be taken to the University of Rutland at Belvoir, where the students remain rather cut up about his breaking that pledge he made on tuition fees. I would not worry too much about its famed Department of Hard Sums if I were him – those fellows tend to have thick glasses and their minds on higher things – but the chaps from the Department of Cryptozoology can cut up rough when the mood takes them. Not only that: they have an impressive menagerie to hand if they choose to deploy it: gryphons, dragons, cockatrice – you know the sort of thing.

Then it is on to Melton Mowbray to meet a delegation of disgruntled pork pie makers – those things can be surprisingly painful if they catch you just under the rib cage. After that, Nick will be entertained by unemployed Stilton miners. The tour will close with a meeting with civil liberties campaigners aghast at the government's plans to snoop on all our conversations by telephone and electric internet. "I expect you know already," I said when writing to Nick to confirm arrangements.

# Lord Bonkers' Diary

After that little lot, I image Nick will be in need of a stiff measure of Auld Johnston (that most prized of Highland malts) and a little rest and recuperation, so I have included a boat trip on Rutland Water in the programme of events. What Nick does not know, however, is that I have told Ruttie that I recently heard him making disobliging comments about plesiosaurs – that should certainly enable him to "welcome the hatred"!

## Thursday

Experienced Liberal activists will need no introduction to my many

inventions – I think particularly of the steam-powered shuttleworth press and the Bonkers Patent Exploding Focus (for use in marginal wards). So they will not be surprised that I am enthused by the Dragons' Den programme on the moving television.

After pondering which of my new ideas to set before them, I have lit upon the 'George Formby Grill'. This will cook meat in the modern healthy way while playing comic songs with a ukulele accompaniment – the standard model will include 'Leaning on a Lamppost,' 'My Grandad's Flannelette Nightshirt' and 'Mr Huhne's a Window Cleaner Now'. My suggested slogan is "The George Formby Grill – So your meat turns out nice every time."

Should any reader wish to invest in the produce himself or, indeed, herself – thus saving me the trouble of making up for the television lights – a letter sent c/o the Whips Office in the Lords will, of course, find me.

## Friday

As I have recorded here before, we gave up our attempt to split the atom early here in Rutland, finding them Terribly Fiddly. However, I am enthused by talk of a new subatomic particle by the name of the 'Higgs boson'.

For this, I surmise, must be named for the Lancashire, Leicestershire and England seamer Ken Higgs, presumably because it has a broad bottom and can reel off a string of maiden overs even when the pitch is not helpful.

It's just a shame that one will need a powerful pair of field glasses to see it.

## Saturday

A letter arrives asking me what my favourite moment from the moving television is. That is easy to answer.

Who could forget the Bird of Liberty attacking Michael Parkinson? I have not laughed so much since King Leopold of the Belgians died.

## Sunday

Wishing to avoid those Guardian angels (they were not receptive to my idea for a maximum price for alcohol), I eschew Divine Service for once and go for a walk by the shores of Rutland Water.

Clegg's hair-shirt tour, I surmise, is intended by the clever children in his office to make it clear whether he has a chance of appealing to voters at the next general election. What if it proves that he has no such chance? What then?

The party would need a new leader: a man of experience who could calm the country in these times of economic crisis. Perhaps a member of the Upper House would be more to the public taste?

I walk on, conscious of the burden I may be required to bear.

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