

# liberator

## Liberal Democrats Brighton 2012



Nobody's sure  
how to rescue  
this either

- 🌟 Clegg's speech sparks a battle – Tony Greaves and Bill le Breton
- 🌟 How to dismantle Trident – Nick Harvey
- 🌟 Coalition kicking the defenceless – Suzanne Fletcher

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

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# COMMENTARY

## STAY AND FIGHT

So now we know. The message was clear in Nick Clegg's conference speech, and reiterated by his former adviser Richard Reeves in a Demos pamphlet and New Statesman article.

Unless you accept the refashioning of the Liberal Democrats as a standard-issue, right-of-centre governing party, you are living in the past and no longer welcome.

Clegg and Reeves seem to view the formation of the coalition as nothing less than 'Year Zero' for the Liberal Democrats, since the target of their remarks is not some troublesome minority but the social liberals who constitute the majority of the party's membership.

If Clegg dislikes his party's members, policies and voters so much, it makes you wonder why he ever bothered to join the party, let alone lead it. But he's not the only culprit. His outlook is just one manifestation of a conspiracy going on for more than a decade, long before Clegg achieved any prominence.

Nobody can say they were not warned. Liberator has regularly exposed the right-wing plotting going on in the party over the past decade or so.

Over that time, the right has gathered a motley collection of people with varying motives. Some are true believers in classical liberal dogma who seek a return to an illusory 'pure' liberalism of the mid-nineteenth century. Some lack the imagination to believe there can be any alternative to the failed economic orthodoxy of the past thirty years. Some are unprincipled tacticians who believe in triangulation on the 'centre ground'. Some are just chancers seeking to home in on wherever the power appears to be. All of them are male, which suggests there's a lot of testosterone flying about.

At the centre of this web sits the hedge fund millionaire Paul Marshall, whose vast wealth ought not to allow him to shape the party's destiny.

If these people had opted for open and honest debate, it would have been easy to take them on. But for the most part, they have resorted to subterfuge and falsehoods.

The dishonesty has been evident in what might politely be termed 'historical revisionism'. We were told that the New Liberals of the 1880s-1900s had stolen Liberalism and that it needed 'reclaiming'. We were told that the pre-merger Liberal Party of the 1980s comprised mainly economic liberals who led the opposition to merger. We were told that all critics of economic liberalism are unreconstructed social democrats; the very existence of radical or social liberalism was denied. We were told that the radicals who rebuilt the Liberal Party, won elections

and established a thriving local government base were not 'serious about power'. We were told that the party started gaining power only when the Orange Book and Nick Clegg came along. We were told that clapped out neoliberal economic dogma is 'new' and 'modern'. And the people who peddle this bollocks often deny their true aims or even the existence of any plotting, resorting to chicanery about 'four-cornered liberalism'.

When Liberator first raised objections to these activities, we were accused of intolerance and given stern lectures about the importance of the party remaining a 'broad church'. It turns out it's the right-wingers who want a narrow church.

Not surprisingly, the current situation has left many social liberals feeling depressed and demotivated. A series of disastrous local election results – with more to come – is sweeping away thirty-plus years of achievements. Being in coalition has involved some unpalatable compromises, not helped by the misguided 'Rose Garden' strategy and a sense that Clegg and David Laws are exploiting the coalition to leverage an irreversible rightward shift in the party.

Each opponent of this trend probably has a 'line in the sand', a point at which their tolerance snaps. The trouble is, social liberals have no common 'line in the sand' and so are reacting in a disparate fashion. Some are leaving the party in dribs and drabs, others are scaling back their activities – but in every case they're acting individually. Let us be clear: these solo protests are personal acts, not political acts.

Dropping out is precisely what our enemies want – and we've been here before, in the late 1980s, when pro-merger fanatics sought to purge radical liberals. There is only one coherent response, then as now, and that is to stay in the party – *our* party – and fight for what we believe in. Social liberals far outnumber their opponents; what they lack is unity, organisation and ruthlessness.

For a start, the Social Liberal Forum needs to sharpen up its act – and it could begin by ending the perverse policy of allowing any party member (including opponents) to join it. This is politics, not a polite debating society. The SLF must also learn from the avoidable shambles of this year's conference debates on health in March and economics in September.

But social liberals must also reflect on how they allowed a small number of right-wingers to cut through the party like a hot knife through butter. If they had applied the same discipline and skills to the party's internal battles that they use to win local elections, this coup would never have happened.

# RADICAL BULLETIN

## HOUSE OF CARDS

The recent ministerial reshuffle was complex enough for it to take some time before the full implications became clear. By September's conference, they were indeed clear and, at least on the Liberal Democrat side of the government, they were not a pretty sight.

It is obvious now that Nick Clegg's overriding priority was to get David Laws back into government. Laws was duly rewarded with a strange portfolio of schools and whatever oddments are thrown his way.

The obsession with restoring Laws to office was strange. There is no more divisive figure in the party and, insofar as the public has any view of him, it is as someone embroiled in the expenses row. It may very well be true that he claimed less than he could have done had he used the proper expenses criteria, but how many people outside parliament would get away with running such a defence?

Did David Cameron realise that so great was Clegg's ardour to restore Laws that he could extract a high price for agreeing to this? It looks like that. There are now no Liberal Democrats in the Ministry of Defence or the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and some of the new jobs they have been given are problematic.

Opinions differ on the MoD, between dismay that Nick Harvey was ejected midway through a review of Trident replacement that he had been successfully nudging towards some solution short of full replacement, and a feeling among some MPs that, this issue apart, the MoD will spend the next few years imposing unpopular cuts and disbanding esteemed regiments and that the party is well out of it.

That reservation hardly applies to the FCO, however, where there is no longer a Liberal Democrat minister to keep an eye on what goes on in a world where trouble may suddenly come from some unexpected quarter.

Clegg said he had chosen to abandon roles in the MoD and FCO because he would get greater media mileage out of having ministers in domestic departments. That may be true but, post-reshuffle, there still isn't a Liberal Democrat minister in the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (unless you count Jo Swinson's equalities brief).

The party does now have a post in the Department for International Development, but that seems a peculiarly pointless appointment. DfID's work was not party politically contentious, even when it was under Andrew 'pleb' Mitchell, so it does not offer a platform for much more than Lynne Featherstone having some overseas photo opportunities.

Odder yet was the decision to have a minister in the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. There is nothing wrong in having a minister there as such, or in that minister being David Heath.

But the party needed a minister in a post where its green credentials could be burnished.

Instead, Heath has been lumbered with the farming brief. "The Tories must think Christmas has come," one Liberal Democrat involved with these issues noted. It means Heath becomes minister for, among other troublesome things, slaughtering badgers, the free vote over hunting and for sorting out the insoluble farm subsidy system.

Heath's appointment was hailed as helping the Liberal Democrats in their rural seats. It will do nothing of the sort. In England at least, there are many Liberal Democrat seats that may appear 'rural' to the metropolitan clique around Clegg but in reality are urban, as the party's vote is concentrated in the towns while the farmers mostly vote Tory.

One problem the reshuffle signally did not solve, despite its wide range, was that of 'two jobs' Tom McNally. Since 2010, he has been both Liberal Democrat leader in the Lords and a justice minister. This status has brought forth complaints from other peers both that he cannot give the Lords' role his full attention and that he has rather obvious conflicts of interest (Liberator 352). Yet the reshuffle left him with both jobs.

There was also the strange case of the equalities portfolio. This was formerly held by Featherstone in the Home Office. The reshuffle saw it go, for no particular reason, to the all-Tory DCMS to be followed a week later by an announcement that Liberal Democrat Jo Swinson would do bits of it from the vantage point of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

Meanwhile, at least one sacked minister was found a new job. Jeremy Browne was moved from the FCO to the Home Office. Why did he escape when others were sent back to the backbenches? "Über-loyalism," explained one MP. "When he toadies to Nick in parliamentary party meetings, the rest of us put our heads in our hands."

Tony Blair was famously accused six years ago of carrying out a 'botched reshuffle'. It seems he is not the only party leader capable of this feat.

## FALLING OFF DEFENCE

Quite the oddest part of the Liberal Democrat reshuffle was the sacking of Nick Harvey from the Ministry of Defence and the failure to find him another post. Harvey was slung a consolation knighthood, though it remains to be seen whether having one of the party's longest-serving MPs feeling injured on the backbenches is a good move for Clegg.

This departure has serious ramifications since it left open the question of the Trident review, which Harvey had piloted so as to give a decent chance of scuppering

its replacement.

Bizarrely, responsibility for Trident was given to David Laws, but Laws's responsibility did not last long. After only two weeks, the review was moved to the Treasury, where Danny Alexander was supposed to find the time to do a job that Harvey had expected would have taken up most of his time for the next six months. Even so, it sounded promising since the Treasury would have viewed Trident as a financial issue, in which context the argument against full replacement is unanswerable.

Such optimism did not last long. On 29 October, Defence Secretary Philip Hammond announced that £350m was to be spent on Trident design work – notwithstanding Clegg's protests that the coalition agreement meant that no decision on Trident would be made until 2016.

## THE PLOT THICKENS

Is 'Coalition 2.0' a "secret plot" or merely "an informal dinner club"? It depends who you believe.

In the previous RB (*Liberator* 355), we detailed the history of various coalition initiatives, including Coalition 2.0. When it was launched in the autumn of 2010, Coalition 2.0 was reported to be a small group of senior Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, meeting under the auspices of the think tank CentreForum and charged with taking the coalition beyond the initial coalition agreement.

Nothing further was heard of this group until an article in the *Independent* on Sunday (30 September) alleged that Coalition 2.0 is "a secret plot" that meets monthly in the offices of hedge fund millionaire Paul Marshall. Besides Marshall, Liberal Democrat participants include David Laws, Julian Astle and Jo Swinson.

The report added: "Ostensibly, their mission is to discuss and develop ideas and policies on a rolling basis, up to 2015. But some in the group are now discussing how to keep the coalition in power beyond the election, even if the result is a hung parliament and Labour is the largest party."

David Laws was challenged about this story at October's meeting of the Federal Policy Committee. He replied that Coalition 2.0 was merely an informal dinner club for Conservative and Liberal Democrat MPs. He claimed that the name 'Coalition 2.0' was an "unfortunate tag" by the press and denied that the group was formulating policy for this parliament or the next.

Regardless of whom you believe, members of Coalition 2.0 have not helped their case by maintaining secrecy about their activities and failing to respond to the *Independent's* story when it was first published.

## THERE'S A HOLE IN MY BUCKET

Having not been present when called to speak in the economy debate at September's party conference, the Social Liberal Forum's former chair is in danger of being known as David Notinthehall-Matthews.

This might be better, however, than being known for a regrettable slip of the tongue he made at the SLF's inaugural annual dinner at the conference.

Hall-Matthews meant to thank those who had shaken

buckets to raise funds at SLF fringe meetings. "I'd like to thank all those who have shagged the buckets," he told bemused diners.

## TOO MANY COOKS

The economy debate at Brighton proved a wasted opportunity for the party conference to signal discontent with the government's dogmatic adherence to austerity.

There was an amendment to the main motion – instigated by Prateek Buch of the Social Liberal Forum – which could have stood a chance of being passed. It declared opposition to "yet more public spending cuts, which will be counterproductive, particularly if capital investment and welfare spending are targeted again", and further called on the coalition to "prioritise measures to boost demand through public and private investment, using all tools available to government including the flexibility in its fiscal mandate, over further spending cuts beyond those already in place that would suppress confidence and demand yet further".

This position would have been controversial to supporters of 'plan A or nothing' but was generally in line with mainstream party opinion and likely to command wide support. The possibility that it would be passed might prove embarrassing to Nick Clegg, though, so how could a conference vote on it be averted?

Simple. Take another amendment instead that stood no chance of passing. This proved to be the one from Ed Randall, a serious party commentator on economics, and Liberal Left's Linda Jack. Since, among other things, it called for the fiscal mandate to be scrapped altogether, it would inevitably be seen (especially with Liberal Left's involvement) as an attack on the coalition itself and consequently would stand little chance.

Choosing that amendment rather than the SLF's thus allowed the party to make a virtue of being willing to hold a controversial debate, while framing that debate around something most unlikely to be carried. Any chance the Randall/Jack amendment had evaporated during Jack's bewildering summing-up speech.

The whole thing was unfortunate. The SLF amendment might have passed, aligning the party with an important criticism of government economic policy, while Randall's amendment had a number of serious and useful points to make but was seen, even by some well on the left, as something the party could not support without renouncing the coalition.

When Liberal Left formed, there were concerns that it and the far larger SLF would be forever tripping over each other by organising separately for debates such as this one, leaving the party establishment unscathed. Such would appear to have been the case here.

## STAR CHAMBER

The Social Liberal Forum has contrived to embroil itself in a row with some of its own members over its publication of a list of people for whom it urged supporters to vote in the internal party elections.

Some SLF members were on the list but others not, and the process for choosing who got the 'coupon' was

opaque – at least to those omitted.

One aggrieved member was told that candidates were placed on the SLF ‘support’ list for “a mix of factors, including a record of supportive incumbency on committees, a record of activism on areas SLF considers strategic priorities, and not being likely to get elected without help”.

Since SLF has no membership test (or indeed fee), it argued that it could not promote people who had joined but who disagreed with its aims and therefore decisions were “made collectively... ultimately responsibility for decisions rests with co-chairs and director but overall approach approved by council and executive”.

Those omitted were told they could appeal, but since they would not know of their omission until after the list had gone out, that was of questionable value.

## ENGLAND EXPECTS

A fresh attempt is under way to put the English party out of its misery. This body was forced on Liberal Democrat members in England by Scottish and Welsh members in 1993, as they resented the idea of their countries being equivalent to a mere English region. Thus the English party was created even though there was no obvious job for it to do.

Like all structures in search of a role, it has too often seen its job as erecting bureaucratic obstructions to party campaigning. The decision that all police commissioner candidates must first have secured parliamentary candidate approval was a notable case in point.

Now, Hertfordshire councillor Chris White, who offended the English party’s jobsworths with a denunciation of them in *Liberator* 348, is running on an anti-English party ticket for the Federal Executive.

With Scottish and Welsh sensitivities less strong following devolution, White aims to find a couple of people in each region to persuade regional conferences to accept motions to create state parties and thus leave the English party.

Meanwhile, South Central region has already voted to begin withdrawal from the English party, given its failure “to take seriously the Police and Crime Commissioner elections”.

## SO, FAREWELL THEN...

*Liberal Democrat News*, the party’s official weekly newspaper, is no more. The party has decided to close a title that was making annual losses of about £44,000 and replace it with a glossy monthly magazine.

LDN had been published regularly since the merger in 1988. Its predecessor *Liberal News* had been published since 1946, so a continuous publishing history of 66 years has come to an end. That leaves *Liberator*, with 42 years, as Britain’s longest-lived Liberal publication.

LDN’s role had diminished with the rise of *Liberal Democrat Voice* as the party’s main forum. And the paper was notorious for its absurd combination of Pravda-like news coverage, endless stories about obscure local campaigns and announcements for bizarre social events – who could forget the opportunity to hear ‘Fred on the musical spoons’ in Mid Suffolk?

But LDN had its redeeming features. Even after the coalition was formed, it provided a valuable forum for debate and its pages remained open to all. Whether a glossy monthly successor will be equally open to dissidents remains to be seen.

The replacement magazine will include ‘lifestyle features’ (fashion tips for Focus deliverers?) and the job of editor has been advertised for the princely salary of £18,000. But the logic behind a subscription-based magazine is unclear, since there seems little reason for it to succeed.

The precedents are not good. Readers with long memories may recall that in 1990 the Liberal Democrats launched ‘In Focus’, a similar soft-centred magazine complete with recipes and wine-tasting notes. It survived for only two years.

## TRADING PLACES

Chancellor George Osborne’s wheeze to allow people to trade their employment rights for shares in their employer’s company met with hostility from every corner of the Liberal Democrats.

What might come next, ‘sell your right to vote for a grand’?

The idea that people should give up their rights for shares that are not publicly traded and whose price, if any, is therefore set by their employer, is manifestly absurd. Yet Vince Cable went through contortions to justify it on *Liberal Democrat Voice* (15 October).

Why? It’s hardly the kind of thing he’d normally support, given his successful fight against the stripping away of employment rights advocated by Tory lunatic Adrian Beecroft. As one MP suggested, “I was aware Clegg supported it so perhaps Cable was appeasing him?”

## SHRINKING MEMBERS

Following our report (*Liberator* 355) of a 25% drop in the number of Liberal Democrat members during 2011, news comes of a further fall this year.

Between September 2011 and September 2012, membership in England (not the whole UK) fell from 45,402 to 40,498, a drop of about 10%.

Although the worst of the decline provoked by the coalition may be over, it looks like a return to the steady annual losses of 5 to 10% that the party has suffered for the past 20 years.

This problem is not unique to the Liberal Democrats; there has been a steady decline in the combined membership of all parties since the mid-1950s. The reasons for public disengagement from politics – and the remedies – are no mystery; they were published by the Rowntree-funded Power Inquiry in 2006. Why has the party ignored them?

Without going into detail, let’s just say that two of Power’s conclusions – that party members don’t have enough say and that the main parties are not distinctive enough – do not sit easily with the current leadership’s views.

# THE BORROWERS

## Jonathan Hunt says Liberal Democrats must accept the deficit and borrow to invest in growth

I am worried about the deficit. No, not that one, the huge minus figures left by Labour in 2010. The deficit that most concerns me is that slowly but surely building up as result of reduced employment and a tumbling tax take. It is caused by a failure to generate growth and invest in infrastructure renewal.

Both of the latter are also part of the dismal heritage of the Blair-Brown pursuit of Thatcherism. But our problem as a coalition is that the Labour deficit is often stated as the reason for Liberal Democrats and Tories to climb into bed together. Sort out that and there's little ostensibly to keep both parties united in a common goal.

Or to mix metaphors, if we shoot the deficit fox, why should they keep running in a pack?

For with the deficit game goes policies of deep austerity. We must all be made to suffer for what Labour got so hideously wrong. That is another side of the great deficit charade. And for the Conservatives, austerity is the ideal means of shrinking the state and allowing private companies to run rings round regulations.

But austerity has a short shelf-life as an economic policy. Expiry date is fast approaching. For many who felt it was an inevitable part of tackling the huge deficit are changing their minds. Ultra-conservative business interests question whether it is really working, and a clash of economists, laid end-to-end, are coming to the same conclusion.

The cost of the austerity programme is being seen for what it is, a long vicious downward spiral, leading to falling GDP and more jobless claimants. Many of us were frightened into believing that the deficit was so huge it justified drastic measures not to saddle our children with huge debts.

But it is becoming clear that austerity-based policies could lumber the next generation with even greater debt, not less. Lack of growth is spinning the economy into decline.

Coalition spin-doctors crow that that we have paid off a quarter of the Brown inheritance. But it is easy to argue that the total repaid could rise to more than half if we flogged off RBS and Lloyds at their current market capitalisation.

For as enforced borrowers know, the cost of the debt can often matter as much as the amount. Given that interest rates have never been lower, it is a strong argument for government to borrow more and expand, not squeeze and repay, while maintaining the balance between levels of borrowing and keeping down interest rates.

Borrowing is seen as a sensible course, to build urgently-needed homes for starters. By increasing the supply of homes to meet existing and future demand now, we might even lower property prices.

Some 18 months ago, I somewhat arrogantly warned Nick Clegg that we face not only a double dip, but also a triple tumble. He replied with his customary

courtesy and charm, but also a quizzical question mark. Two, or even three quarters of recession were not difficult to predict.

The third less so. But it is creeping almost unseen like an iceberg on Titanic. Libor, the London inter-bank offer rate crisis, for major crisis it will soon be, threatens much more than just stiff fines on 'banksters'.

Criminal falsification of Libor affected trillions of transactions. Already, huge claims for compensation are being drawn up. The amounts claimed against a series of banks will total tens of billions. The sums sought will threaten banks' existence like nothing before.

Clamouring for a large lifeboat, funded by taxpayers, will be persuasive. We should plan for it and say "No, it was your dishonesty distorting the true rates to make money that got you into this mess. You get yourself out."

But our leaders need to set out some simple rules. Firstly, we say that there will no bailout.

Secondly, act now to force big banks to split their investment and retail banking arms. If, for example, Barclays and others are sued for huge sums by companies that can prove they were cheated, the casino banking arm may go under, but high street banks should be protected.

Thirdly, we need a wealth tax, where we seize assets and bonuses of bank executives involved in dishonest activities. They caused the crises and it only right they pay for them. The prospect of starving bankers selling the Big Issue will serve as a salutary lesson.

Fourthly, we need to destroy the bonus culture once and for all with windfall taxes. Squeeze their bonuses until their eyes water. We may also kill the excessive amounts company bosses, as managers as opposed to real wealth-creating entrepreneurs, pay themselves.

Such measures, proclaimed loudly and frequently, may help the party recover from being tarred with the Tory brush.

Then we can begin our real tasks: replacing Labour as the party of the left, and turning the tide of the Thatcher philosophy that has so poisoned our values and culture over three decades. But that's for another time.

---

Jonathan Hunt is a former Liberal Democrat parliamentary candidate

# BACK TO THE FUTURE

Nick Clegg claims his party's past is gone, but ironically he's taking it backwards in so many ways, says Tony Greaves

I went to the Liberal Democrat conference at Brighton thinking that the Leadership Question was no more than the media stirring up a story – and that it would be another couple of years before the question came to a head. That what really matters now is thinking about how this parliament is going to end, how we get out of the clutches of the Tories in time to fight the 2015 election as a clearly independent party promoting a clearly independent platform, and how to gain the time to get that across to the voters. That is still so important though it hardly seemed to be concerning the members, in or out of the conference hall.

Of course, Nick Clegg saw off the media. First by his tuition fees apology, which gave the hacks a diversionary story, then by the evident unwillingness of members to rock the slowly sinking boat. Worried, yes, and often a bit scared. But since they had no clear idea of what to do about it without putting a hole in the side, better to paddle on for a bit longer and hope there are no big waves on the horizon. And many of the people who are really upset by the coalition would not splash several hundred pounds on registration, travel and hotels.

And so we got through the week to the big set piece, the leader's speech. I watched it on a monitor, listened to the words, and was horrified. I then found that the people streaming out of the hall at the end were, by and large, quite enthused, though an angry minority shared my view. Many people whose opinions I usually rely on thought he had punched hard, setting out a determined (though grim) economic framework and ending with some fairly inspirational (though fluffy) stuff.

## PENDING DISASTER

So what is the truth? As with a lot of such speeches, most people have already forgotten what he said, though the general impression will remain, for a while, that he came out fighting and his position is for the moment secure. It will get him, and us, to the middle of November, when the next round of very poor election results will hit us in the teeth. It might get us to the New Year and the pending disaster of the county council elections in May. But then?

The alternative view of the speech is that it was an important event in a planned campaign to shift the Liberal Democrats from our historic position as a centre-left radical Liberal party – or a social liberal party in the new jargon – and turn us into a centrist or even centre-right party on the unappealing model of the Free Democrats (FDP) in Germany. Progressive and decent on issues of individual social freedom and European and international issues, cautious and pro-business on the economy with a stress on the failed theories of neoclassical free market economics, sound

on constitutional matters and keen (but not radical) on the environment, but suspicious of radical social campaigns on matters such as poverty at home and the rights of employees and people who are seen as 'welfare dependent'. And a conventional 'party of government' rather than a campaigning force.

This speech has to be seen in context, alongside the New Statesman article (19 September) by Richard Reeves, who until recently was Clegg's right-hand man. This is a clear bid to abandon the centre-left and turn the party into a centre-right force, fruitlessly targeting an ill-defined and unsuspecting new group of people – the ones Cameron calls the 'strivers' and Miliband the 'squeezed middle'. Reeves was the man who produced and promoted within the party a series of large and barely comprehensible charts setting out a mass of new policies, which on examination turned out to be substantially what the present government is doing. All summed up by the nonsense slogan 'Alarm Clock Britain'.

It is widely thought that Reeves's replacement Julian Astle, fresh from running the arguably liberal but scarcely radical think-tank CentreForum, was the man behind much of the speech. Astle is the man who came to the Federal Policy Committee to present the Mid-Term Policy Review, again of necessity a compilation of the outcomes of the Coalition Agreement: the things the government has done and those which (to date) it has not. He seems to be one of the people behind all the briefing of the press, ignorant and gullible as many of their journalists are, that the party is becoming a 'liberal' party and rejecting the corporatism of the leftish 'social democrats' who remain. Those of us who remain from the days of the Liberal-SDP Alliance, the merger and the early days of the new party are entitled to an ironic grin at this blatant rewriting of history, ridiculous as it is serious!

So what did Clegg say? First he invoked the spirit of the London Olympics (*de rigueur* for all leaders this year). Then he invoked the strivers – "the millions of people up and down the country, who, no matter how heroic or mundane their battles, keep going, keep trying, keep working..." Followed by the first piece of rhetorical nonsense: "Our party, from the comforts of opposition to the hard realities of government. Our country: from the sacrifices of austerity to the rewards of shared prosperity. Two journeys linked; the success of each depending on the success of the other."

This cloud nine stuff was followed by several pages of justification, indeed positive promotion, of what he called "building a new economy from the rubble of the old." You may think the government's 'austerity' programme is necessary; you may even believe the ever more ludicrous spin that "It was Labour who plunged us into austerity"; or you may like me think that the government has the wrong policies, which are a rejection of everything our party has stood for since the Lloyd George-Keynes Yellow Book of 1928, and



that they are doing at least as much harm as good. Whatever, there's not much building going on.

But he went on to claim that across Europe it's "a debate between those who understand how much the world has changed, and those who do not." Odd then that the 'new' policies are those which would have gained approval well over a century ago, which failed in the 1920s and 1930s, and which are throwing much of the continent into penury and economic collapse. But we are doing the right thing because "if you're being attacked by Liam Fox from one side, and Ed Balls from the other, you're in the right place." The problem with this is that it lands us firmly in bed with Osborne and Cameron, which is what happens if you plonk yourself firmly in the centre.

Of course, not all is bad and Clegg set out some of the better things the Liberal Democrats have got done – the rise in the income tax threshold, the pupil premium and the rest. The problem is that these are all offset by the collapse in public sector investment, the refusal of the banks to lend, the massive withdrawal of demand from the economy, and the deliberate further impoverishment of the poorest 20% of households. But it's okay, it's all "part of a broader agenda... to reward work [nice work if you can get it], enhance social mobility [okay for the mobile minority, tough for the rest], and secure Britain's position in a fast-changing world [whatever that may mean]."

## RHETORICAL MUSH

This "national renewal" he said "is our mission" and added "our policies either serve that purpose, or they serve none at all." And with that rhetorical mush, he launched into an attack on the Tories for their retreat from the environmental agenda and voting blue to go green. Fair enough, but what followed was what really hit the alarm bells. Our party's "philosophical core" is an "unshakeable belief in freedom". But again it's a centrist sort of freedom – not the "tinny sound" of the Libertarian (whatever that means), "still less [less?] the dead hand of the Socialist's", but it's a rich sound (!) "amplified and sustained by the thing that gives it real meaning: opportunity". But how is this different from the "equality of opportunity" espoused by the Conservatives in the 1950s and 1960s as the alternative to and antithesis of socialism? Nothing at all about democracy, which is surely the core of a real Liberal society.

He strayed into an ill-considered defence of Gove's school reforms before declaring that all this adds up to a new kind of party. We are now a party of power, not protest. We cannot choose between "the party we were" and "the party we are becoming". No, "the past is gone" [there's a new idea!] "and it isn't coming back." We have a "better, more meaningful future waiting for

*"The alternative view of the speech is that it was an important event in a planned campaign to shift the Liberal Democrats from our historic position... into a centrist or even centre-right party"*

us" [waiting?]. We will not be the third party, but "one of three parties of government". The dismal FDP would no doubt be delighted.

But of course, we have a different electoral system in which the tedium of survival with 6% is not an option. Those of us who helped build up our strength on councils over several decades, with Liberal Democrat administrations in major UK cities and all kinds of other places, now see the years of genuine government at local

level being swept away along with huge swathes of councillors. Impotent protest politics has already arrived and, with two more rounds of council elections to go, much worse is to follow. The Euro-elections in June 2014 are likely to see most of our MEPs lose their seats, even under the list system of PR. In the elections for police commissioners this November, a third of the seats in England were not contested.

The party is being hollowed out in so many areas, members are drifting away, campaigning has stopped, and the failure at high levels to recognise or worry about this is just a symptom of the abject and arrogant dismissal of the past, a repudiation of Grimond and Steel and Ashdown and the Young Liberals and the Association of Liberal Councillors and everyone who created a modern ideology and a campaigning movement out of a shell.

Sorry, Nick. Far from the past not coming back, it is here already. We're back to the long years when the Liberal Party decided whether or not to fight constituencies on an *ad hoc* basis and (until October 1974) failed to do so over wide areas. We are going back to the past, truly 'back to the future' and Liberals younger than me will have to pick up the pieces and rebuild it all again. "We will not be the third party"? I trust and pray we will *still* be the third party, for others – the Greens, UKIP and the SNP – are already challenging for that prize.

Building the Liberal Party in the past was both an ideological and a campaigning mission. We were by nature a radical, anti-Tory, non-socialist campaigning movement of the centre-left. For all the difficulties of the present alignment with the Tories, that is still our natural position and it's the only one where we can survive. If Clegg's speech was really a dismissal of that reality, the battle for Liberal survival will be more than a battle to maintain an organisation, more even than a battle to restore the party's campaigning ethos. It will be a battle for its very *raison d'être*.

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

# IN ROOM 101 WITH CLEGG

Bill le Breton went to Room 101, Conference Centre, Brighton, Oceana to be told that his experience of more than thirty years of Liberal activism and political success must all have been a dream

I have always liked Brighton or, until today, the 26th September 2012, I have always believed that I liked Brighton. It is where I first met Martin King. Until this day I have always believed he was then the leader of the nearby Liberal-controlled Adur Council.

Later, there are happy memories of tea and buns with Martin, Sally Hamwee and Diana Maddock, when they were just Sally and Di.

Brighton evokes memories of the best Dover Sole served, not in Wheeler's or Old English, where you might have found Roy Jenkins and young Charlie Kennedy, but in a plain seafront 'chippy' with Roger Hayes and Peter Chegwyn, the Seagulls' supporter who had written my first Focus leaflet (or as he called it, 'Action Report').

And some years later, I was again at Brighton, churning out the late night workshops with Andrew Stunell (about a nanosecond from impact with his mental marathon 'wall') and Maggie Clay pushing us beyond that psychological barrier to unearth the Holy Grail that was Community Politics.

Then an image of a late night, staring at the extremely intimidating Liberator Collective, the astronauts of Liberalism, singing gleefully their subversive ditties round the Grand's grand piano while young Rennard and Rainford handed me the next day's edition of a freshly printed Conference Gazette. It must have been real, as real as picking up the Sundays from Charing Cross station late on a Saturday night.

And riding my bike along Marine Parade, up the hill to my tent on the council-owned campsite, past all those liberal lovers obscured from recognition under the pier or in the seafront shelters. Your secret is safe.

It was there in September 1989 (when the party's poll rating was: \*) that we sold the first People's Campaign Pack and where, five days later, when every copy had been sold, Gordon Lishman instructed me to wind up the People First Campaign Rally – the Daddy of all subsequent conference rallies. Martin King beaming from stage left as the fight back began.

I need to talk to Martin, but he is not with us any more. I tell his widow Jenny, we all need to talk to Martin... he'd know what to do.

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Today, I am awfully muddled. They told me to go to Room 101 in the Conference Centre.

The man there has been telling me that none of it happened. It was a dream, a delusion, an irresponsible flight from responsibility. That I must pull myself together or get the hell out of here and join the Labour Party.

He said that, when I was well, I would realise that I hadn't been fighting for power, that I had actually

never had responsibility as a council leader. Those homes we had built. The life chances hewn despite the tyranny of Marsham Street. The power shared with the communities we represented.

No, I don't remember opposition being enjoyable. 15 years' hard labour in Liverpool, after Richard Kemp upbraided me and told me it was no use just winning in the south and west; that we had to win in the cities if we were to be a national party and how, with Steve Hitchens battling Labour in Islington, we had set up the Cities Network or something like it. How I'd gone to Liverpool determined to prove we were a national party again.

I just can't be sure of the details any more and now the man in Room 101 is telling me to join the Labour Party because I am a Social Democrat and the last thing I can remember (or can I?) was walking as a Liberal along a long corridor in the Royal York Hotel with Paul Burstow for the SDP relaying the terms the ASDC would accept from the ALC for a merger between the two associations.

And Tony Greaves refusing to join the new party and Maggie Clay receiving all those letters from Liberals who wanted to know what they should do. And how, when Maggie was ill and I was told to clear her desk in Hebden Bridge, I found those heart-breaking letters in a draw because finally she had been too troubled to take on the troubles of all those troubled people. Our battles to keep the drawbridge down so that those who couldn't yet join could when they felt their time was right.

But now I'm told this could not have happened; because we were all the time the Continuing SDP.

Yet I am sure I recall, yes, I recall it vividly because I was about to come down with hepatitis caught as I worked for the cause of Liberalism at an Association of *Liberal* Councillors conference in Nottingham and I had the worst headache I had ever known, and yes, I distinctly remember seeing David Owen all alone, totally alone as I had never seen him before, shuffle down Exchange Road from the Guildhall in Portsmouth (I have checked it on Google Maps to verify the memory), after he had lost the vote against merger in the last, yes the *last* SDP conference, and thinking he looked grubby and his suit shambolic and that I of all the people in the universe was the one seeing him alone and walking out of history.

Then, with his departure, a unity of purpose slowly acting like a balm on our bruises. So that Tony and many other Liberals could return. But not Meadowcroft.

Then, Ashdown, minutes after the polls closed in the 1992 election, presenting his Strategy Paper for the coming parliament, like Henry IV planting his standard on the next hill to be won while his

troops wanted only sleep and oblivion. The budget amendments carefully costed. The manifestos signed off by PWC. All, all, I am told, irresponsible promises that could only have been put forward by a party wedded to opposition.

How could they have been tricks and baubles? Our opponents took them up at the first opportunity – yet he said they were dust, the man in Room 101.

And being told by Sheila Ritchie that the party would be safe with Kennedy and hearing him use the word that Paddy, following the merger, yes the merger, could not use, that only someone like Kennedy could use, the word *Liberal* all on its own and splendid, and how Sheila was right as she always is.

And about that time I remember Peter Moores telling me there was this amazing constituency in Sheffield called Hallam which he was going to win if only he could find someone daft enough to be the candidate who had to be more interested in running for parliament than running the city with a budget of millions. I think I wish I'd murdered him there and then.

And because of Peter's unintended consequence, the man in Room 101 would muddle my mind by saying that the party was formed on the 18th December 2007 and that I was deluding myself if I thought I had been a Liberal before that date because he, yes he, had made the Liberals, that he had saved us from ourselves and that he would continue to save us from ourselves for a 1,000 years, that he was our Father and our Leader and that we should trust him and serve the party he had created, that it was a real party because it now was a party of government, a party he alone had created out of the ruins of our country because all we needed now was to live austere lives and all would be well and salvation and bliss. And we wouldn't have to fight another ground war, or deliver another Focus,

that all that stuff had been getting in the way of us taking power. And now there'd be a new core to replace the old core and the new core would soon be everyone because they would see him in his green Jaguar and know that he was serious about power.

And then I walked into the hall and this same man was there amid a sea of upturned faces, mouths open wide and he was saying, "We are the inbetweeners."

And Michael Meadowcroft, who could join us now because it was The Year 5, and not The Year 155, hailing him the Saviour of the Liberals.

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*The voice from the telescreen was still pouring forth its tale of prisoners and booty and slaughter, but the shouting outside had died down a little. The waiters were turning back to their work. One of them approached with the gin bottle. Winston, sitting in a blissful dream, paid no attention as his glass was filled up. He was not running or cheering any longer. He was back in the Ministry of Love, with everything forgiven, his soul white as snow. He was in the public dock, confessing everything, implicating everybody. He was walking down the white-tiled corridor, with the feeling of walking in sunlight, and an armed guard at his back. The long hoped-for bullet was entering his brain.*

*He gazed up at the enormous face. Forty years it had taken him to learn what kind of smile was hidden beneath the dark moustache. O cruel, needless misunderstanding! O stubborn, self-willed exile from the loving breast! Two gin-scented tears trickled down the sides of his nose. But it was all right, everything was all right, the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother.*

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

## **END THAT CLOSED WALLET MISERY!**

**The Liberator Collective thanks you for your continuing loyalty in these difficult days, and is delighted to announce that the subscription rate of £25 for UK subscribers will remain for the time being, despite the hike in postal charges.**

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**Wendy Kyrle-Pope**

# STEPPING DOWN THE NUCLEAR LADDER

The Liberal Democrats have the chance to build a broad church against full Trident renewal, on both military and financial grounds, says Nick Harvey

In 2007, Liberal Democrat MPs voted against the Labour government's proposition to renew Britain's submarine-based nuclear deterrent on a like-for-like basis, arguing that something designed to protect us at the height of the cold war was no longer appropriate for the very different and more diverse security challenges of the twenty-first century.

It is worth noting that 97 Labour MPs also voted against their government, meaning that the plan only got through with the help of the Conservative opposition.

At the 2010 general election, the Liberal Democrats stood on a policy of continuing to oppose like-for-like replacement, arguing that Britain should instead seek a more minimal deterrent and one that would hopefully cost less – at least on a through-life basis. We resisted, sensibly, pretending we had the expertise to design a Liberal Democrat nuke on the back of a fag packet, but published a thoughtful paper written by Ming Campbell, which established *prima facie* that there were alternative approaches worth investigating.

When negotiations took place to form a coalition, it was clear that very different attitudes to the future of the nuclear deterrent were a potential stumbling block. The deal that was struck was a pragmatic balance: a formal value-for-money study would look at the plan inherited from Labour ('Successor' as it is known in Whitehall) and, subject to its findings, the Successor preparations would continue, while the Liberal Democrats would continue to argue the case for alternatives.

The value-for-money study concluded that the financial crisis could be eased a little by delaying the early stages of the Successor programme, which had the added political bonus of moving the critical 'main gate' decision – effectively the point-of-no-return, where the big money starts being spent and the metal starts being bashed – to mid-2016, so after the 2015 general election.

Somewhat painfully, we then had to agree that preparations for Successor could proceed through this parliament, albeit on the now revised timetable, because to stop them would be to prevent the government of 2016, whatever its colour, having the option to proceed with Successor in time for it to replace the existing deterrent.

This work has entailed expenditure that will be sunk if the programme is cancelled after the 2015 election, but only the detailed submarine design work and long-lead items that must be ordered to meet intended production timelines fall into that category (about £2bn – half what had been spent on Nimrod before it went

into the crushing machine!). Spending on developing the new PWR3 power plant for the submarines, and on the factory at Derby that builds them, will not be sunk as they will be needed for whatever submarines we build in the future.

In return, the Liberal Democrats secured agreement that, in order to give effect to our "arguing the case for alternatives" from inside government, there should be an official study into alternatives. Established in mid-2011 and conducted by government scientists, policy analysts and military personnel under the auspices of the Cabinet Office, the work would be overseen by me as Liberal Democrat defence minister and report by the end of 2012 to the prime minister and deputy prime minister.

The study would ask the question: "what are we seeking to deter?" and, guided by the answer to that, would look at alternatives to a submarine-based deterrent, alternative submarine-based deterrents, alternative postures to the current 24/7 patrols, and end up looking at both the financial and industrial implications of alternatives deemed to be credible.

Officials set about their task with relish, stimulated by the opportunity to look afresh at the nuclear issue in an entirely objective, evidence-based manner without any pre-conceived political outcome to which they were expected to steer their work. When I left the Ministry of Defence for the last time in mid-August to go on holiday, the work was still on course for completion by December, with publication of some sort of declassified summary akin to the 2007 white paper in the early months of 2013.

I cannot tell where the work has got to since I left, nor where it will go now under Danny Alexander's guidance, and it would certainly not be proper for me to offer running commentary on where it all stood when I left. It is an important study and must be left to run its course. It will then offer the factual analysis to inform a national political debate about the future of our nuclear deterrent, which will run for a couple of years through to the 2015 election, where I believe it could be a significant issue for the first time since 1983.

## ABSURDLY ANACHRONISTIC

What I will try to do here is sketch out various 'rungs' on a 'ladder' of alternative nuclear positions that I believe may be open to the UK to choose to take. The top rung is like-for-like replacement – as planned.

The next rung down would be to build it but break the 'continuous at sea deterrence' posture, which is absurdly anachronistic so many years after the cold war ended, and replace that with any of several

reduced patrol patterns. This would save money because fewer submarines would need building and ongoing manpower would be reduced. It would extend the life of the existing subs, so easing timelines, and it would contribute modestly to the cause of disarmament.

A further rung down the ladder would be to build it, but adapt the submarines to fulfil dual or multi-uses. The Americans have adapted some of their Trident submarines (Ohio class) to fire conventional missiles and even to launch special forces out of the Trident-firing tubes in miniature tactical submarines. This would secure a better return on the huge investment and – crucially – offer any future government between now and about 2070 the option of stepping further down the nuclear ladder, or even getting off altogether, without having to write off vast billions of pounds of public money.

The next rung down from that would be to cancel the Successor programme and instead build extra Astute class submarines, and equip them with nuclear-tipped cruise missiles.

No one should pretend that this offers the same firepower as Trident, and this option involves technical challenge and cost, though neither should be overstated. Whether the Atomic Weapons Establishment spends a decade improving the nuclear warhead on Trident or developing a new one for cruise may not make a vast difference, and the cost of developing new firing mechanisms could be appreciable in the short term, but would be more than mitigated in the longer term by only sustaining one class of submarine instead of two. The advantage of ‘dual use’ comes automatically, climbing down or off the nuclear ladder would be simple for the future, and even fully operational this option being a significant dividend to the cause of disarmament.

Further steps down the ladder bring other possibilities into play, such as cruise missiles fired from surface ships, missiles fired from fighter jets (such as the Joint Strike Fighter, which will come into service in the 2020s and would be capable of carrying such a weapon, taking off from either land or sea) and bombs dropped from a larger aircraft. Each has obvious limitations in terms of vulnerability, but yet another variation on the theme would be to mitigate such issues by the back-up of keeping the ability to fire a Trident missile from a land-based silo. Most of these would save money, offer flexibility and contribute to disarmament objectives.

The ultimate step, of course, would be to step off the ladder altogether. But that might prove a step too far either for the British political establishment or indeed the public. So an interesting penultimate step – the bottom rung while still on the ladder – would be to retain and maintain nuclear warheads, missiles and a launch platform, but put them beyond immediate use or routine patrol.

## OUT OF THE CUPBOARD

To keep them on a contingency basis, capable of being deployed at reasonably short notice should the global security picture ever deteriorate to a point where a future British government thought it necessary to ‘bring them out of the cupboard’. This is not unlike the position taken by the Japanese government, though at rather swifter readiness.

Further options derive from our emerging co-operation with France. Sharing of research facilities in warhead testing and design has been one of the most positive aspects of Franco-British cooperation over the past two years. Coordination of submarine patrols would be another way of reducing costs and maintaining lower levels of readiness.

When the report sees the light of day next year, it should inform a great debate. If it concludes that there are some alternatives that would be technically feasible, and offer some credible deterrence – even if more limited than the current system – then everyone across the political spectrum will have to decide how to respond. This debate will go beyond political parties into civil society, and it will need to go into the heart of the security establishment.

Just at the point when capital expenditure on the currently planned Successor programme reaches its height, there will be many other vast defence projects competing for very limited funds. This will be the very timescale when the JSF planes need putting onto the new aircraft carriers, when the Type 26 frigate is to be built, when a new generation of unmanned aircraft is needed and a point by which the MoD must surely face up to the chronic underfunding of the army’s equipment for many decades. Something will have to give.

If there are credible alternatives in the nuclear area, surely these have to be put on the table and debated alongside everything else, rather than Trident just automatically prevailing come what may.

If a wide enough body of support could be built for climbing some way down the nuclear ladder, things could get very interesting and there would be a real chance of stopping Successor getting the go-ahead in 2016.

What will Labour do? Well, remember those 97 MPs who opposed renewal even when the party’s whips had at their disposal the sticks and carrots of being in government. What will really be the line in opposition as an election looms? Perhaps outright Conservative victory in 2015 would be the only outcome that sees renewal go ahead?

It is a tantalising prospect. Liberal Democrats – when we have a chance to analyse the report and proceed on the basis of evidence – must decide what deterrent is proportionate to the real threat and what is affordable in the bleaker economic situation outlook for 2016 than was hoped for in 2010. There will be no scope for increasing the defence budget, and limited appetite to jeopardise procurement of conventional equipment just to maintain a cold war scale nuclear deterrent. The likely options will by then be cancellation, lower levels of readiness, or – if practicable – a less capable but less costly minimum deterrent.

We must also decide whether our role is to help build the broad church that delivers that outcome, or whether we prefer a comfortable and intellectually satisfying stance, but one that risks missing the opportunity actually to affect the outcome.

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Nick Harvey was armed forces minister 2010-12 and is Liberal Democrat MP for North Devon

# KICKING THE DEFENCELESS

Suzanne Fletcher wondered what the Liberal Democrats had come to when she heard Lord McNally's excuses for withdrawing legal aid from vulnerable people

I'd gone along to the 'justice surgery' at September's party conference to raise the issue of the forthcoming withdrawal of legal aid for welfare benefit cases.

People are streaming through the doors of advice agencies for help with bad or wrong decisions on their welfare benefits. Many of these people have disabilities, and a number of these have mental health issues. Currently those seeking help are able to access help and support from workers who are paid from the Legal Aid budget.

I must say that these welfare benefit problems have not just arisen as a result of cuts brought in by the coalition government, and the bad and widely publicised decisions of ATOS began when the Labour government gave it the contract for assessing whether or not people were fit for work.

However, the contract with ATOS has been renewed, far more people are going through the assessment, the Department for Work and Pensions is getting worse in its administration and, as more benefit changes have impacts on people, the numbers needing help and support to appeal are growing rapidly.

Supporting charitable organisations are not able to keep up with the need for providing a hot meal on some days, or a food parcel, and are having to ration these.

Goodness knows what the long term effects of all of this are going to be, and it will cost money to deal with many of those problems. I dealt with a man who had been let down by one bad judgement (stopping his benefit because he did not sign on – because he was in hospital) and a mistake by the benefits office. He had used up his entitlement to crisis loans, and depended on a meal a day from a local church charity, as he had no electricity as well as no money for food.

## DESTITUTE FEEDING THE DESTITUTE

He had missed the lunch as he had been in the queue at the advice centre. As a result of a phone call I made, the group that provided the lunch was negotiating with the next group in the building that day that provided food for destitute asylum seekers. We hear about the blind leading the blind. This is the destitute feeding the destitute.

Currently advice, initial support and negotiation on getting the right decision for people are done by, or backed by, advice workers funded in their work by payments from legal aid. Not every case goes to a tribunal. Getting the right information in the right format, or pointing out the relevant part of the regulations to benefit officers can often avoid that. More than half the cases that do go to tribunals with the support of a legally aided worker are won, success rates for supported appeals on medical grounds are

about 75%.

All cases going to a tribunal prepared by a legally aided worker are well presented, saving the tribunal time and money. Workers in advice centres who are funded by legal aid are not highly-paid lawyers, but qualified people working in a professional way, earning, here, around £23,000 a year.

The government had at one stage this year said that it would consider ways of supporting funding for such appeals but, as questions have been asked (and Lord Greaves has been immensely helpful in asking pertinent questions on these issues), it has ended up that appeals to the 'first tier' tribunals can have legal aid support only where "the Tribunal reviews its own decision because there has been an error in law"; and "Appeals on a point of law to the Upper Tribunal and onwards appeals on a point of law to the Court of Appeal and Supreme Court." You don't have to be a lawyer to work out that you can get to the second tier only if you get through the first tier! There is no mention of how help for that is going to be paid for.

The government says that it is being generous in making £20m available to the not-for-profit advice sector in 2013–14. That sounds a lot of money but it has been calculated that over £51m each year in legal aid funding alone will be lost. Divided up around the country, the £20m equals one-and-a-bit advice workers (about one-third of a caseworker per subject area in our office) – and there are other areas of work that are going to lose out on funding to be covered by that money too.

So that is the background. I know as well as others that our country spends a lot of money on legal aid, but that is for criminal as well as civil legal aid. It was previous governments that wanted the funding for support for tribunals to be via legal aid. I know as well as others that cuts in all budgets have to be made, and savings looked for.

So when I went along to the 'justice surgery', it was not to ask about a return to the status quo. My question was about what ways were going to be brought in to ensure that those who needed to appeal against welfare benefit decisions could be best supported to do so. I said that most of the people that I saw that needed help were unable to cope with the complexity of language and detail. Many have mental health problems, some have learning disabilities, and some cannot read. How were they going to have access to justice?

There were a lot of people at the surgery, so we were limited to one question and answer, with no chance of a discussion or even supplementary question. I was lucky to be called and put my question. I had tried to pre-empt answers I knew would come.

"If legal aid is not going to be available, what will Liberal Democrats be doing to ensure that there is

still access to justice for those needing to appeal against bad and wrong decisions about their welfare benefits. Especially bearing in mind that many of those needing to appeal have mental health

and other issues, making it almost impossible for them to prepare and conduct appeals themselves. The £20m given to not-for-profit advice centres will be not nearly enough to provide this help. What are we doing to make sure that the quality of justice is still there for those who need it?"

The answer from Lord McNally, from notes I made:

"£2bn is spent on legal aid, most of it for criminal legal aid. It is more than any other country spends, and there is a national debate about this. Decisions should be right in the first place. There has been a rise in welfare benefits paid in the last ten years, this cannot be maintained, and the dependency on welfare benefits has to stop."

I sat there as the next question was asked. What had he said? I agree very strongly that decisions should be right in the first place, but they are getting worse not better, and outsourcing and cuts in the civil service will not be helping.

We have to continue to pay for justice for criminals (not that I am against that), but not those who claim welfare benefits. Is the way to cut the welfare benefits bill to allow these bad and wrong decisions to continue – and make it almost impossible for people to be able to appeal? Yes, that is what he said. No mention at all of even looking at ways of supporting people making appeals. No mention of the availability of justice. Was I really at a Liberal Democrat justice surgery?

## WEPT FROM DESPAIR

As I mulled this over, I realised the enormity of what had just been said. I sat frozen still, and tears started rolling. I have been going to conference for 30 years, and many times I have been angry, frustrated, and upset. However, Lord McNally has achieved what nobody else ever has. I just wept out of despair as to how badly our party has, and will continue to, let down those who need us most.

There were other tears at this conference. Ones

# “Was I really at a Liberal Democrat justice surgery?”

of relief and of joy. When there was the presentation from Citizens UK on the ending of child detention for immigration purposes, I was there on the stage with a group of asylum seekers. I heard the

story that I have heard then so many times before, of how children were locked up in Yarlswood. Also I have visited the pre-departure accommodation for families at Cedars that has replaced it. But standing there alongside those most affected by this, seeing the animated film, and realising again that this wicked practice had ended. Tears of relief, that there was some justice in our country and Liberal Democrats had made sure that it happened.

The next day, we had a meeting to launch our Liberal Democrats for Seekers of Sanctuary. Two groups of asylum seekers had come down for the afternoon session to tell their stories to key Liberal Democrats. Reading each other's labels (which we had provided), two of the asylum seekers realised that the niece of one, from Senegal, had been brought up by a lady who had fled from Gambia. Two families riven apart by warfare and tribal practices were able to be in touch with each other again. Yes, you can imagine, I shared tears of joy.

There is a long way to go to get justice for those who have sought sanctuary in the UK from atrocities and violence in their own countries. The lady from Senegal was here because she refused to practice female genital mutilation, and was going to be put to death for this. If she returns she will be killed. There is a long way to go, to fight for justice for these very brave people, but our new organisation is starting to do this. Have a look at our website, and see if you want to join us.

So we have made sure that there is justice, in that innocent children are not being locked away; we are campaigning for justice for those fleeing persecution; but what about justice for those in our society who are in poverty and being denied access to justice?

---

Suzanne Fletcher was a Liberal Democrat councillor for nearly 30 years and has worked as a voluntary advice worker with Citizens Advice for 37 years

Liberal Democrats for Seekers of Sanctuary: [www.ld4sos.org.uk](http://www.ld4sos.org.uk)

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# PLAYING WITH WORDS

## Former Clegg adviser Richard Reeves has co-opted the term 'liberal' to deeply conservative ends, warns Matthew Huntbach

An astonishing article was published on the eve of September's Liberal Democrat conference. The content was not astonishing; articles with a similar title and theme have been a staple of media commentary as Liberals gather for their annual conference for as long as I can remember.

These articles were published in right-wing newspapers and magazines, written by commentators who were usually cheerleaders for the Conservative Party. Having followed their usual policy of ignoring the Liberals for a year, in Liberal Assembly week they felt they had to say something, so they did: that the Liberal Party should become another Conservative Party. They would be dress it up a little, distinguishing their proposed new party from the actual Conservative Party by suggesting dropping a few of its more vulgar aspects, decriminalising cannabis might be thrown in as a trendy issue and contrasted with Conservative stuffiness, but at the heart would be two suggestions: get rid of party democracy, and endorse economic policies at least as right-wing as the Conservatives'. This would be labelled as 'true liberalism'.

Two other things would generally be found in these articles. The first would be a very selective view of the historic Liberal Party: ignoring the extent to which the provision of good public services was a core part of its development, and misrepresenting its opposition to the power of the landed aristocracy, who constituted the pre-democratic state, to make it seem as if they were endorsements of modern Conservative economics. The second would be a complete lack of knowledge of what was going on inside the Liberal Party, of the local activity of its members, of how it managed to win elections, of the whole history of the Liberal revival, which brought the party back into existence as a serious electoral contender after its near elimination in the 1950s. The party would instead be discussed purely in terms of its leader and perhaps one or two other parliamentarians, as if they alone were responsible for any success it might have had. Liberal Party members were dismissed as an irrelevance, something rather embarrassing that a wise leader of the party they wanted to see come into existence under its name would do well to dispense with.

The astonishing thing about the article of this form that appeared before the 2012 Liberal Democrat conference was that it was not in the Times, Telegraph or Spectator; it was in the New Statesman (19 September). Furthermore, it was not written by a Conservative Party supporter given the task of saying something about the Liberals at short notice. It was written by someone whose title at least suggested a very senior role working with the party he was writing about: Richard Reeves, outgoing Director of Strategy for Nick Clegg, Leader of the Liberal Democrats.

The article represents a further phase in the Orwellian attempt to change the way people think by forcing a change in their language. Those who have

been around for long enough will remember the first phase: the word 'Liberal' was almost banned. After the Liberal Party and the SDP merged in 1988, it was considered disloyal to the principles of the merger to describe oneself as a 'Liberal' or to suggest any past pride in the work of the Liberal Party. The principles of merger were for the party to 'modernise' (meaning to become more centralised and obedient to its leader) and so become more 'successful' like the SDP (with its smaller number of councillors and MPs, and a strategy of trying to gain seats by demanding a share of those made 'winnable' by Liberal Party activists). In accordance with this, the merged party was lumbered with a clumsy name ('Social and Liberal Democrats') contrived to avoid the possibility of it being shortened to 'Liberal', with efforts by some to adopt just the name 'Democrats'.

Only after this phase had run for long enough for people to forget what Liberals were about at the time the SDP was formed, did the second phase start: a selective rediscovery of aspects of liberalism. The signal that it was now acceptable to think of oneself as 'Liberal' was the publication in 2004 of a collection of essays under the title 'The Orange Book', consciously echoing the Liberal 'Yellow Book' of 1928. For all its attempts to appeal to Liberal history, the Orange Book authors were mainly from an SDP background. One can hardly object to a serious attempt to apply liberal principles to the modern world, as the Yellow Book was and the Orange Book attempted to be. However, the Orange Book has a curiously social democratic feel, portraying liberalism as about the right mixture of economic policies imposed from on top. There was little in it that looked at individual freedom from the point of view of the individual person. As Simon Titley put it at the time (*Liberator* 298), it lacked a human spirit.

### MOST SINISTER

The third phase is the most sinister, because the trickery is subtle, yet it is hard to avoid the conclusion that there has been some deliberate planning. Richard Reeves's article typifies it. We have moved from the Orange Book's reminder that freedom to choose goods and services and freedom to volunteer to provide them is an important aspect of liberalism, to the position where these freedoms are posed as the heart of liberalism and those other freedoms that are safeguarded by state control of the disproportionate power of the wealthy in a modern free market economy are ignored. Richard Reeves uses the word 'liberal' in this way, and dismisses anyone who has a wider vision of liberalism as 'social democrats' who ought to join the Labour Party.

I have spent half my life fighting the Labour Party in areas where it is dominant, because I dislike the Labour emphasis on control through party mechanisms, because I believe a political choice should be available to all rather than just those living in



marginal seats, but most of all because I believe a liberal emphasis in self development is needed in these areas and Labour technocracy does not give it. I also believe the centralising nature of the modern economy needs a strong and active state to prevent wealth and power being absorbed into the hands of the leaders

of the large corporations in such an economy – this is why I cannot accept simplistic free market theories as being all there is to liberalism, and feel their growing application since 1979 has diminished rather than widened freedom for most people. Who is the ‘liberal’ – me or Richard Reeves, who supposes that my second sentence in this paragraph means I should join the Labour Party in contradiction to all I have written in the first sentence?

Reeves has a view of the role of a political party and its leader that repels me. It is the ‘great man’ theory, that a party should essentially be the tool of its leader, who being endowed with supernormal powers should force it in the direction he wants, expelling anyone who disagrees. Curiously, Reeves calls this “liberalisation of the party”. He writes that there is a “Blair-shaped hole in British politics”. Blair’s contempt for democracy within his party and parliament was palpable, as was his admiration for the sheer power of big businessmen and his wish to incorporate them and their principles of top-down control into an oligarchic state.

One might think that Reeves’s praise for Nick Clegg as being “fiercely committed to opening up British society, attacking the hoards of power that disfigure our politics and economy, keeping the state out of private lives” demonstrates a liberal instinct. To question that, we must consider who he means. Who are these “hoards of power”? Does it, for example, include the close network of pressure group and think-tank figures, who have views that are so pleasing to the leaders of big corporations that they pay them large amounts of money to promote those views, to push them into positions of influence so they emerge effortlessly as advisers to political leaders, and to open doors to them making frequent appearances in the printed and broadcast media? Scattered throughout Reeves’s article are hints that he actually means this remaining aspects of democracy in our country. This is an old Conservative game: to pose the existence of some dominant ‘establishment’, against which themselves, the leaders of big business, the proprietors of the big newspapers, large property owners, in fact anyone whose power and wealth might be curtailed by an active democratic state, are painted as brave rebels on the side of the people.

The ‘hoards of power’ are people involved as members of political parties, people serving as local councillors, people working in public service jobs, people who have stood up for themselves by forming trade unions to balance the power of lives that big employers have. Reeves mentions keeping the state out of private lives, but says nothing about the way our lives are dominated by big business, so that children today grow up with the brands and manufactured ‘celebrities’ and

*“Reeves has a view of the role of a political party and its leader that repels me”*

the values pushed by mass entertainment as more central and real in their lives than the natural world around them.

Reeves says nothing about “enslavement by poverty, ignorance or conformity”, in the phrase central to the liberalism developed by the Liberal Party that stands up against the claims of right-wing

politics that the only things that constrain liberty are government legislation and taxation. To me, the equivalent of the powers that radical liberals fought against in the past – that of established religion, which forced a particular way of thinking and manufactured myths onto people, and that of the aristocracy, whose ownership of the land so constrained the freedoms of those who relied on it for food and housing – is not so much ‘the state’ in the sense of those services paid for through taxation, national or local; it is more the close-knit network of those at the top of the big corporations. Railing again and again against ‘statism’ as Reeves does is to be a general fighting the last war.

The future for the Liberal Democrats that Reeves proposes is to “seek out” new voters who he thinks might be attracted to the politics he espouses while throwing away those he claims were “borrowed from Labour” in 2010. I campaigned in the London Borough of Lewisham in 2010; all three parliamentary constituencies in the borough were Labour held but saw a big swing to the Liberal Democrats. This was from the accumulation of many years of hard work by activists in the party; the votes were hard won, not ‘borrowed’. If there were votes in the party shifting to a purely ‘economic’ view of liberalism, now that most of the country thinks we have moved that way, where are they?

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Matthew Huntbach is a former Liberal Democrat councillor in Lewisham

# DECEIVED AGAIN

## David Blunkett's new pamphlet suggests he is no advocate for the high calling of politics, says Michael Meadowcroft

I still have far too many Charlie Brown moments in my political life. You may recall the Schultz cartoon strip in which Lucy always offered to hold the ball for Charlie Brown to attempt a place kick on goal. Every time, Lucy pulled the ball away as he ran up and Charlie Brown fell flat on his back. At which point Lucy said to him, "Charlie Brown, your faith in human nature is an example to all us young people."

Despite many decades of political activism, I still experience the same triumph of hope over experience! So it was that, imbued by optimism, I approached David Blunkett's latest political offering, *In Defence of Politics Revisited*. This pamphlet is presented as being an updating of Bernard Crick's definitive *In Defence of Politics*, first published in 1962 and now in its fifth edition.

Now, Bernard Crick, who died in December 2008, was a difficult man but he produced a superb tract, which should be required reading for all of us who have to defend the honourable practice of politics. Unfortunately, David Blunkett is no Bernard Crick and this is certainly no 'revisiting' of the original text. If Blunkett really believes that his tome plays such a role then he is even more estranged from current political reality than I imagined.

The strength of Crick's argument is crucially that it is pluralist; that is, it is an argument for all politics. It is not partisan and it can be drawn on and applied by politicians – and the public – from all parties and of none.

By contrast, Blunkett produces an extensive shopping list of palliatives, which he believes will help to produce a new politics for the twenty-first century. These are all in themselves worthy of discussion and debate but they are candidates for a party manifesto rather than being of the essence of politics itself. They include, "Meaningful empowerment and development of communities," "Services for and by the people," and "New and innovative approaches to finance." You get the message?

### HIJACKED BY MILIBAND

It is even more hijacked by Ed Miliband in his foreword. Perhaps no-one told him what the book was supposed to be paralleling, but to expatiate on politicians and false promises, and, explicitly, on the role of the Labour Party, undermines still further the *bona fides* of this book.

Now, not only are these not modern extrapolations of the age old principle of politics as the means and

the ground base of enabling a decision making process to take place with the possibility of enhancing the citizen's life chances, but they are actually the opposite of politics. In effect, they replace politics.

In its essence, politics provides the 'space' in which voluntary groups of citizens – political parties in today's nomenclature – can formulate and promote different visions of the kind of society they believe to be the best chance for society. Blunkett's shopping list is part of the step after this moment of formulation and, as such, is partisan.

The case for politics as a fundamental principle, and as the 'machine' for its practice by the whole spectrum of political parties, must be non-partisan. What is more, the desperate state of politics today requires a combined effort by all those of good heart to man the lifeboats. Once safely back in a deep water haven, we can all then promote our separate philosophies and our ideologies.

I have spent the best part of the past twenty years endeavouring to install viable political systems in new and emerging democracies. In most cases, the best we achieved was to buy time for the development of real politics in a secure and well founded structure. This was not

an ignoble achievement but it was essentially partial in that there was and is no hope of healthy politics in these frail first efforts – or, indeed, in more mature democracies – if the political parties are not based on some sort of political philosophy. Unfortunately, the political parties were usually based on tribe, religion, region, charismatic leader or liberation movement, none of which provided a sound basis for an electoral result that enabled a government to be formed and to function on a basis of like minds.

When Bernard Crick wrote his book fifty years ago, the state of British politics was infinitely more healthy than it is today. Electoral turnout was approaching 80%, there were lively public meetings and inter-party debates, and party membership was around ten times what it is today. But he still wrote it, quoting Hobbes, to address "the disorders of the present time."

If 1962 was a time for concern about the state of politics, how much more is 2012? What a pity then that David Blunkett produces a pragmatic prescription rather than a fundamental re-assertion of fundamental principles, with a prescription for reviving and enthusing the latent potential of our citizenry.

I fear that the political parties are far too content to secure elected office, however feeble the turnout and however alienated the electorate is. Is David Blunkett really content to be in parliament on the votes of less

*"Blunkett produces an extensive shopping list of palliatives"*

than one third of his electorate? In party terms, he has a 'safe' seat but, in democratic terms, it is precarious in the extreme.

The same problem applies to local politics. Local government has, in effect, been abolished. It has been destroyed incrementally over the past sixty-five years, essentially because no party at local level was prepared to stand up to its party colleagues in government at the national level. Alas, there has never been a 'trade union' of local government and this has permitted it to be salami sliced until today it is a sad apology for local democracy.

So, stick with Bernard Crick and despatch David Blunkett back to his hegemonic cul-de-sac. We need politicians of bigger stature to rescue politics from its gloomy depths.

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Michael Meadowcroft was Liberal MP for Leeds West, 1983-87 and was Leader of the Leeds City Council Liberal Group, 1968-81. Over the past twenty years, he has led or been a member of fifty pro-democracy missions to thirty-five different countries. Website: [www.bramley.demon.co.uk](http://www.bramley.demon.co.uk).

'In Defence of Politics Revisited' may be downloaded in pdf format from David Blunkett's website at: <http://bit.ly/UdqXR>

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# NOW YOU SEE HIM

Beneath Boris Johnson's self-promoting exterior lies, well, nothing much. Caroline Pidgeon wonders why the media have yet to see through his apparent popularity

In September, a YouGov poll showed that Boris Johnson was Britain's most respected political figure. Further polling among Conservative voters shows that 35% of them now think he should be the next leader of the Conservative Party.

Cabinet members such as George Osborne, Michael Gove and Theresa May trail a very long way behind, with their individual support languishing at 5% or even less.

What is it about Boris Johnson that makes him so popular, stretching from people in his own political party to people who are largely switched off by politics in general?

Perhaps the first thing to say is that it is much easier for a politician to be popular from afar. When Tony Blair's popularity was waning in the UK, his popularity was soaring in the US. And in the late 1980s, the international reception given to Margaret Thatcher was significantly different to the reception she received from many communities around the UK.

As obvious as it might seem, Boris Johnson's responsibilities relate to London. He might like commenting about a whole range of issues, stretching from the teaching of the classics through to the state of the Greek economy, but the bottom line is how his actual actions as a politician affect Londoners. Their views should be carefully noted.

It is a stark fact that, among the 8.2m people that Boris Johnson represents, his popularity is not quite as immense as some of the national media like to suggest. While on the 3 May Londoners did indeed re-elect him, it is important to remember that his vote was not a landslide. After the first and second preference votes were counted, he received 1,054,811 votes, just beating Ken Livingstone with 992,273.

My second point about Boris Johnson is that he has managed – in some respects quite brilliantly – to avoid real scrutiny from the media over the last few years. One of the most extreme contradictions about him is that, despite his extensive media appearances, he rarely gets asked anything relating to his actual delivery for London.

Questions about the mayor's actual record really should be asked, and it shouldn't be left to some brilliant London bloggers to do the job of the traditional media.

The mayor of London has immense powers over housing, transport, policing, fire services, economic development and many other areas. As for money, it is worth noting that Boris Johnson will ultimately be responsible for the expenditure of around £60bn of public money between 2012-16.

From Jeremy Paxman to Jon Snow, broadcasters fail time and time again to ask questions about his actual record. Given his huge responsibilities, the mayor should be interviewed, by national broadcasters and

journalists, with the same interrogation skills that face cabinet ministers, yet sadly this simply doesn't happen.

The mayor's favourable treatment from so much of the national press also poses questions about his very cosy relationship with News International.

## PHONE HACKING

Getting a full picture of the mayor's diary has proved incredibly difficult and, for nearly a year, his office battled against disclosure and failed to answer a Freedom of Information request. However, following a welcome ruling by the Information Commissioner, his diaries from his first three years in City Hall are now in the public domain. They reveal a string of undisclosed conversations and meetings with News International executives, including Rebekah Brooks and James Murdoch, at the height of the phone hacking scandal.

The Sun newspaper might have given him some immensely favourable coverage, but what has he done in return? An appearance before Lord Leveson is surely long overdue.

The third point about Boris Johnson's popularity is that those around him have successfully managed to set a narrative.

Take for example the Olympics. It has been repeatedly said by many commentators that Boris Johnson had a "successful Games," with the suggestion that he almost single-handedly delivered the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The reality is somewhat different. London won the Olympic and Paralympic bid back in July 2005. At the time, the prime minister was Tony Blair, the secretary of state for culture, media and sport was Tessa Jowell and the mayor of London was Ken Livingstone.

Whatever you might think of these three politicians, it is a fact that they invested a huge amount of time to ensure London won the bid.

It is also worth noting that, between 2005 and 2008, incredible achievements took place to transform the Olympic Park. By the time Boris Johnson had got his feet under his desk at City Hall, some of the most significant work on the Olympic Park was completed.

Another detail that is often overlooked is the sheer brilliance of London's bid.

For example, the bid clearly set out how the status of the Paralympics would be raised, it described how we would ensure long-term use of the sporting facilities and it also recognised the need for improvements in our transport network. Its level of detail even included a commitment to ensuring that daily travelcards would be offered with every Olympic or Paralympic ticket.

The success of the Games was due to the full implementation of a brilliantly prepared plan for the 2012 Games, which had learnt lessons from past

Olympic and Paralympic Games, had inspiring themes and addressed many knotty issues through extensive attention to detail.

Indeed, incredibly even Boris Johnson himself admitted at the Conservative Party conference that he has been credited too much for the Olympics. Yet such an admission makes little difference – a myth has been set.

Another narrative issue is that of transport. Boris Johnson is, for example, associated with the London bike hire scheme, indeed to most people they are in fact 'Boris bikes'. Some people might even think he came up with the original idea.

Again, a reality check is needed. Across Europe, there are bike hire schemes in dozens of cities, often existing

for many years. Boris Johnson did not invent the concept. Indeed, it is worth noting that the London-wide bike hire scheme was first proposed by Lynne Featherstone back in 2001. Sadly, Ken Livingstone simply took no action until his last few days in office.

It also has to be said that, despite some boastful claims, the London bike hire scheme is a long way from reaching its full potential.

I totally support London's bike hire scheme, but I wish it had started years before Boris Johnson arrived at City Hall and that it was now far bigger and better run. Above all, I would like to see Barclays, as the commercial sponsor, contributing a realistic amount of money that reflects the incredible marketing and media coverage benefits it receives from the scheme.

Another narrative issue is that of London buses. Boris Johnson simply hates bendy buses and over the last few years has managed to demonise them. He talks about a new London bus as if it is the dawn of a new age in public transport.

Once again, the reality is somewhat different. Most bus users in London actually had no problem with bendy buses. They provided huge levels of capacity, they were easy to get on and off, and for anyone with a mobility impairment they had the added bonus of being 100% accessible. The truth is that the strongest objectors to them were people who would never dream of travelling by bus.

Now there was a reasonable argument that there were possibly too many of them in London and that on certain bus routes, with narrow roads, they were not entirely appropriate. And there was certainly a problem with fare evasion as well, although this is an issue that exists with all buses with more than one set of doors and no one randomly checking tickets, i.e. Boris Johnson's new Routemaster bus.

## INCREDIBLY EXPENSIVE

Boris Johnson's real record in eradicating bendy buses in such a short period of time has been incredibly



expensive, with some bus companies having received extensive compensation due to their contracts coming to a premature end.

At the same time, capacity on many bus routes has often been cut, leading to more overcrowding. The maths are quite simple – a bendy bus could carry 120 people but the maximum capacity of a double decker is 85 people.

Most notably, Boris Johnson has embarked on a policy of introducing a new London Routemaster bus, which has already cost millions in research and development alone. The true long-term costs of the new bus are far from clear.

What we know for certain is that the only way to ensure these buses arrive quickly on London's streets is through a huge central purchase of them

with taxpayers' money, and then leasing them to the bus companies. Private bus operators, who normally buy buses directly from the manufacturer, are not willing to touch the new bus with a bargepole.

Basically, Londoners are paying a serious price for a mayoral vanity project. Bus fares have already soared under Boris Johnson. Soon there will be a bigger price we will have to pick up.

Of course, one of the most frequent claims about Boris Johnson is that he is witty and simply different from most politicians – the anti politician. For some people, this is a unique selling point.

In some respects, this widespread description is his greatest trick. I am not suggesting that Boris Johnson can't be humorous, but in practice his humour is not nearly as spontaneous as many people would believe. As someone who questions him every month, I am very aware that his jokes and so-called throwaway lines are repeatedly used, sometimes year after year. I expect some of his best lines are well rehearsed before they are first aired.

Humour cannot run a global city or hide his true track record. Those who know him well are often the most critical of him. Google the words Max Hastings and Boris Johnson if you are in any doubt!

Most notably, let's never forget that Boris Johnson is implementing key decisions, which affect real people.

A mayor who delivers few affordable homes, allows police counters and fire stations to close, who tolerates such appalling air pollution and hikes up fares will not stay popular for long.

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Caroline Pidgeon is leader of the Liberal Democrat group in the London Assembly

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**For Europe! Manifesto  
for a postnational  
revolution in Europe  
by Daniel Cohn-Bendit &  
Guy Verhofstadt  
Carl Hanser Verlag 2012  
£9.90**

Much of this book will be familiar reading to well-schooled British Liberals. Dany Cohn-Bendit and Guy Verhofstadt are, respectively, the leaders of the Green and Liberal groups in the European Parliament, both with a commendably long record of campaigning for a federal Europe. This short book is their manifesto for the 2014 European elections, and as such it may be the calling card for any new alliance of party political groupings in the next parliament.

The authors are against President Barroso's 'federation of nation states' – terminology also used by Jacques Delors. Instead, they want a federal union of post-national citizens. In being rather iconoclastic state-busters, Cohn-Bendit and Verhofstadt tend to underestimate the delicacy of the balance always to be struck in the European Union between the role of the (albeit declining) state and the role of the (slowly awakening) citizenry. But the writers are on target when they decry the claim of the European Council of heads of government to be somehow more legitimate in terms of EU governance than the older EU institutions of the Parliament, Commission and Council of Ministers. The German and French leaders are particularly in their sights: it speaks volumes that the role of recent British prime ministers does not earn so much as a credit.

The Manifesto is bold in calling for a European army, more immigration and a new form of multi-national EU passport union. It is less clear in its prescriptions for the constitutional evolution of the federal union, especially so with regard to the functions of a senate in which state interests would be represented. The enemy, however, is very well characterised as nationalist, populist and conservative. The book is a bold polemic and should be widely read.

After the manifesto comes a lively extended interview of the co-authors by Jean Quatremer, the Brussels correspondent of the French daily *Libération*. The style, at least in the English version of the book,



# REVIEWS

is annoyingly typical of modern political speeches. Lots of words. Without verbs. Or syntax. Like this. But take a deep breath. And enjoy.

Andrew Duff

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## **On Governing Europe by Andrew Duff Policy Network 2012**

Andrew Duff's writings are without gossipy asides that are the (usually self-serving and unverifiable) makeweight of too much political writing. *On Governing Europe* (which may be downloaded at [www.policy-network.net](http://www.policy-network.net)) epitomises Andrew's style: balanced arguments based on evidence.

The pamphlet provides a good survey of recent treaty provisions and political decisions, how they have affected Europe and member states during the recent crisis years. Andrew lays out options for the future and the problems of Britain's political position. Andrew's argument (as anyone who even vaguely follows the work of Liberal Democrat MEPs will know) is that Britain's interest is in Europe integrating closely and with speed to full federal union.

Andrew begins with "what went wrong" with the economic and monetary arrangements put in place at Maastricht. "The presumption at Maastricht, held commonly but not universally, was that the introduction of the euro would lead automatically to deeper economic integration." Crisis has come about because member states have been allowed to "pursue their own distinctly national policies while they only paid lip-service to the broad EU framework." In Andrew's view, the constitutional convention 2002-03 was a missed opportunity for choosing not to look at the treaty provisions for economic and monetary union.

At the heart of dealing with

the crisis has been the European Council, whose status has been enhanced since Lisbon, but which has failed to deal with the crisis. Andrew catalogues effectively the failures of the Council – not due so much to any institutional arrangement but because of poor judgements by the prime ministers who comprise its membership. They have been unable to overcome national political expediences to achieve a successful way forward.

The European Commission comes out well from Andrew's analysis of the crisis – proposing successful measures to mitigate the economic damage of bank defaults. If you are not familiar with the '6-pack' and the 'semester', Andrew is a lucid guide.

The story reaches the notorious European Council of 8-9 December 2011. On the agenda was how to incorporate a number of measures already agreed upon. Most states wished to simply revise Protocol 12 of the EU Treaties "[b]ut the British refused to agree to opening up the Treaty of Lisbon for further amendment despite the fact that the UK would in any circumstances keep its unique derogation from the euro" and an amendment to the protocol would not have triggered a referendum under the EU Act.

The Cameron government comes out badly in Andrew's analysis as unrealistic and verging on double-dealing. The UK's main export to the single market is financial services but Cameron seriously thinks that UK could be exempt from regulation within the single market of such services.

Andrew argues that "the EU treasury should... become a prominent and powerful part of the federal economic government... accountable to the European Parliament." It was at the Council meeting on 28-29 June that there was agreement (of more

importance but receiving less attention than the veto six months before) on further action to stabilise Europe's economy. This work provides an accessible description of the European Stability Mechanism.

The last third of Andrew's book concentrates on the way ahead. Andrew's case is that for Europe's economy to be more successful (and by definition more stable) will require normal means of economic policy to be established at a European level and new forms of governance to ensure effective and democratic governance of this "new polity."

Andrew is more committed than any other parliamentarian to rehabilitate the word 'federal' as a standard positive term in discourse about Europe, by using that word without fear and arguing for a federal arrangement. Andrew understands that democracy needs a demos, "the new union... must foster from the outset a sophisticated sense of European political citizenship with functional linkages, such as media and political parties."

In discussing where Europe may go, Andrew observes "the British problem". Hague's review of EU competences is seen as a subjective political exercise that may well condemn Britain to a peripheral relationship akin to Norway or even Turkey – affected by many EU decisions but with little say in them or influence elsewhere in the world. The Hague strategy is ultimately "an accident waiting to happen."

Andrew argues that Europe needs the one institution it lacks – a government elected by the population and accountable to the parliament. The future of a Europe with a government may be bright. Whether Britain remains in such a Europe is a matter in issue. It makes both the 2014 European elections and the 2015 general election immensely important.

Antony Hook

## The Eighteen-Day Running Mate: McGovern, Eagleton, and a Campaign in Crisis

by Joshua M. Glasser  
Yale UP 2012 £20

George McGovern, who died recently aged 90, has retained an avid following among those who remember his ill-fated run for the US presidency in 1972. Those disagreeing with him philosophically have no trouble remembering him, using the catchphrase 'McGovernism'.

His biggest problem, in a list of many, losing his vice-presidential running mate after just 18 days, has been allowed to stay in the collective memory due to one particular phrase, 'I'm 1,000 percent behind Tom Eagleton.'

But he wasn't, and there was a different vice-presidential candidate in November. McGovern ended up winning only Massachusetts and the District of Columbia.

Glasser has written an engaging account of this high-octane political disaster, one of the great such disasters of the 20th century. Additionally, he brings into focus the missing man in this saga, Tom Eagleton, for the first time.

Was Eagleton badly treated? At long last, one feels one can make a complete judgement, while that might not be far removed from one's first impressions. There is much discussion of Eagleton's mental health and his related electroshock treatment. Behind all of it is a few seconds of conversation between McGovern's campaign manager and Eagleton, which, let me tell you, would leave ALDC rather shocked, in terms of selecting any candidate.

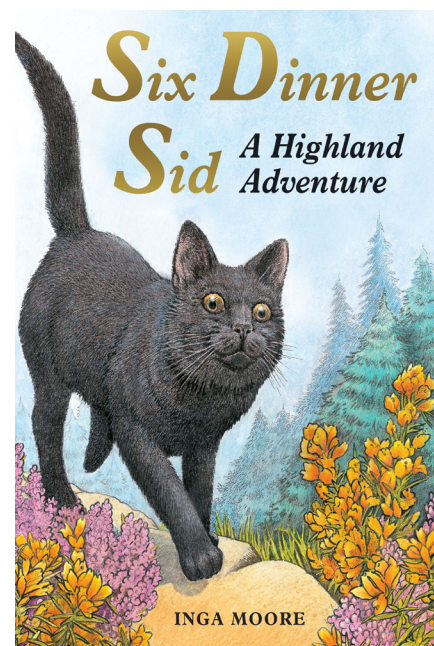
Why was the process of choosing a vice-presidential candidate so messy? The practical answer lies in Ted Kennedy's many refusals to become McGovern's 'veep', refusals which McGovern refused to absorb. His opponents from the primaries were also trying to derail his nomination at the convention. But the explanation for the problem is on page 92: "wishful thinking and arrogance alone cannot explain the McGovern's campaign lack of planning for the vice presidential choice. Rather, the running-mate selection process also exposed flaws in the dynamics between candidate and staff that the campaign could withstand though the primary and caucus season, but that would ensure failure in a national campaign".

Glasser's account of how McGovern tried to cope with the unfolding disaster after the

Democratic Convention in Miami is thoroughly absorbing, making the event into an absorbing page turner. You can sense an election, which might have been lost by eight percentage points, becoming an eventual 23 percent, 49 state loss.

If there is a way to 'write' politics, then Glasser's handling of this episode is an excellent example, with all its many superbly illuminating details. Oh, by the way, the latter-day McGovern disagreed with the line he took in 1972.

John Pindar



## Six Dinner Sid / Six Dinner Sid: A Highland Adventure by Inga Moore Hodder Children's Books 1990 & 2010, both £5.99

*Six Dinner Sid* was first reviewed in *Liberator* a good 20 or so years ago. In those days, when the use of children's books to illustrate the otherwise dry review pages was young, the Collective was divided into 'Cattist' and 'Doggist' factions, each vying to find suitable titles. *Six Dinner Sid* was a winner.

Inga Moore has generously provided us with Sid's further adventures to celebrate his twentieth anniversary. Sid is off to the Scottish Highlands, though we don't find out whether he sorts out that champion of the Doggists – Hairy McClary.

Stewart Rayment

## Sunday

When in need of wise counsel, I take myself off to a woody bank beneath the Ornamental Arch I erected to mark the victory of Wallace Lawler in the Birmingham Ladywood by-election of 1969 and rap on a door half obscured by foliage. There, after much shuffling and snuffing from within, I am admitted to a dark hallway and then to the cosiest of studies. On its walls are shelves housing the works of our finest poets, a cricket bat signed by the 1948 Australians, an election address from Sir Alan Beith, an oar used by the victorious Oxford eight of 1954, a set of cigarette cards depicting the Presidents of the Liberal Party and a framed photograph of Dorothy Tutin.

There, before a crackling fire, I enjoy a modest supper of toasted cheese or angels on horseback and more than one tumbler of Auld Johnston (that most celebrated of Highland malts) while setting the world to rights with the King of the Badgers. This evening, I am sorry to learn that one of his granddaughters is unwell and is to be sent to a sanatorium in Switzerland to recover if the Wise Woman of Wing's remedies prove ineffective.

## Monday

In Brighton for the Conference of the Liberal Democrats, whom should I bump into but our own Nick Clegg? He kindly asks me to look at his main speech of the week: "I've already given the press most of it, but you may be able to tweak the odd line."

Well, I have tweaked for every Liberal leader since Campbell-Bannerman, so I settle down in the lobby of the Grand with a pot of orange pekoe and a red ballpoint. And this is what I read:

"We are not the party for you. You know who you are: Socialists, Social Democrats, Social Liberals, social anythings, beardies, weirdies, beardy-weirdies, weirdy-beardies, flat-earthers, Friends of the Earth, friends of Vince Cable, Little Englanders, Len McCluskey, tree-huggers, bunny-huggers, beard and sandals, beards and scandals, Polly Toynbee, polly wolly doodle all the day. If people want just protest politics, if they want a sort of 'I don't like the world let me get off' party, they've got one. They can all fuck off and join the Labour Party."

The waitress has to replace the tablecloth after I lose a snootful of the pekoe, but she is Terribly Nice about it. The manuscript is a little damp, but I score through the passage and substitute some lines of my own about our becoming a party of government before hurrying off to return it to Clegg.

## Tuesday

Do you know David Heath? Our Liberal Democrat MPs are fine fellows to a man – and, indeed, a woman – but if I were kidnapped by highly-paid BBC executives and forced to listen to the ramblings of David Dimbleby until I named my favourite amongst them, my choice would almost certainly light upon Heath. In recent years, he has served as Deputy Leader of the House of Commons, which means that he has been privy to the most delicious gossip: who is up, who is down, whether the government will be obliged to make concessions on the Tramways Bill. For all these reasons, Heath is a favourite guest here at the Hall and I look forward to his arrival tomorrow, even though he has recently been moved to Agriculture.

# Lord Bonkers' Diary

## Wednesday

Meadowcroft puts his head through the Breakfast Room window (fortunately, it is open at the time) to inform me that my drive is "befangled with ballistics". I rush outside to see what the fuss is about and am met by an extraordinary sight: the drive is occupied from the Lodge, past the lake, around my carriage sweep and under my porte cochere by jeeps, tanks and missile launchers. It reminds me of the chilly Moscow afternoon when (for reasons I need not enter into here) I found myself obliged to join the party taking the salute

in Red Square.

Just as I am thinking of returning for the Library revolver, a bearded figure in a tin hat emerges from the turret of the largest tank. It bounds forward to greet me and turns out to be Heath. "Hope you don't mind. I've bought a few friends just in case you have badgers."

## Thursday

I had settled down to write this Diary after breakfast when I was disturbed by the sound of mortar fire. A minute later, Heath bursts in: "Sorry about the noise. I thought I saw something moving in that covert of yours and thought it might be a badger. Best not to take any risks. I'll give it another biffing when the smoke has cleared a bit."

"Why don't we have an early stiffener at the *Bonkers' Arms*?" I suggest hurriedly. "Meadowcroft can call the fire brigade." As I lead him down the drive I add: "They've got a guest bitter from your neck of the woods. It's called Badg... On second thoughts, let's stick to the Smithson & Greaves Northern Bitter."

## Friday

Another trying day with Heath. This afternoon, I suggest we go to the village school to watch the little mites rehearse their Christmas play. "Very good," replies the normally estimable Heath, "but I'll take this bazooka just in case we run into a badger."

As we stroll down my drive past the lake (and his missile launchers), he asks me which play the school is giving this year. "Toad of Toad Hall," I tell him. "It's one of my favourites – better than all that gloomy Scandinavian stuff they go in for these days. It's based on *The Wind in the Willows*, of course. All the characters are there: Toad himself, Ratty, the Mole, Badg.... Shall we go the *Bonkers' Arms* instead?"

## Saturday

What to do about Heath? He is the most engaging of fellows, but the badgers and I simply cannot put up with him any longer. I walk by the shores of Rutland Water seeking inspiration and it duly dawns. On my last trip to South Africa, I was taken to see a vicious creature called the honey badger – so vicious, indeed, that it is known to bring down its prey by biting off the male member. I should like to see Heath take *him* on! Certainly, I took the precaution of wearing my own Extra Heavy-Duty Cricketers' Box for Use on Green Minor Counties' Wickets (patent pending) throughout the visit. Sure enough, I find the honey badger's card in my pocket book and hurry to the woody bank beneath the Ornamental Arch where I happen to drop it.

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