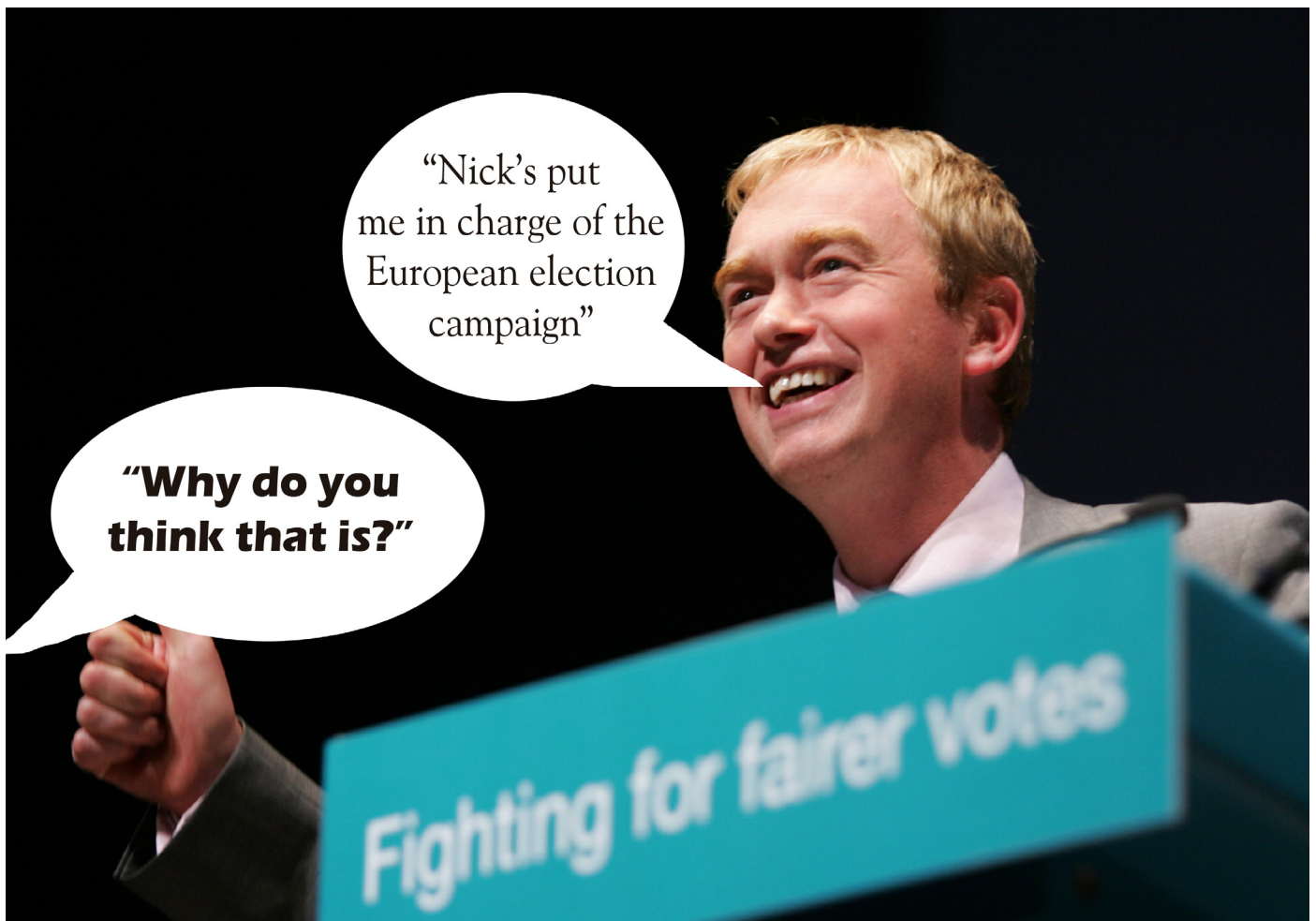


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COMMENTARY

THE MUDDLE IN THE MIDDLE

Liberator is not Nick Clegg's greatest fan but sometimes we have to say he hits an issue right on the nail, proving to any sceptic that he remains a Liberal at heart.

Such was the case this May after the shocking murder of a soldier on the streets of Woolwich. In the spirit of 'something must be done', many leading politicians leapt aboard the authoritarian bandwagon (if they were not riding it already).

We heard repeated calls for a revival of the discredited Communications Data Bill (or 'snoopers' charter'), even though such a law would not have prevented the Woolwich murder. These calls came not just from the usual suspects on the Tory right and Labour's authoritarian wing, but also from Liberal Democrat peer Alex Carlile.

It is unlikely that Clegg would have joined such calls but, in such a febrile atmosphere, it would have been tempting to duck for cover. Clegg nevertheless bravely resisted tabloid pressure and reiterated that he would prevent the snoopers' charter becoming law.

If only there were such moral clarity about the party's broad approach. Instead, Clegg has been banging on repeatedly about the 'centre ground', a facile concept that is wearily familiar to those who remember similar messages from David Steel.

There is a fundamental problem with the 'centre ground'. It doesn't exist. This was pointed out recently by Tory MP Patrick Jenkin. In *Public Servant* (21 March), he wrote: "Politicians often talk about 'the centre ground' of British politics, as though there is some big bell curve of voters in the middle where we have to be in order to get elected. The three main parties are crowded there in the facile belief that being anti-immigration, anti-EU, pro-business, tax cuts and tough on crime is 'right wing'; while more spending, concern about the poor, pro-EU, pro-human rights and CND is 'left wing', and therefore sensible moderate people weigh up these 'extremes' and finish up somewhere in between."

The 'centre ground' strategy says, in effect, "Let's wait for everyone else to state their opinions, then position ourselves in between". In other words, it means allowing your opponents to define you.

It is part of a technique called 'triangulation', popularised by Bill Clinton and Tony Blair. Politicians present their ideology as being 'above' or 'between' the extremes of the political spectrum. They describe this as 'moderation', implying moral superiority. But it is merely a cynical exercise in positioning.

Nick Clegg asserts he is above ideology, claiming he is 'pragmatic' and simply interested in 'what works'.

But you cannot assess 'what works' outside the context of a clear set of values (an ideology, in other words), which provides a standard against which it can be judged whether something 'works'.

A 'centre ground' strategy is not virtuous but morally weak. It abandons leadership for followership. It became the convention because the end of communism led politicians to assume mistakenly that all the major questions of political ideology had been settled for good. The challenge was therefore no longer to compete with other politicians about values. It was to compete to agree with public opinion. Accordingly, politicians increasingly relied on opinion polls and focus groups to find out what people wanted. But this approach mistakes the statistical mean for the typical. The 'average voter' has one breast and one testicle.

Politicians are searching in vain for the electorate's shared G-spot. In reality, public opinion is highly varied. The current version of the 'Mosaic' system used by many advertisers and marketers, for example, classifies the UK population into 15 main socio-economic groups and, within this, 67 different types. The 'Cultural Dynamics' values model identifies three distinct values modes, each comprising many sub-sets.

It's a complicated world out there. The notion that most people are clustered round the same set of opinions is simply ridiculous. It's also illiberal. In *Monty Python's Life of Brian*, Brian famously told the crowd "You're all individuals!" and "You're all different!" No Liberal worth his or her salt has any business replying, "I'm not!"

Perhaps the most pertinent failing of the 'centre ground' strategy is that, if politicians converge on the same territory, they all look the same. This opens up space for extremists and allows them to thrive, and is the secret of UKIP's success.

Nigel Farage has a point when he says, "People have had enough of the three main parties, who increasingly resemble each other. The differences between them are very narrow and they don't even speak the same language that ordinary folk out there, who are struggling with housing and jobs, speak."

To restore health to our democracy, we need all parties and politicians, not just UKIP and Farage, to stand up for what they believe in and offer voters a real choice.

Nick Clegg has proved that he can be a Liberal, loud and proud, when it comes to the snoopers' charter. He should display similar clarity about everything else, and drop the nonsense about the 'centre ground' and 'pragmatism'. Who knows, this might win some support; it certainly can't lose any more than the party has already lost.

RADICAL BULLETIN

POISONED CHALICE

There was some head scratching at the Liberal Democrats' Federal Executive when Tim Farron was abruptly announced as being in charge of the campaign for next year's European elections.

Since the current popularity of both the party and EU points to these being, ahem, challenging, it's unlikely that whoever is in charge of them will be able to cover themselves in glory.

Maybe that is the point. By lumbering Farron with responsibility for a campaign whose results are likely to be dreadful, he will hardly have much of a platform from which to launch any leadership bid against Nick Clegg.

Farron supporters think the post-Euro elections point might be the ideal time for a challenge, though the failure of Lembit Öpik's eccentric bid to change the rules for calling a leadership election makes this more difficult. Farron also faces unease among MPs who do not like the idea of an evangelical Christian leading the party, and among those who thought his comparison of the party to cockroaches unwise.

His role does, though, mean there are now four people who have been in charge of elections, but none of them in overall charge. Farron has Europe, Paddy Ashdown the general election and Martin Horwood the recent local elections. James Gurling meanwhile chairs the Campaign and Communications Committee (CCC), which supposedly oversees election campaigns of all kinds.

An aggrieved Gurling told the FE he was not consulted about Farron's appointment and enquired what was the point of having a committee to oversee campaigning if it didn't oversee anything and was not consulted about who did.

Readers with long memories may recall rows about the accountability of the 1992 general election campaign, run by Des Wilson, and that in 1997 run by the late Richard Holme. It was then that it was resolved that the CCC – a sub-committee of FE – would oversee election preparations, and that its chair, who is elected by the FE, would line-manage the professional in charge of elections.

This arrangement broke down in the Kennedy era, leaving a situation where Ed Davey chaired the CCC but not the general election preparations – a task given to Lord Rennard. Willie Rennie was put in charge of the 2009 European elections and Andrew Stunell the local elections. This created three parallel structures for election campaign preparations, with no obvious links to messages, research and communications or any way to efficiently allocate resources between them.

This disorderly arrangement is continuing. Is that because someone has decided it is in fact the best way to run things, or is it just an elaborate scheme to

prevent Farron making any mischief?

SUPPING WITH DEVILS

Party members would ordinarily not expect their policy makers to pay attention to the views of Migration Watch, an organisation founded by eccentric retired diplomats to argue that the UK is 'full'. But that has happened at a recent meeting of the party's Immigration, Asylum and Identity Working Group.

It seems the alarm expressed by some over this was misplaced, as *Liberator* hears that it was part of an exercise in listening to all sides, and that those present gave Migration Watch's unimpressive representative a thorough going-over, which exposed the holes in that organisation's 'research' and the worthlessness of its opinions. No IAIWG member saw any merit in its views.

Migration Watch's website describes the reasons for its existence as: "The essence of the problem remains – namely that governments have lost control over our borders during the past fifteen years. This has resulted in immigration on a scale that is placing huge strain on our public services, housing, environment, society and quality of life."

'Lost control', 'huge strain'? Well, anyone can be tendentious. Migration Watch is associated with something called the Cross-Party Group on Balanced Migration, a parliamentary body that, to the party's credit, boasts not a single Liberal Democrat in either house among its published members.

What is more worrying for IAIWG members is that Nick Clegg's ill-received speech on immigration was made without any consultation with them. Indeed, the group had no preview of it nor were they provided with a copy of what was actually said.

MAKING A MILLION

It is good to see the Liberal Democrats running a campaign, but that 'Million Jobs' one, on closer inspection, turns out to be about merely a general wish to create one million more jobs, starting with more apprenticeships.

Laudable aims indeed, but who would disagree with them and what makes them distinctively Liberal Democrat? It may be that the Conservatives ought to run a 'we will destroy a million jobs' campaign but they are hardly likely to do so, while Labour would no doubt favour a million more jobs too.

Party members sent the campaign pack will find plenty of practical advice about how to order leaflets and set up local displays, but very little on how the party proposes to go about creating one million jobs beyond wanting to encourage more businesses to take on apprentices.

Parliamentarians briefed on the campaign say it was

made clear that it is intended for seats that already have an MP and that it was stressed that campaigners must “follow the script to the letter”. Since this contains the dreadful Americanism “Have a nice day”, perhaps users might think otherwise.

THEIR MASTER'S VOICE

Somebody in party HQ has clearly decided that MPs and peers simply cannot be trusted to think up political messages for themselves and must be guided.

In the late 1990s, Labour MPs were famously beholden to their pagers and the messages from on high thus provided. Technology marches on, and now Liberal Democrat MPs and peers are sent suggested tweets (Liberator 357).

These will give readers a flavour. On the demise of the ‘snooping’ bill: “@nick_clegg has made the right decision for the economy, for internet security and for our freedom”. It is hard to see what the snooping bill had to do with the economy, but this was better than the rather North Korean “The #snooperscharter is dead, long live the Clegg”. It’s only a wonder he wasn’t referred to as the ‘dear leader’.

At least the stuffing of the Communications Data Bill was a genuine bit of good news, but when Clegg wrote a contentious piece on his new theme of claiming the centre ground, out came the suggested tweets again:

“The Labour and Tory exodus by @nick_clegg”, “Our opponents are heading back to their respective homes. It is time for @libdems to reclaim this space” and “Something is happening on the centre ground of British politics”.

Indeed it is – it’s where all parties try to congregate in the hope of neither offending nor inspiring anyone.

ANSWERS ON A SINGLE SHEET

Early indications from the Liberal Democrat manifesto writing process for 2015 suggest something that is very Westminster-based and largely concerned with existing policy rather than looking forward.

Parliamentary policy committees have been asked to send short submissions by early June, described in the case of one of them as “views on the challenges we face, but also which parts of our government record we should be highlighting [and] our policy ideas for the next manifesto which link to the key message”.

Each policy group has been asked to come up with not more than five ideas expressed in up to 400 words, plus details of costs or savings and information on “how the policy supports the overall message”.

There will be a debate at this autumn’s conference and a pre-manifesto in summer 2014 to be endorsed by that autumn’s conference.

HALF A WELCOME MAT

There was a lot of controversy in Scotland last year when the Scottish Liberal Democrats decided to ban the pro-independence Yes Scotland campaign from exhibiting at their conference. This was despite a minority of Liberal Democrats supporting this position, and the party’s usual commitment to free debate.

With the federal conference due in Glasgow in September, the issue has resurfaced. Attempts by some in Scotland to get Federal Conference Committee

to ban Yes Scotland fell on deaf ears; whether for the lure of income or for fear of accusations of political cowardice is unclear. It was, though, agreed that Yes Scotland would have to make an approach if it wanted to attend and would not be actively sought out.

Oh dear. The conference office then included Yes Scotland in an invitation to a ‘special networking reception’ ahead of conference. It was sent to organiser Susan Stewart but addressed as ‘Dear Stewart’. So now Yes Scotland can hardly be refused. And if Scottish leader Willie Rennie finds its presence as problematic as he says he would have found it at his own conference, he will just have to take a circuitous route round the exhibition area.

GETTING MEASURED

Ten Liberal Democrats are measuring up the ermine, we hear, for the long delayed creation of some more life peers.

The House of Lords has already reached a ludicrous size but, unreformed, is likely to grow like Topsy under any government keen to secure its majority. At this rate, maybe the place will at least eventually collapse under its own ridiculousness.

Liberator has been told there will be 10 new peers named at the end of June, with the likeliest names including Olly Grender, Brian Paddick, James Palumbo, Julie Smith, Alison Suttie, Rumi Verjee, Ian Wrigglesworth, a former MEP (likely to be Liz Lynne), Catherine Humphreys (former north Wales AM), and someone from Scotland.

WEAR IT WITH PRIDE

Liberal Democrat members who helped in the Eastleigh by-election campaign have been receiving unsolicited badges from party headquarters bearing the slogan ‘I Made Eastleigh Happen’.

This has unfortunate echoes of the last time party HQ decided to send badges to members. On that occasion, it was to acknowledge donations to a spurious fundraising scheme called ‘Greenshare’, which was launched just after the party came fourth behind the Greens in the 1989 European elections. The Eastleigh badges went out just as the party, er, came fourth in the county council total vote. Clearly when badges appear, it’s a sign of real trouble.

CHARD TO CINDERS

The Chard Group was founded as a self-described left-of-centre pressure group in the Liberal Democrats in 1992. It quickly declined into an eccentric fringe body noted for holding somewhat bizarre raffles, and then vanished entirely.

Of its two leading lights, Frances McKenzie is now a Conservative councillor in West Dorset, while in May, Richard Denton-White stood unsuccessfully as a Labour candidate for Dorset County Council.

Denton-White was last heard of as the only known representative of something called the Citizen Party (Liberator 344). Those who knew him in the Liberal Democrats will doubtless bear with fortitude the news of his arrival in Labour’s ranks.

WHEN WILL THE PARTY START CAMPAIGNING AGAIN?

The Liberal Democrats are returning to a derelict state in many parts of the country. They must re-learn how to campaign and why, says Tony Greaves

The stuff party HQ sent out following the mediocre county council election results felt more than a bit complacent, and more than a touch arrogant. Liberal Democrats did well, they told us, “where it mattered”. Yet we lost a net 124 seats – a quarter of the number we previously held and rather more than that in particular seats (there were about 36 individual gains).

What these people meant was that we did well in the chosen held and target parliamentary seats. So everything is okay. Rawlings and Thrasher said the Liberal Democrats will come back with nearly 50 seats and come close to holding the balance of power again. In private, only some of the clever but clueless brigade really believes it. The elections did not cover most of our more difficult areas and the good news was patchier than they pretend.

But even if they are right, their message was nothing less than an insult to those Liberal Democrats actively campaigning in 85% of the country. “Thanks for standing and even winning but you don’t matter” is not the best message to give to the declining bands of party workers in all but the best parliamentary seats.

The fact is that the party is being hollowed out. It’s not uniform, it’s not yet terminal, but it’s dangerous. And the ‘black holes’ are growing in number. Yet what is being done to help? ALDC has started to put some small staff resources into helping a small number of ‘non-target seat areas’ and is hoping to expand to others. This is welcome, though hardly helped by a national HQ that frankly does not seem to care.

It all takes me back to the early 1960s when Liberal Party strength on the ground was even patchier. A national boost in support after the epic Orpington by-election win in March 1962 meant that Liberals found winning council seats was suddenly much easier. Michael Meadowcroft, then local government officer at LPO (party HQ in London), tells the tale of a phone call from an urban district in eastern England the day after polling day with the anguished plea: “We’ve just won control. What do we do now?” There were hundreds of rather shocked new councillors.

Shuttleworth sheets had recently appeared on the scene, the Liberal version of the Mikardo and Reading pads of Labour and the Tories, but Liberal election organisation was often rudimentary. To fill the gap, a young activist in Beckenham, James Woodward-Nutt, set up Thor – a system dedicated to providing modern and efficient election organisation for Liberals. How to keep annual canvassing records, letters to postal voters, notes to people who had asked for lifts to vote

(and lists of them for polling day), tellers’ sheets – all these were supplied and much more. A sort of EARS before computers. James turned up to Liberal Assemblies, preaching his gospel from a pulpit-like stand. The problem was that, by the end of the sixties, the base Liberal vote in much of the country was down into low single figures. Thor promised an efficiency in delivering a high proportion of a smaller and smaller level of support. For most places, on its own, it was useless.

GAINED FORCE

The answer gained force in the 1970s following the promotion of the ideas of community politics by the Young Liberals and their adoption by the party in the iconic community politics resolution at the 1970 Eastbourne Liberal Assembly. The ideas were spread around the party by the monthly newsletter *Radical Bulletin*, the campaigning flair of Liverpool’s Trevor Jones and his string of by-election victories, evangelists such as party employee Gordon Lishman and the party’s ‘community politics co-ordinator’ Andrew Ellis, with his weekly ‘over the garden wall’ column in *Liberal News* and tireless railway journeys round the land, and from 1977 the new Association of Liberal Councillors operation and its *ALC Bulletin*, conferences and developing network of activists. *Focus* slowly became a national brand.

It was all based on local community campaigning. We were Liberals. We knew why we were Liberals and we challenged illiberal populism. But we were campaigners working away with local people on local issues, giving a local relevance to national issues, opposing stubborn out-dated local elites and getting things done. Of course, we needed the organisation behind it all, to avoid wasting effort by doing things in a shambolic way or trying to reinvent the wheel. Once the new community campaigning movement got going, I turned to publishing piles of booklets on everything from petitioning and public meetings, to leaflet delivery systems and polling day organisation. All necessary if you are building up strength from local campaigning, often irrelevant if you are not doing that.

I remember this ancient history for one reason. In much of the country, the wheel has turned. We are back where we started and it is all going to have to be done again. It is now being hinted by top people in the party that all this past campaigning was just about ‘protest’ and dredging up the ‘protest vote’. This is a misunderstanding by people who were not there. Of course there were things to protest about (frankly there still are) but the essence was campaigning. And

it was based on what the 1970 resolution called the 'dual approach': campaigning both inside and outside the structures of power. By 'campaigning', I don't mean just fighting elections (though that's part of it). Campaigning is about working with people to achieve things locally. The success of a campaign is not election to the council or elsewhere; it's achieving something.

It's not that the party has too often forgotten that being a councillor, MP, MEP or even government minister should just be a means to campaigning ends. It's not that the party leadership never seemed to understand this. It's that by cutting themselves off from the party that worked so hard to elect them, they make themselves less effective. People in elected positions need the pressure from the party, and the campaigns the party should be running and involved in, to help them achieve the Liberal objectives.

Of course, the party before the coalition was still campaigning. There was a campaign about tuition fees. The U-turn resulted in dismay outside the party by those who saw it as a betrayal of a campaign pledge. But it also caused dismay within the party when we saw our ministers opting for a clever internal fix instead of working as part of the wider campaign "inside and outside the structures of power". They forgot why they were there and on whose behalf, and they cut themselves off from their political allies. Of course there are lots of things people in elected positions just have to get on and do, though good communication with friends outside is never wasted. But people in positions should never stop thinking and operating in campaign mode, particularly on many of the big issues. It's about our political culture.

PISSED OFF

The clever people at the centre of the party will tell us that they do this all the time – what are the avalanche of briefings they send us all about? The problem is that it's all top down. "Here is what we are doing and why we are doing it, this is why it is a good thing even though we know most of you don't agree with it, now go out and tell everyone else like good boys and girls." It's no wonder that so many experienced activists are pissed off.

Trevor Jones used to talk about a good election campaign ending in the "spontaneous uprising of the people". But even in Liverpool, local people learned how to organise elections, led by such as David Alton and Chris Rennard. Then came computers and EARS, and for quarter of a century the party relied on EARS to do what Thor tried to do decades before. I don't know what proportion of the party used EARS at its peak (some local parties are still in the dark ages!) but it was fairly high – in spite of the dismal way the party often treated the EARS team, culminating in the unhappy decision to dump them and transfer official affections to Connect, suddenly seen as the electoral saviour by HQ and ALDC alike.

"We are back where we started and it is all going to have to be done again"

We are not using Connect in Pendle and, given the many horror stories people tell me, I don't think we will, at least until they sort it out. Also it costs a lot. Most of the people using it seem to be those who have been told they must do so

if they want to get money from the party, which we never do. But organisational whizzery or not, Connect on its own is not going to rebuild the campaigning political movement, even if strapped local parties can be persuaded to cough up the brass. It's back to the old Thor problem – trying to get 100% of your vote out when you have two and a half activists and a base vote hovering just over zero is a waste of time and effort. What you have to do is to go out and campaign, for things you believe in and things you want to get done locally. And what somebody in the party needs to do is to act as the stimulus, catalyst and educator of members and local people about what this means.

It's great. It's fun. It gives a sense of purpose, and a sense of achievement. And even if (like many of our members) you are choked off with the coalition, it will keep you going until the present nightmare comes to an end. But who is to do this? I see no chance that the clever people who run the national party 'machine' will begin to understand what I am saying. Or that they have the experience and skills – or aptitude – to do what is needed.

So what about ALDC? After all, it calls itself the party body for councillors and campaigners. I despair of the stuff it sends out, hardly anything about campaigning. I cheered when I saw its new magazine-format mailing, perhaps something readable at last. I was uncheered when I couldn't find anything about local campaigns. Nor can I find any campaigning material in the stuff ALDC sends out before elections (good as it is for people already fighting local seats to win), nor in the stuff in its weekly emails and on its website.

Perhaps I'm unduly gloomy. Perhaps, next week, someone will launch a modern version of the *People First* campaigns that ALDC and the inspiration of Bill le Breton created after the merger in 1988 and which, combined with local election campaigning, saved the newly merged party from going under. But where and by whom? With all the electronic means of communication, it really ought to be much easier now. So why is no-one doing it? The very existence of our party in half the country may rest on the answers to these questions.

Tony Greaves is a Liberal Democrat member of the House of Lords and a member of Pendle Borough Council. In 1970, he moved the community politics motion at the Eastbourne Liberal Assembly on behalf of the Young Liberals, and from 1977 to 1985 was organising secretary of ALC

WHEN WILL CLEGG 'GET' LOCAL GOVERNMENT?

The party can recover and UKIP can be beaten, but not while the Liberal Democrat high command obsesses over 2015 and ignores local campaigns, says Chris White

Mountains of drivel (probably a mixed metaphor – but still) had already been written about the county council elections by the time the results were declared, and much more has come in since.

The prize for the silliest comment, however, goes to whoever writes Nick Clegg's 'Letter from the Leader', e-mailed to activists on 4 May, which said: "One big story of Thursday's elections was UKIP. They pose a huge problem for the Conservatives." Those of us who actually campaign on the ground know that UKIP may have saved our bacon in some areas but cost us dearly elsewhere.

Strong Liberal Democrats – people who said year after year they were voting for us – happily voted for that nice Mr Farage and his team; some because they were angry, some because they wanted to give the political classes a warning. Some, indeed, for baser motives.

Time will tell whether this is a flash in the pan. Some of the newly elected will turn out to be villains or fools (but so did a number of their MEPs). The failure of Bulgarians to arrive in droves in the next couple of years may start to prick the UKIP bubble but immigration is largely an irrational fear and so the absence of foreigners may simply suggest to the hard-up, jobless and disaffected that they are lurking out there somewhere.

The leader of a Liberal Democrat council was told a few years ago by a punter: "Do you know there are 20,000 immigrants living in this district?" She smiled sweetly and said: "I don't think that's right. I am leader of the council so would know if that were the case." "Ah," said the voter. "They wouldn't tell you, of course."

So what lies behind UKIP? They arose, of course, in the struggle to make sure that Britain did not join the euro – a battle that seems long ago (and for which, incidentally, the party has no up-to-date policy).

Euro-scepticism is as strong as ever, of course, but most would be hard-pressed to say what it is about Europe and Brussels and the EU that Euro-sceptics don't like, other than the historic fog-in-the-channel mistrust that has always lurked in the post-reformation British mind. They don't speak English, don't drink tea, didn't stand up to Hitler and almost none of them is Church of England. But that was the case five years ago. Why the upsurge now?

In part it is because UKIP became the media story. The Liberal Democrats won Eastleigh but lost the propaganda battle. Some of that is due to the unerring ability of party HQ to misfire. Some is due to the BBC – left of centre and euro-sceptic and thus happy to talk up an anti-European outfit that embarrasses a centre-

right government.

And there is Farage himself: genial, heavy-smoking, pub-going. You somehow warm to him, and those who are weary of public school Oxbridge types can warm to him a great deal (even though they may forgive Boris).

It is three years since the general election and five years since the bankers destroyed our economy. The economy is not getting stronger very fast, although in parts of the country it is stronger than the statistics suggest. The bankers have not really had their comeuppance and are still, to quote one shareholder recently, "greedy bastards". The government seems unable to make much difference but is noticeably making cuts, especially to local services. The cuts to welfare are welcome to many but VAT is still at 20%. And is it really sensible to cut the size of the armed forces?

Meanwhile, the government obsesses about things that 'don't really matter', like House of Lords reform, overseas aid to countries that are doing very nicely thank you, and gay marriage.

The last may be a bigger factor than we had supposed. The majority of the population supports reform but a sizeable minority is really shocked, partly because the churches have irresponsibly muddled sacramental marriage with civil marriage.

So people are fed up. Not coherently, perhaps, but when the Liberal Democrats were the beneficiaries of protest votes it was never coherent for disaffected people to be voting for a 'pro-European' party that believed in all sorts of liberal ideas they heartily disapproved of – just to annoy Tony Blair or Margaret Thatcher.

TOXIC INGREDIENT

Disaffection is potentially a toxic ingredient in politics. It can cause people historically to vote Liberal Democrat but it can also cause some people to vote BNP. Farage cleverly emphasised the inability of former BNP members to become UKIP candidates and so made voting for a party without policies or principles socially acceptable. UKIP thus became as respectable as the Liberal Democrats had always been, but with the huge advantage of not being part of the government.

Disturbingly, the current disaffection may well be more existential than temporary. Before the crash, some (notably Stephen Haseler) warned that we were no longer really paying our way in the world. Manufacturing has moved to Asia (not without disturbing consequences). High technology and R&D haven't disappeared from these shores but are more obviously prominent in the US west coast.

What, then, are we for? One UKIP supporter was asked to name anything in Britain they were proud of. The answer was 'the Past'.

The phenomenon can be termed 'negativity'. 'Nothing works' as Ian Hislop put it when talking up Cameron's Conservatives before the last election. And in some ways, that is still true. The roads are potholed, the pavements are uneven, the streetlights are going out at midnight. Banks lose your money and don't give you loans or pay interest. And the digital divide means that some services are becoming harder to access unless you have one of those American phones, which don't seem to work as phones. Meanwhile, the BBC is full of lefties and the family viewing stars we used to snigger at or with turn out to have been criminals.

The Daily Mail – the country's most 'negativist' institution – is full of it day after day. We're all going to hell in a hand cart and the posh boys at the top of the Tory Party don't care – in fact wouldn't know how to. Negativists don't mention Enoch Powell only because he is no longer with us.

It would, however, be a mistake to think that the county council elections were all about the rise of UKIP and the consequences of negativity. Despite the media coverage – due in part to the failure of party HQ to grab the positive headlines – in some areas we actually did well.

We went up in Cumbria, Oxfordshire and Shropshire, and more or less stayed the same in places like Somerset and Hertfordshire. It is too early to tell why there were satisfactory results in some places alongside the disasters elsewhere but it is not just a north-south divide.

These are, of course, local elections, although as ever apparently only MPs – preferably representing London seats – have the brains to say anything sensible about county council elections on broadcast media.

Local issues will have had an effect. It is likely that, where there were co-ordinated countywide campaigns, we were more successful – this clearly needs more research.

SHEER EFFORT

Equally, sheer effort played a part. It is not true to say where we work we win. It is, however, true to say where we don't work we don't win. Doorstep canvassing, plentiful good quality leaflets and direct mail talking about local issues that matter will have an effect. Tabloids and leaflets that don't show the candidate working hard for the electorate will have been less useful.

At this stage, I can talk only about my own experience, where I found myself being targeted by the Greens after they unfortunately won a seat in one half of my division two years ago. They were boasting on the internet about their impending success. Caroline Lucas came to St Albans to help unseat me and their new leader (please supply name) boasted on the Today programme about their impending gain in Hertfordshire. Watford Greens were all set to move over to St Albans until my Watford colleagues – bless them - turned their fire on their only county councillor.

I stood on my record, delivered until I couldn't walk and canvassed my heart out. I also used Connect – canvassing on my mobile phone in the rain – enjoying the subtlety of the various categories to inform targeted messages and remind people that I had stood

up for them for 20 years.

The triumph, though, belongs to others – the Conservatives for delivering so many local policy disasters and to helpers for doing the groundwork year after year so that the vote came out and came out for us.

What of the future? The party is still not geared up towards the next set of elections. The unfortunate and demoralising Clegg letter was clearly obsessed with 2015 and parliamentary elections. Only MPs matter – European elections, 2013 and 2014 local government elections and anything else are just means to the ultimate goal: Westminster representation.

Until the party genuinely applauds local government service in its own right and the campaigning needed to make that work, we will not have the secure base needed to make Westminster success a possibility. Irony indeed.

Nor is the campaigns department yet ready to fight the next war. Too often, well-planned local campaigns this year were disrupted by last-minute demands from party HQ geared towards 2015 success – demands that cut across existing campaigns and which involved additional materials, usually pointless tabloids, which would do little to enhance local government success.

More positively, Connect is here to stay. But it has too many bugs, some flagged up twelve months ago but still not sorted. For instance, it doesn't really handle blocks of flats and this has to be sorted for the London elections next year. But it does save time on polling day and does allow more sophisticated approaches to a complex electorate.

It is not a solution – just a tool. Fundamentally it comes down to work. If you're not willing to start campaigning in June and get out on the doorstep week in week out, please don't apply.

And ultimately in the long run, that may be why we will win and UKIP won't.

Chris White is a Liberal Democrat county councillor in Hertfordshire

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LINING THE POCKETS OF AFRICA'S ELITE

Giving 0.7% of GDP as foreign aid is simplistic. Too much ends up in the wrong hands but actions that cost little would achieve more, says Rebecca Tinsley

The UK government wants to cut aid to South Africa because it is rich enough to fund its own development.

This follows last year's controversy about India. Our images of both countries have been formed by decades of emotive charity appeals featuring skeletal children. Not surprisingly, we struggle to make sense of India's space programme and President Zuma allegedly spending \$50m of government funds on his private residence.

Sadly, the aid debate is reduced to choices that reflect our ignorance. Put simply, people assume all Africans and Indians are poor so we must give them aid. If you are against ring-fencing the aid budget, the argument goes, you must be a racist.

Few ask if we direct aid to the right places, how we choose the recipients or where the funds end up. Should aid go direct into the bank accounts of African governments in the form of 'budget support' (which represents 25% of the UK aid budget) or via the notoriously ineffective EU fund, or via charities doing UK-funded projects?

UK Aid now allocates funds according to how many poor people live in a country, not what proportion of people are poor. So Ethiopia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Yemen get an increasing share of the cake because they have large populations, while poor little Burundi, where a much higher proportion of people live in astonishing poverty, is axed completely. Meanwhile, some argue that our priority should be to make sure democratic successes like Ghana don't fail, ensuring there are credible African role models.

Which 'Africans' do we want to help? Does budget support reach the masses living in dire, rural poverty where malaria and opportunistic infections kill three children every minute because of generations of malnutrition? Or does budget support actually benefit the African elite, rich beyond belief?

In many African countries, there is a greater gap between the assets of a rural farmer and a cabinet minister than there is between an American minimum wage supermarket self-stacker and Bill Gates.

Which Africans do we listen to? The ones whom their rulers deliberately keep illiterate, poor and terrified of authority? Or the rulers to whom we give legitimacy and power with our aid – a point made by the West African writer Sorios Samur – the same elites who tell us colonialism is still to blame, six decades after their nation became independent?

In the words of the Oxford economist Paul Collier, "The leaders of many of the poorest countries in the world are themselves among the global superrich. They like things the way they are, and so it pays to

keep their citizens uneducated and ill-informed."

Advocates of UK aid policies like Bob Geldof argue that, although the elite skims our bounty, it is still worth sending because some trickles down to those in need (an argument rejected by most Liberals, and economists, when used to justify tax cuts for the wealthy in our own society).

Regrettably, after 60 years of 'development' and \$3tn of aid, there is little evidence of improvement in most African nations. Take Kenya, where living standards are lower than when the British left. In July 2010, Kenyan MPs voted themselves a 25% pay rise and a year-end bonus of £29,500. They earn £8,920 a month, compared with a Kenyan farm worker who will earn £25 and a city worker who averages £50.

REMINDED OF APARTHEID

Richard Dowden, of the Royal African Society, says of Kenya, "The ruling elite presides with thoughtless complacency over one of the most unequal societies on earth... it reminds me of South Africa under apartheid."

Or Nigeria, another very wealthy country, and yet receiving a growing proportion of UK aid. Human Rights Watch found the governor of one state had a daily travel allowance of \$60,000. Another spent \$25m of public money on his private mansion. No wonder 33 out of 36 state governors are being investigated for corruption. And no wonder there is a West African expression, "as stupid as a white man".

Nigeria's own anti-corruption agency believes \$400bn in oil revenues has been stolen by the elite in the last fifty years. For those who subscribe to trickle down theories of aid, Catholic Relief Services has calculated that 80% of the benefits of Nigeria's oil go to 1% of the population. Yet this vastly wealthy nation continues to get UK aid, frittered away on status-boosting football stadia and power plants that will never function.

Nigeria is not the only massively wealthy oil producer heaving with poor people: seven members of the Angolan presidential elite are worth more than \$100m each. In Angola, 13% of the health budget is spent providing medical evacuation services for 100 ruling families. And the vast majority of Angolans have no idea their nation even has oil because, as the NGO Global Witness reports, half of its GDP vanishes.

As a local journalist asked, why should the president of Uganda have a bigger jet than the Japanese prime minister? Why was the West happy to support the Central African Republic ruler, Bokasa, when he spent 21% of his wretched nation's GNP on a ceremony proclaiming himself emperor? Why should we give aid to governments that are not willing to let their

own citizens see how they spend it? And why should we invest in countries where the local superrich will not themselves invest, preferring to stash their money in London?

Why do we send aid to regimes that spend more on security (which usually means internal repression) and defence, than on health and education? In Zambia, the budget for AIDS was half what the government spent building villas for visiting heads of state attending a conference. Why didn't middle class Ethiopians donate to help their starving countrymen? Because they knew it would be stolen by the regime.

Alas, UK policy is not what it seems. Our military or 'security' interests have as much bearing on aid allocation as they did during the Cold War, when we turned a blind eye to human rights abusers because they were "on our side" against the communist threat.

Occasionally, when a corruption scandal hits the media, the UK will announce it is punishing the errant regime by cutting or suspending aid. This is purely for domestic UK consumption. Whatever sum has been 'cut' is quietly shifted to bilateral defence or security training programmes, away from public scrutiny, building the military and intelligence capacity of nations seen as reliable, or to whom we or the Americans have rendered suspects. The UK is following the US in directing spending through our defence and security budgets, thereby avoiding oversight, monitoring or evaluation by our elected officials.

PEACEKEEPERS IN HELLHOLES

We are also paying Africans to fight our wars for us. Public opinion is increasingly intolerant of foreign adventures costing British lives and limbs. Hence our aid to Nigeria will continue, one way or other, while 5,000 Nigerians serve as peacekeepers in the world's hellholes. Ditto Kenya, which sent 5,000 soldiers to fight the Horn of Africa's al Qaeda franchise, al Shabab, in Somalia; and which also provides a hot weather training facility for British troops in northern Kenya. Ugandan and Ethiopian troops are also keeping us safe, fighting in Somalia, in this new form of aid-mercenary trade off. Pakistan, sending 8,000 men to be UN peacekeepers, Bangladesh and India sending 8,800 apiece, and Nepal with 4,500, all bear a disproportionate burden, compared to Portugal, which contributes two people to the UN's 92,000 peacekeepers.

The development economist William Easterly reminds us that empowering local security services and militias doesn't always go as we intended, as if 'blowback' from training and equipping al Qaeda wasn't enough:

"During Guatemala's civil war USAID gave aid to train rural leaders in order to give more political voice to peasants. At the same time the CIA supported the military's counter insurgency campaign, which suppressed peasant activism in the name of fighting Marxist guerrillas. A later study found that the US-trained Guatemala military murdered more than 750

"African governments will never be accountable to their citizens until everyone, including the rich, pays tax"

of the US-trained rural leaders."

Our policies follow in the footsteps of the Pentagon Military Education and Training Program and the African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance Program, the latter ostensibly a response to the Rwandan genocide,

although to date none of those trained have helped stop human rights abuses anywhere in Africa. Not surprisingly, the US is especially keen to shore up the military capacity of West Africa: America gets 15% of its oil from Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea and Angola.

What is the alternative to our current approach to aid, which rests on the simplistic notion that giving 0.7% of our GDP is a credible or effective policy? As the Zambian economist Dambisa Moyo argues, African governments will never be accountable to their citizens until everyone, including the rich, pays tax.

A good use of aid is Rwanda, where the UK funded a £24m project to strengthen the local tax authority. Now, Rwandan tax revenues raise £24m a month. Paying tax gives people an incentive to demand transparency and accountability of their rulers; and it strengthens the all-important growth of civil society.

Christian Aid estimates tax-dodging foreign companies operating in developing countries could provide £100bn a year if subjected to local tax. As the writer Michela Wrong says, donors would do better targeting Western companies, lawyers and banks who enable tax evasion.

The rich world gives its own agriculture \$1bn a day in subsidies, making it impossible for African farmers to compete. In the words of the Ugandan journalist, Andrew Mwenda, "The best thing the West can do is nothing."

We might achieve more supporting local agents of change rather than imposing whatever is currently fashionable in Western development circles. We could also learn what works elsewhere. For instance, Brazil and Mexico have been paying poor parents to keep their children in school: the result has been a breathtaking fall in the poverty rate.

The greatest improvements in the UN's Millennium Development Goals are due to distributing bed nets and training people how to use them, and by skilling traditional birth attendants in the basics of midwifery. Building latrines and ensuring girls have some privacy when they pee also has a big effect on how many females stay in school. None of these successful but simple ideas require the presence of foreign aid workers, their ubiquitous four-wheel drives and expensive infrastructures. Hence they aren't too popular with the big aid agencies.

The last word goes to Kenyan journalist Kwamchetsi Makakho: "Fundamentally the West doesn't care enough about Africa to pay too much attention to how money is spent. It wants to be seen to do the right thing."

Rebecca Tinsley founded the human rights group Waging Peace (www.WagingPeace.info)

WELL, THAT DIDN'T WORK

The manifest failure of coalition economic policy endangers Liberal Democrat MPs' jobs, yet they seem surprisingly unengaged in the debate about how to move on, say Prateek Buch and Geoff Payne, introducing the forthcoming SLF conference

With the economy still reeling from an unprecedented depression, there is an acute need to address fundamental questions about the distribution of ownership and the role of power in our society.

On 13 July, the Social Liberal Forum (SLF) will hold its third annual conference in a city with a great Liberal tradition. The location is apt, given the theme of the conference; it is close to the birthplace of the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers, which set up a workers cooperative in 1844 and provided the foundation for the cooperative movement. Manchester remains the home of the Co-op group.

The intention behind this conference is to encourage a debate between speakers who have different perspectives and opinions. We have an outstanding array of speakers from secretaries of state to leading academic thinkers and activists – all enquiring about ownership, democracy and power in the political economy.

The overall theme will be 'Democracy and Ownership – where does the power lie?' The idea for this theme arose from a fringe meeting organised by CentreForum at the September 2012 federal party conference on 'What is Cleggism?' The meeting itself was unusual, as this is the only time we can recall a debate where the Liberal Democrat leadership orthodoxy has been tackled head on by another Liberal Democrat. In this case, it was David Howarth's contribution – heckled by Jeremy Browne MP – which you can still see on YouTube (<http://tinyurl.com/d589kua>).

David Howarth made the point that, while we are all agreed that Liberalism is about dispersing power, this is often not actually what we are doing in government. One very interesting example, in a criticism of Richard Reeves's Demos pamphlet *A Liberal Inside*, came when he pointed out that Liberals should support a redistribution of wealth (and not just social mobility), because wealth concentrates power and power concentrates wealth – Rupert Murdoch was cited as an example.

Since then, we were struck how, at our conference last year, we supported a radical motion on industrial democracy but, once we returned to our constituencies, we soon found that it was the Tories that were dominating government policy with their Beecroft report proposals about taking power away from workers.

PERNICIOUS TREND

So that invited the question, where does the power lie? On this topic, not with us it seems! The way in which

power works in the coalition is a key topic in itself. But more fundamentally, why would any worker want to support a government that takes away their rights? How do governments and big business get away with taking power away from people? And are the Liberal Democrats the party to do something to put this pernicious trend in reverse?

The question of power and how it is exercised is fundamental to the political economy and it is right therefore that this is the theme of our conference. One of the speakers we invited suggested this should be a weekend conference, which we would love to do but it would probably be overambitious.

The conference starts with a session on the economy – the key test of the coalition government's record in office. We are delighted that Vince Cable will be our speaker for this session. The conference falls just two weeks after the government announces its spending review, in which there are likely to be some very painful cuts in departmental spending, so Vince's perspective will be of acute interest.

The reason for these cuts is largely down to the failure of government economic policy to bring about growth that would help reduce the budget deficit. Vince Cable's previous call for increased capital spending to remedy this prompted a budget commitment of £3bn at the last budget, which is hardly going to make any difference. Given the failure of economic policy even to meet its own benchmark of not being downgraded by the ratings agencies, there is a surprising lack of debate in the party at the moment about what should be done about it.

It is true that the SLF and Liberator have looked at alternatives such as 'Plan C', but the parliamentary party and the MEPs are not joining in the debate. From the point of view of self-interest alone, this is getting hard to fathom as it is their seats that are on the line and there is little prospect of any meaningful growth in time for the elections in 2014 and 2015.

Then we have concurrent sessions on industrial democracy, media ownership, and empowering local communities. Speakers include Deborah Hargreaves from the High Pay Centre, Janice Turner, Evan Harris, and Gordon Lishman (co-author of *The Theory and Practice of Community Politics*).

On the key issue of industrial democracy, it is striking how it is that, in the UK, the John Lewis partnership has been so successful and, in Spain, the Mondragon worker cooperatives have continued to be even more successful in even more challenging circumstances. Yet at the time of writing, it looks like the recently announced privatisation of Royal Mail

will provide only 10% of shares to the employees. Should the Liberal Democrats be doing better in winning this argument?

The media have been in the headlines, with the Leveson recommendations currently being fought over in government. It is noticeable that many newspapers are in the market of publicly humiliating people, of peddling public hatred and of going to remarkable lengths to get their stories, which often present an unfair distortion of what really happened.

GROSS VIOLATION

Scandal sells. Imagine if the state did such a thing. It would be considered a gross violation of civil liberties, and rightly so. No less so, surely, if this guilty party is the private sector rather than the state? The intention in supporting Leveson is to protect people's civil liberties from an intrusive press, but there is obviously a debate on the ethics of how much power the state should have to enforce the new regulations. Where there is little debate is on who owns the press and what if anything should be done about it – this will be covered in a session on media ownership with Evan Harris and John Leech MP.

At a previous SLF conference, we compared the Tory idea of the Big Society with the Liberal idea of Community Politics. The Liberal Democrat leadership claims the two are roughly the same and we should be pleased that power is being devolved. Yet the sight of Michael Gove visiting a school in Haringey and telling parents that, whether they like it or not, their school is to become an academy rather looks like “the gentleman in Whitehall knows best”, to borrow a phrase. Is Tory ‘localism’ centralisation under a different name? And does the Liberal Democrat leadership agree with it? This will be explored in a panel discussion on regional and local government power.

We understand there to be two different visions of localism. The Liberal Democrat vision – supported by our membership-driven conference – supports localism for local government. We believe in democratic localism. The Tory version is *laissez-faire* localism – power dispersed from the centre into the ether, for the already-powerful to Hoover up.

Democracy is not really part of the Tory vision; power goes to whoever steps forward, and then they get on with it. In practice, this is power to the middle classes (and increasingly only the richest) and to moneyed interests, working against social mobility. The wealthy and savvy have the confidence, knowledge, money and drive to get what they want, leaving the rest of society behind – not a liberal outcome.

In the afternoon, we have the second annual William Beveridge Memorial Lecture addressed by Steve Webb. Steve is a founding member of the SLF and we are delighted about the pension reforms he has brought in.

The welfare cuts implemented by his department are far more troubling. We very much appreciate that he has agreed to speak to us on reforming the welfare state and the Q&A session should be interesting to

“The Tory version of localism is laissez faire – power dispersed from the centre into the ether, for the already-powerful to Hoover up”

say the least! Now is the time for Liberals to think seriously about what is possible in terms of modernising the welfare state, not least as Nick Clegg has made it his top priority.

There are more concurrent sessions on mutualism in public services with Norman Lamb, and on

redistributing wealth with Susan Kramer and David Howarth.

The former will address the need to balance the welcome drive towards employee empowerment and user- and provider-oriented services with democratic accountability and social justice. The latter will tackle the crucial matter of releasing small and medium-sized enterprises from the suffocation of a failed banking system and the overbearing power of oligopolistic big business.

We end with two plenary sessions looking at the overall theme of the conference. Economist Maria Mazzucato will join John Pugh MP in discussing the role of power and voice in driving inequality. SLF director Prateek Buch will then join co-chairs Gareth Epps and Naomi Smith to summarise the Social Liberal Forum's perspective on ownership, democracy and where power lies.

Prateek Buch is director of the Social Liberal Forum and Geoff Payne its conference organiser



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SETT TO FAIL

As the government proceeds with its counter-productive policy of culling badgers, opposition is mounting, says John Leston

Night-time shooters, qualified to Deer Stalker Level 1, firing at a distance of up to 60 metres, operating from supposedly secret locations, aiming at badgers (noticeably smaller than deer!) while being harried by large numbers of well-informed, highly organised and irate protesters. What could possibly go wrong?

This summer, pilot badger culls, the ministerial responsibility of Liberal Democrat David Heath, are scheduled to begin in Gloucestershire and Somerset, or Dorset if one of the two original choices drops out.

This is a pointless, futile policy likely to contribute nothing to its supposed aim, a minor reduction in bovine TB. It is a policy built on assertion and bluster. It's claimed foundations are the essence of policy-led evidence rather than evidence-led policy.

FINGERS OF BLAME

The problem the cull is meant to fix is the incidence of bovine TB in cattle. The number slaughtered as a result of bTB has increased in recent years and farmers are pointing the finger of blame at badgers. That there has been an increase in the reported incidence of bTB is true. But the evidence paints a very different picture to that portrayed by David Heath, acting as 'bagman' for the National Farmers Union.

Firstly, whilst not wishing to minimise the impact of bTB, it is not true to claim, as DEFRA does, that it is "the most pressing animal health problem facing the UK today". In terms of the number of cattle being prematurely slaughtered, bTB is responsible for only the seventh greatest number (38,000 a year), well behind, say, mastitis (90,000).

Nor is it soaring out of control. The number slaughtered has grown, not because the incidence of bTB has increased, but because testing is now more widespread. In the entire period from 2001 to 2012, the proportion of cattle tested that were slaughtered due to a positive bTB result has remained unchanged in the range 0.4% to 0.6%.

Secondly, while it is likely that badgers are responsible for some of the incidence of bTB, it is laughable to maintain they are a major contributor. Therefore, killing 70% of them (the objective of the culls) could not have more than a minute impact on the problem. Indeed, there is clear scientific evidence that it could even make the problem worse.

If the badgers truly were to blame, how do we explain that:

- Levels of bTB increased dramatically only as farmers began restocking after the 2001 foot and mouth outbreak, when movement controls were relaxed, much stock was imported and TB testing was suspended;
- bTB has been declining recently at comparable rates in Ireland (which has a savage policy of

badger culling) and Northern Ireland (which does not);

- There are badgers in Scotland (which is essentially TB free) but not in Anglesey (which is not);
- Royal Veterinary College research says: "Our findings reveal that direct contacts between badgers and cattle at pasture are surprisingly rare, despite ample opportunity for interactions to occur, suggesting that the two species may be ignoring or even actively avoiding one another."

Faced with such facts, even the DEFRA Chief Vet is reduced to saying, "We're *pretty sure* that a lot of the spread of the enlargement of the area which has high TB occurrence is *probably* because of the spread through badgers *or wildlife...*"

No, the key causes of bTB are clearly cattle-to-cattle transmission and poor bio-security practices on farms. The bTB test is notoriously unreliable and, as a consequence, over a fifth of new bTB cases are first discovered at slaughter, the animals having come from officially TB-free herds. The situation is not helped by some farmers switching ear-tags of animals that tested positive so that other, less valuable, ones are killed in their place while the infected animal remains in the herd. The industrial nature of farming almost guarantees a significant incidence of bTB. As one scientific paper notes, "Pathogenesis studies indicate that bovine TB is principally a respiratory infection and the majority of infections are thought to occur via 'direct' aerosol transmission between animals in close proximity". 'Close proximity' is a good description of how most large-scale cattle herds in the UK are kept, especially those over-wintering in sheds.

OFFERING A CARROT

So, how have we reached the point where around 5,000 'protected' mammals are to be killed and maimed in a six-week period this year and where, if the pilot is deemed a 'success', around 100,000 badgers will be slaughtered across the country out of a total national population of about 300,000? David Heath states, mendaciously, that the policy is 'science-led'.

Interesting then, that Professor John Bourne, who conducted the landmark Randomised Badger Control Trial (RBCT) and now strongly opposes culling, is quoted as saying, "I think the most interesting observation was made to me by a senior politician who said, 'Fine, John, we accept your science, but we have to offer the farmers a carrot. And the only carrot we can possibly give them is culling badgers.'"

Interesting, also, that DEFRA has failed to rise to multiple challenges "to name a single independent scientist that supports the cull" while innumerable experts have gone on record as opposing it on scientific grounds. These scientists echo the bottom-line conclusion of the £50 million RBCT, that "badger

culling can make no meaningful contribution to cattle TB control in Britain. Indeed, some policies under consideration are likely to make matters worse rather than better.”

Even DEFRA concedes it expects that only a 16 per cent reduction in bTB would be achieved after years of culling 70 per cent of badgers. In fact, the policy could make things even worse due to a perturbation effect, whereby culling results in badgers fleeing and so moving into new areas, which they would not do if left undisturbed.

There is no scientific justification for the cull policy. Instead, it is a political sop to a farming industry that is unprepared to face up to its own responsibilities and failings. It is also a question of money. The pilot culls this year are designed not to see if killing badgers will reduce bTB but only to see if it is feasible to kill badgers ‘humanely’ (!) through free shooting (at night) rather than by trapping and shooting or by investing in vaccination instead. The cost of free shooting is estimated at around £300 per sq. km. compared with about £2,500 per sq. km for either trapping and shooting or badger vaccination. Essentially, in these times of austerity, the coalition is interested in pointless animal murder on the cheap.

But amazingly, the policy will certainly not be cheap. Not least because, for the two cull zones alone, DEFRA is budgeting for £4 million to be spent on policing costs due to the high level of opposition to the policy. It is the policy of a government better equipped to shoot itself in the foot even than to shoot our wildlife. Also remarkable is that DEFRA’s Impact Assessment in ‘support’ of the policy shows that costs will exceed benefits; it would be more cost effective to do nothing. Clearly, David Heath sees the Hippocratic dictum ‘first, do no harm’ as having no relevance to government policy-making.

RIOT POLICE AND HELICOPTERS

It doesn’t have to be this way. There are alternatives to murdering our badgers pointlessly and the sadness is, if we let the coalition have its way, there will be no incentive for it to pursue those alternatives.

In the short term, a policy of badger vaccination would be more effective and could well be less expensive. Riot police and helicopters are unlikely to be required to prevent protesters interfering with badgers being given the occasional injection. Oral vaccines are also close to readiness. The Welsh government abandoned its original plan for culling and has adopted vaccination instead. Recent research suggests that the efficacy of vaccination is in excess of 70%, more than enough to reduce the risk of badger-to-cattle transmission very significantly, and to protect badgers from cattle-to-badger transmission. One cost estimate, from the Conservative Bow Group no less, estimated total culling costs at £5,100 per sq. km. whereas badger vaccination would cost £3,400 per sq. km.

In the longer term, the objective should be to field-trial cattle vaccinations in UK conditions and then

“There is no scientific justification for the cull policy”

licence them. Such vaccines are available but many regulatory barriers stand in their way. Currently, EU regulations will not permit the export of cattle or cattle products from vaccinated animals

as it is not possible to differentiate between those that are vaccinated and those that are infected. However, recently a so-called viable DIVA (differentiation of infected from vaccinated animals) test has been developed. Therefore, the efforts of DEFRA should be on pushing the EU to change its rules quickly instead of complacently claiming it will take ten years and that in the meantime we should simply massacre our native wildlife for the sake of not efficacy but of being seen to be doing something, anything.

OPPOSITION WILL BE MASSIVE

If the culls go ahead, the opposition will be massive. Almost a quarter of a million people have signed the official e-petition. That, in turn, triggered a Commons debate, which saw an overwhelming majority against the policy. But given the stubbornness of Heath and Environment Secretary Owen Paterson, it is likely that it will take lawful direct action to disrupt and then stop the killing. For those who care about animal welfare, the cull zones will be like by-elections to Liberal activists back in the day. Forces from around the country will be able to concentrate on specific geographic areas, ably advised and informed by www.stopthecull.net.

Already, hunt saboteur groups from hundreds of miles away are in Gloucestershire and Somerset, mapping setts and preparing to fight this cruelty. They are joined by a massive range of local (e.g. Gloucestershire Against Badger Shooting) and national groups (e.g. Badger Trust, RSPCA, Save Me). Between them, the opponents will deploy every conceivable form of opposition. One demonstration, on a single day last year, cost Gloucestershire Constabulary £62,000 to police; the £500,000 per zone per year policing budget is already looking woefully inadequate.

There is a Liberal Democrats Against the Badger Cull Facebook group. A motion opposing the cull was passed by the Western Counties Regional Conference. Liberal Democrat Klara Sudbury on Gloucestershire County Council recently proposed a successful motion condemning the cull.

If it comes to it, I hope many Liberator readers will join those of us protesting in the cull zones. The political heritage that played so strong a role in the direct action of the Stop the Tour campaigns surely has a part to play in stopping this madness. After all, as Ghandi said, “The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated”.

John Leston is a former Liberal councillor and was chair of the Young Liberals 1979-80

LIVE LONG AND PROSPER?

An ageing society is the biggest challenge facing social policy, but the government's response is inadequate, says Claire Tyler

We are all well aware of the demographic shift taking place at home and in many other developed countries across the world – people are living longer, having fewer children and so the population is ageing. Perhaps not so apparent are the implications of this, not just in terms of their scale but in how pervasive an impact they will have on so many aspects of our lives.

I was lucky enough to be a member of the House of Lords Select Committee on Public Service and Demographic Change, which recently published its report *Ready for Ageing?* Despite coming out on the same day as the new Pope was announced – so not exactly a quiet news day – it attracted considerable media attention and continues to do so.

Ageing is arguably our biggest social policy challenge and is happening now – our population aged 85+ will increase by 40% in this decade. The report identifies how England will see a 50% rise in the number of those aged 65+ and a 100% increase in those aged 85+ between 2010 and 2030.

In a nutshell, the Select Committee warned that the government is “woefully underprepared” for ageing. The Committee said that our rapidly ageing population will have a huge impact on our society and public services and, unless government and all political parties address this, the gift of longer life could lead to a series of crises.

For far too many of our older citizens, their latter days are dogged by fear and insecurity. For example, this week I spoke in the Lords second reading debate on the Care Bill and I pointed out that public confidence in the social care sector's ability to treat older people with dignity is now very low. In a recent survey, only 26% of the public said they were confident that older people currently receiving social care are treated with dignity and respect.

Taking part in the Select Committee's deliberations, I was struck by the evidence I listened to from people working in a huge variety of sectors and industries witnessing this change taking shape. There is no question that the challenges an ageing population poses to our health and social care services are immense but the issue doesn't stop there. From housing development to product design, private equity release, retirement and employer attitudes, an ageing population affects many of the most fundamental aspects of how the world around us works.

The astonishing medical progress that has been made in the past century and the ability to live a fuller life for longer is clearly something to be celebrated. Nevertheless, the need for change in the way we plan our lives and in how public services are delivered should not be underestimated. A longer life offers benefits for many, but to help people sustain a good quality of life over more years will require big changes in employment practices, pensions, health and social

care services.

Above all, the challenge of an ageing population requires forward planning and holistic vision. Whilst some sectors and markets will have a key role to play in providing the innovation needed to meet new demand, in my view the long-sighted comprehensive vision is the kind that can only come from government. Other countries such as Australia have done this, so why can't we?

RADICALLY DIFFERENT MODEL

An ageing society will greatly increase the number of people with long-term health conditions, and health and social care services will need a radically different model of care to support such people in their own homes and in the community, and so avoid needless admissions to hospital. The Committee concluded that our current model of health and social care provision is failing older people now, and is inappropriate to care well for the many more older people there will be with chronic health conditions. This will require a fundamental shift in healthcare services and the integration of health and social care systems and their funding.

High on the list of changes is the need for more preventative measures to avoid the need for acute care, meaning a 24-hour health and social care system, the provision of care at home wherever possible, and effective collaboration between the third sector and public services. We heard from groups advocating for older people and experts in the field that older people in hospital could very often have avoided being admitted had they received better co-ordinated care at an earlier stage. This was brought home to us by some truly harrowing tales of older people receiving disjointed or poor quality care too late in the day and totally lacking compassion.

Thankfully, this kind of horrific experience does not reflect the majority of the NHS and social care services, and indeed we heard encouraging examples of innovative integrated care overcoming the structural barriers, focusing on the patients needs and making best use of the resources available.

Take the Torbay and Southern Devon Health and Care Trust. Torbay has co-located multidisciplinary teams of occupational therapists, physiotherapists, social workers and social care professionals, community nursing teams and community matrons, all of whom work with clusters of GP practices. This enables GPs and the public to reach the whole team through a single point of contact and, although the Trust is required to account for its spending to its different sources separately, local decision-making has allowed for access to both health and social care funding streams. Leeds City Council is also doing some fantastic work, encouraging collaboration through co-locating adult social care workers with community NHS staff, centred around GPs practices and through

collective spending.

So it is possible. But as too many witnesses said in their evidence, they are doing this despite, rather than because of, existing structures and funding arrangements. Joint commissioning and pooled budgets can clearly help. But surely it can't be beyond the wit of man – and woman – to devise a system that positively encourages high-quality and integrated care with a far greater focus in prevention and early intervention.

SERIOUS DEFECTS

For many people, there is a risk that a longer life could worsen the existing problem of insufficient savings and pensions. Whilst fully recognising that this was a hard sell to the electorate, the Committee felt that people should be able to work later if they wish to, often in part-time work and supported by retraining where appropriate. The Committee also said that private sector employers, government and the financial services industry must together tackle the serious defects in defined contribution pensions so people get a clearer idea of what they can expect to get from their pension savings.

The Committee suggests that people may need to use their housing assets to support their longer lives and urges the government to work with the financial sector to support the growth of a safe, easy-to-understand equity release market, with low fees and high quality standards.

JOINED-UP APPROACH

As the Select Committee Report readily acknowledges, the government has made great progress in some very key areas affecting older people, led by the work of Norman Lamb and Steve Webb in reforming social care and state pensions respectively. Both Steve and Norman gave excellent evidence to the Committee. However, evidence of a joined-up approach across government was sorely lacking.

We felt strongly that the government as a whole needs to assess what preparing for an ageing population means across the piece. The government has not caused these challenges and it cannot be expected to find solutions to all of them. But the government is uniquely placed to lead and inform public debate on an issue with wide implications for individuals, communities and the economy, and for public finances and services.

The Select Committee Report contained an interesting (well, to Whitehall watchers anyway!) but unreported section on the need for the government to adopt a more joined-up approach to ageing. It called on the government to publish a white paper setting out its vision for public services in an ageing society, as well as stimulating a wider public debate about what individuals, families and employers should be doing to prepare for a longer old age and the changes needed to attitudes, policies and services so people are best able to benefit from a longer life.

“The government is woefully underprepared for ageing”

Frankly, a green paper would be fine too. But without co-ordinated action, prospects look bleak. Thinking into the future, for the current generation of young people struggling with unemployment and getting their first foot on the housing ladder,

what will be the combined impact of the looming pensions crisis, the NHS spending shortfall (according to the Nuffield Trust, assuming unprecedented efficiency gains, the NHS in England will see a funding shortfall of £34 billion by 2021-22) and the social care emergency? This issue is not about a single term of government and it is perhaps that kind of thinking that has handicapped progress over so many years. This requires a long-term perspective and should be on the agendas of all political parties. Indeed, it would be interesting to know what UKIP has to say on the subject!

The Committee concluded that “The Government must set out in a White Paper the implications of an ageing society with a vision for living well and independently. It should set out how our health and social care services, our pension arrangements and our practices must change to achieve this. All political parties should be expected to consider the wider implications of the ageing society in their manifestos for the next general election for the 2015 election”.

Finally, the Committee recommended that whichever party is in government after the election should, within six months, establish two cross-party commissions to respond to the ageing society. One would work with employers and financial services providers to improve pensions, savings and equity release; the other would analyse how the health and social care system and its funding should change to serve the needs of our ageing population. Both should report in 12 months.

This is not a distant issue; our population is older now and will get more so over the next decade. The public is entitled to an honest conversation about the implications. Liberal Democrats should be taking the lead.

We all know that that older people are more likely to vote and often feel neglected in policy debates. Quite rightly, we as a party have put huge emphasis on early years. However, this does not preclude us from having a clear message for older people that we care about the quality of the latter stages of their lives. I'd like to see Liberal Democrats leading this debate as part of our commitment to social justice and a fairer, more compassionate society.

Claire Tyler is a Liberal Democrat member of the House of Lords

TRAVELS THROUGH COALITIONLAND

Michael Meadowcroft applauds Alex Marsh's collection of incisive essays about the Liberal Democrats in coalition

This is A Good Book. Occasionally, when each of us fears that we are the last Liberal left in captivity, we find a kindred soul. Similarly, when we bemoan the lack of intellectual rigour amongst Liberals and despair at the lack of publications helping party members and activists to analyse the coalition's programme from a party point of view, along comes Alex Marsh with *Travels through Coalitionland*.

This is a collection of his blogs from June 2010 to January 2013 and is an astute and often challenging commentary on the past two and half years, written from the perspective of someone "at the maximal social liberal end of the spectrum of views within the Liberal Democrat party." Helpfully, his sources are all referenced. His day job is as Professor of Public Policy at the University of Bristol.

POSITIONING THE PARTY

In using Liberal rather than Liberal Democrat wherever possible, I am following Nick Clegg's example – see for example his forward to the party's 2011 policy paper *Facing the Future* – and this is important in the context of much of Alex Marsh's analysis. He is especially punctilious in making the important distinction between party and government.

All governments, national and local, require compromise. Far more than for a political party, a government's agenda is considerably driven by an unavoidable agenda of problems for which are all too often there are no solutions that fit comfortably into a party's philosophic construct. But, as Marsh points out, that need not inhibit the party from continuing to state and to campaign for its values-driven policies, even while it understands the constraints on its ministerial colleagues. He makes the positive point that internal critics of coalition policy have a key role as the conscience of the party.

It is this perception that needs continually to be put to those excellent colleagues who have given up on the struggle and have resigned. I have not noticed that the party qua party has changed and, while that is the case, the support of Liberals for it should continue. One of the problems is that of 'tone', with the Conservatives increasingly exhibiting all the vicious, exploitative and harsh kneejerk responses that are the gut reasons why we have always opposed them. I have set out on a number of occasions why the parliamentary arithmetic, and the political reality, of May 2010 required the coalition, but, as Marsh concludes, "Coalition with the Tories has proved as unpalatable as the sceptics had feared." He continues:

"There needs to be people willing to question and to refresh the collective memory of where we started and what we stand for. That is the only way for the party

to keep anchored and not drift to its demise as a pale shadow of one of the other parties."

He does, however, appear to have swallowed the myth of the *Orange Book*. It is a classic example of something that gets into the clippings and is continually regurgitated without any effort to check on the realities of it. Its emphasis was, of course, a restatement of economic liberalism but it was certainly not monolithic. The darling of the anti-Clegg commentators, Vince Cable, was one contributor and another was Steve Webb who is certainly no swivel eyed right winger – and was also a contributor to the social liberal response *Reinventing the State*. Chris Huhne and Nick Clegg also contributed to both! I am rather more relaxed than some about the economic liberals, not least because they were always vociferous in my early days in the party. Liberal Party members of the time, such as Oliver Smedley, SW Alexander and Arthur Seldon argued their case – and largely lost the argument. Similarly today, the deployment of reason and logic is the only way to deal with what I believe to be a philosophy that is unsustainable in the prevailing social conditions.

ECONOMIC OBSESSION

Alex Marsh recognises the Conservatives' economic obsession when he states that "Cameron's position would appear to be 'the answer is marketisation. Now what's the question?'" The Liberal position has always been, "The market where possible where possible, the state where necessary." And it has also differentiated itself from socialism by being aware that Liberals have a philosophy of the state, whereas socialism has a cult of the state. I've always been fascinated by the dogged awareness of their Liberal values that fed party members' determination to carry on in the early 1950s when it appeared that the Liberal Party was dead and buried. I recall asking George Allen who fought elections in 1953 and 1955 why he and his colleagues carried on. He reflected for barely a moment and replied, "Well, we couldn't stand the Tories and we didn't trust the state." Marsh similarly talks about opposing the "over mighty state."

He is rather inconsistent on the placing of the Liberal Democrats on a left-right spectrum – an axis which works only in terms of economic determinist parties, and thus excludes any Liberal party worth its salt (though not necessarily social democrats). At one point, Marsh perceives this and states that "the Liberal Democrats stand clearly in opposition to the authoritarianism of the two main parties." However, elsewhere in the book he talks about placing the Liberal Democrats towards the left of this spectrum. Of course, the left-right concept is lodged like shrapnel in the minds of the media and one cannot easily escape

from it, but party members really need to appreciate why Liberals should reject it. We ancient Liberals were brought up on Donald Wade's booklet *Our Aim and Purpose* in which he pointed out the simple truth that the far left and far right of this spectrum were very similar in their effect – public and private monopolies had the same impact – and that the 'lines' actually bent round to meet. Given the Liberal opposition to authoritarianism and to the concentration of power, we are thus at the extreme end of a very different and more relevant 'North-South' axis.

SOCIAL POLICY

Alex Marsh digs in splendidly when he comes to coalition social policy. He comments wryly that Liberal Democrats who were determined "to ensure that the vulnerable were protected... were pleasantly surprised to discover that I[an] D[uncan] S[mith] willingly stated a similar commitment." Marsh then lets fly:

"At this point I felt like shouting. It's all very splendid that we all agree that vulnerable people should not be unduly disadvantaged. But that doesn't appear to stop it from happening. Anyone who has been following the operation of the regime applying tests to determine fitness to work, and hence withdraw disability benefit, will be aware of repeated reports of injustice."

There would, of course, be some logic in measures to get individuals back into work if there were jobs, but with, in effect, five persons currently chasing every job, some of the draconian measures simply seem insensitive. It was a very traditional Conservative MP, Sir Ralph Howell, who made the point in parliament in 1995:

"There is something awful about insisting people should go on writing application letters when there was no work available... It's like forcing people to play bagatelle on a board which has no holes in it."

AMBIVALENT ABOUT CLEGG

Marsh is fairly ambivalent about Nick Clegg. He initially comments on Nick's speech at the end of the 2011 Spring Conference as being out of sync with the tenor of the rest of the debates and discussion. The speeches on other days had, he says, placed the Liberal Democrats "firmly as a progressive party of the centre-left [*sic*]." Then came Nick:

"It felt like he'd wandered in from some other conference that was happening next door and ploughed on regardless to deliver his speech, with all its classical liberal overtones."

Later he lauds Nick Clegg's speech given at Demos as being "a brilliant encapsulation of the problems facing our society."

I understand Alex Marsh's puzzlement at the variations in the message but, frankly, I am more of a Nick supporter, not least because despite his curious attachment to the "middle ground" and to "governing from the centre" – as if there was an identifiable location for such a spot, or that the party should just split the difference between Conservative and Labour, rather than determine its own position – I find his instinctive responses essentially Liberal. These range from the global issues, such as Europe and international aid, down to the parochial but significant point of supporting his office cleaner who had been disciplined for leaving propaganda leaflets on desks.

Certainly the party should not fall into the elephant trap set out by the media who have carried on a sustained and largely undeserved personal denigration of Nick Clegg. Apart from the Independent from time to time, there is no paper that gives a sympathetic hearing to the party or its leader, and members should be aware that these proprietors and editors have an agenda and it is not aimed at assisting the Liberal Democrats. Nothing would please them more than to see party members fomenting internal dissension over the leader. During all my time in the party, there have always been colleagues who fondly believed in the 'silver bullet' theory of politics: if only we had a new leader or a new slogan, we would sweep the country.

It simply isn't true, and the remarkable success at the Eastleigh by-election in unimaginably adverse conditions shows it. That victory was a consequence of over forty years of solid political campaigning and consolidation there by Liberals such as Martin Kyrle and his late wife, Margaret, and the many colleagues over the years who knew why they were Liberals and were able to convince others of its importance. It was the depth of that persuasion and commitment that was able to withstand the bitter winds of personal circumstances.

Marsh's criticism of the leadership for being distant from the grassroots has some resonance, particularly in the sense of not having come through the party organisation – a trait, alas, common to almost all leaders – and therefore often unaware of the trials and tribulations of holding a party and its structures together. It would be less significant if Nick appointed good bright party hacks who could fill the gap; Duncan Brack rather than Richard Reeves, for instance.

DEBILITATING CONCEPT

Marsh makes a clear statement of the need to combat the public's oft stated that the parties are all as bad as each other, combining it with a rejection of the debilitating concept of the 'middle ground':

"It turns politics arse about face. Political parties could stand for something identifiable, developing a policy platform rooted in their beliefs and then attempting to convince the public to vote for them. Instead we have politicians working out what tickles the swing voters' sweet spot and then working backwards to assemble a suitably alluring manifesto. If you're not careful, beliefs and principles become rather incidental to – and possibly an inconvenience in – the grubby grab for power."

Amen!

Michael Meadowcroft was a Leeds City Liberal Councillor for fifteen years and the Liberal MP for Leeds West. He has spent much of the past twenty years on missions to develop good practice in new and emerging democracies.
www.bramley.demon.co.uk

'Travels in Coalitionland: Notes of disquiet and dissent' by Alex Marsh can be downloaded at: <http://www.alexarchives.org/?p=5361>

LETTERS



NO GREEN GLOOM

Dear Liberator,

I was slightly taken aback by Gareth Epps's claim (Liberator 358) that The Green Book's authors were all sunk in gloom and despondency – particularly given another reviewer's opinion that they "write with an intelligence and passion which Labour and the Conservatives should envy. Every party needs new intellectual fuel to stay fresh, but the case made in The Green Book is positively bracing" (Matthew Spencer, Politics Home).

Still, my main reason in writing is to correct the impression Gareth gives that Liberal Democrat ministers, including Ed Davey, refused to contribute. In fact, we didn't ask any of them (apart from Nick Clegg, for a short foreword). We assumed they would be required to stick simply to explaining existing government policy, whereas we wanted contributors who were free to criticise the government's approach and also to look ahead to the next election and beyond.

I think Gareth's conclusion that "buy-in at the very top of the party ... just does not seem to be there" is warranted, at least for some elements of the leadership, but you can't blame them for not contributing to The Green Book.

Whatever the shortcomings of the book, I hope Liberator readers will agree with its central thrust – that investment in green industries is good for Britain's short-term recovery and longer-term prosperity, necessary because of the environmental challenges we face, and helpful to the party because it sharply differentiates us from the Tories – and helps us fight for their inclusion in the 2015 manifesto.

Duncan Brack
Co-editor, The Green Book

ROLE OF INDEPENDENTS

Dear Liberator,

To be candid, my political relationship with Kiron Reid has been at best hostile. However that did not stop me from considering many of the points in his review of the police and crime commissioner elections (Liberator 357) and valid points made bearing on other elections.

Yes, both for independents and minor parties – by which I mean Lib Dems as well as Liberals – the need to announce standing for election early is critical. I regret not having decided and declared to stand in last year's Liverpool mayoral elections earlier and found the late nomination disadvantaged me likewise.

The bigger issue of people belonging to a party but standing as Independents is a serious tactical question. As individuals elected to a key individual rather than collective roles, is there relevance of a party political platform or is it a serious disadvantage?

This question could equally apply to city mayors – anyone elected would have to and want to work with members of a range of political parties. Is a party platform in that context an obstacle both for getting elected and doing the job? That is a question we all need consider.

I for one utterly disagreed with the role and imposition of the police and crime commissioners and could only bring myself to spoil my ballot paper.

Cllr Steve Radford
President, the Liberal Party

NO KID GLOVES

Dear Liberator,

Trevor Smith (Liberator 358) puts forward a radical agenda – to revive the economy, save the environment, tackle inequality and reform foreign policy – and to rescue the Liberal Democrats from the coalition's unpopularity. It was inspirational, and yet, in a sense, almost irrelevant. There is no possibility that Laws will entertain such a manifesto, or Clegg campaign on it.

Thatcher routed the Tory Wets. Blair made Old Labour past history. Our own right-wing putsch was called the Clegg Coup. Its losers lack the identity, though also the stigma, of a derogatory nickname. So let us choose to be the Real Liberal Democrats. Can we fight back any more effectively than the Wets and Old Labour did?

First, we should know our enemy. Why did right-wing forces mount coups in all three parties, instead of backing a single winner? The power of wealth must play a key role. In the blue corner, old money Tories; in the red corner, new money New Labour. Charles Kennedy famously argued that Britain did not need three conservative parties. Others disagreed. Wealth sought security by buying up all the horses in the race.

So please let us hear no more from our current leadership about the Liberal Democrats being a 'family'. We should leave that sinister analogy to the Mafia. The Right does not fight with kid gloves, and nor should we.

Second, we should understand what Thatcher meant by 'wet'. The Liberal Democrats should long ago have dismissed Clegg on basic competence grounds – after a reckless pledge on tuition fees, which could not be kept, a misleadingly written Coalition Agreement, the disastrous AV campaign, and the doomed pursuit of Lords reform.

While the Tories have ruthlessly sacked their less successful leaders, the Liberal Democrats have been too 'wet' to dump a proven loser whose unpopularity drags his party down. Since the party loyalists are too scared to rock the boat, those who most strongly oppose Orange Book politics should take the lead.

Third, we must recognise the hard truth. We, the Liberal Democrats, have enabled a hard right Conservative government to set in train the marketisation of health and education, dismantling of welfare, retreat from Europe, degradation of democracy, inaction on climate change, and the abandonment of the real economy. Labour, for all its manifold faults, would have done better. A Liberal Democrat party, which for decades led progressive opinion, has now mutated into a force for harm.

Until we change our leadership, we cannot in conscience maintain business as usual. At the very least, we should stop working for a party that is facing in the wrong direction. We should demand change. To get it, we should become Liberal Democrats on strike.

David Allen
Rushcliffe

SWIVEL-EYED LOONS

Dear Liberator,

So Jeremy Paxman has spoken. The presenter of BBC2's *Newsnight* has also heard senior Tories refer to their activists as "swivel-eyed loons". Lord Feldman's denials ring a little hollow.

More woe for David Cameron then, as his party membership reportedly melts away towards UKIP. Surely those nice people with the sterling logo are more clubbable by half, maybe the thinking in the shires. Can't imagine that nice Nigel Farage supporting gay marriage, can you?

Stop laughing at the back, though. Surely all leaderships of all political parties regard their activists with suspicion. Paranoia comes with the job and the prospect of trial by Daily Mail splash headline. After all, it's not as if members are allowed to dictate policy.

Parties of government, or those returning to their constituencies to prepare for that eventuality, long ago rewrote the standing orders to stop their annual conferences actually deciding anything.

Along with the tighter security to afford protection from the 'terrorist threat' came tighter controls on attendance, to protect the platform from the party members.

The Labour movement's love of compositing, learned in the baby steps of the National Union of Students' conferences, was always used to head off swivel-eyed lefties.

Otherwise Labour would surely by now have been supporting unilateral nuclear disarmament, nationalisation or re-nationalisation without compensation, and Derek Hatton might not have needed a second career in broadcasting. (Now, there's a plan we can make for Nigel, given the BBC's embrace of his constant availability. He's on our screens almost more often than Paxman, after all).

Equally, though, the Liberal Democrats might have put legalisation of cannabis or land value tax into the general election manifesto.

Let's not look to local government for democracy in action, either. Most councillors now seem to have as little say as backbench MPs, following the spread of cabinet government to town halls.

You'd have to be a swivel-eyed loon to consider standing for office. Let's face it, the expenses aren't as good as they once were.

Perhaps that's something UKIP can sort out in a coalition? Oh, they don't whip their elected councillors. No deals can be guaranteed as worth the paper they're written on. Surely pretty much the same goes for a fixed term parliament if the swivel-eyed loons dump Cameron.

Paul Nettleton
London



REVIEWS

The Audience [play] by Peter Morgan directed by Stephen Daldry Gielgud Theatre, London

Walter Bagehot in his book *The English Constitution* described the role of the British constitutional monarchy as the monarch having three rights: to be consulted, to encourage and to warn. Bagehot also observed that, in the course of a long reign, a monarch would gain experience that few ministers could match.

The manifestation of this is the weekly audience that the prime minister has with the monarch. The present Queen has certainly amassed the experience to which Bagehot refers, having dealt with 12 prime ministers since her accession in 1952.

A fictional account of this constitutional oddity forms the basis of *The Audience*, a new play by Peter Morgan playing to packed houses since it opened in March.

Helen Mirren stars as the Queen in a role she has made her own. A fine performance, she captures the formality adopted by the Queen with a sharp wit. During an audience with John Major, played by Paul Ritter, where he is bemoaning his role as PM, he whines that when he walks into a room no one looks up, to which the Queen replies with a studied resignation "if only".

I refer to the audience with prime ministers as a constitutional oddity not least because no minutes are taken and no officials are present. The proceedings are confidential. Anecdotes have emerged down the years. Harold Wilson is said to be her favourite and Thatcher the opposite. James Callaghan once referred to his meetings with the Queen as a visit to a shrink.

Richard McCabe, who plays

Wilson, has the lion's share of the roles and plays the character with gusto, one of the few to push against HM's formality, first with irritation but later the relationship changes to one of admiration.

Like their relationship, this is the point in the play where the set changes briefly from Buckingham Palace to Balmoral, with Wilson feeling uncomfortable in the vast country house setting and makes his feelings clear to good comic effect.

It is at one of their later meetings where the relationship changes again, when Wilson confides that he is suffering from dementia. A moving interview where both actors rise to the challenge. They both won well deserved awards for their performances at this year's Olivier Theatre Awards.

While Wilson has the lion's share of the action, others make a brief appearance. Eden appears gloomy at the time of Suez and finds the Queen exercising her constitutional right to warn when she queries the legality of the Suez invasion. Mr Eden is swiftly dispatched. Doubtless a similar conversation took place with Blair, though mercifully we are spared him. Heath doesn't make an appearance either, perhaps a pity as the two known for sharp wit would have made good theatre.

We weren't spared Cameron but he seemed to be there as modern context padding; brief and uninteresting, though the actor captured his walk well. And of course no appearance by our Mr Clegg, as she doesn't do deputies. But if she did: "Mr Clegg, if you say sorry once more..."

Peter Johnson

Liberty before Liberalism by Quentin Skinner Cambridge UP 2012 £10.99

Like Athene, Liberalism sprang fully formed in the late eighteenth century, but like the probably Libyan goddess adopted by the Greeks, it too had its antecedents. Quentin Skinner's 1997 lecture charts the intellectual activity of the mid seventeenth century that was part of the dialogue that spawned our philosophy.

Liberals will commonly cite

Milton, more specifically his *Areopagitica*, but less so his republican writing. Hobbes is mainly thought of in terms of his riposte from Locke (and it is refreshing to see Locke's work as a practical contribution to political debate – it comes over rather dry otherwise). Sidney, Sidgwick, Harrington? If you come across them, it is likely to be a footnote.

The important thing about these writers is that they link back to the republicanism of Machiavelli. This is the context in which they are dealing with Liberty but not Liberalism, since Freedom is defined through membership of a Free State rather than as a Free individual.

The book concludes with a discussion of intellectual history, which outside of academia concerns us less, but remains a stimulating read.

Stewart Rayment

Enough is Enough by Bob Dietz and Dan O'Neill Earthscan 2013 £12.99

Dietz and O'Neill are respectively executive director and chief economist for the US based Center for the Advancement of the Steady State Economy (CASSE), and their book is an account of its *raison d'être*.

It examines the problems of achieving a full and fair distribution of the world's resources, work and products, and the achievement of the possibility of fulfilment and happiness for all, when we accept that the present solution offered by most political parties and financial institutions (yet more economic growth) is untenable.

There is not a great deal that is new but the book brings together the key findings of such as Tim Jackson *Prosperity Without Growth*, Wilkinson and Pickett *The Spirit Level*, Peter Victor, Herman Daly and many others. Each chapter is thoroughly referenced and the book provides a comprehensive account of the field. There is a good deal of readable anecdotal description to support the arguments, some nice touches of humour "A Tobin tax (named after an influential economist) or a Robin Hood tax (named after an influential social

worker)", and some amusing cartoons.

A major theme of the book is that, although economic growth and increased well-being go hand in hand from poverty levels to middle income, beyond a certain point, around the equivalent of \$US17,000 per head, further growth does not bring further improvements in the quality of life. On the contrary, the rising inequality that seems to accompany economic growth in most societies causes deterioration in community cohesion and mental well-being.

Nor can we rely on growth to improve the lot of the poorest: a rising tide does not in practice lift all boats.

The writers are concerned to limit population growth but, pointing out that annual world population growth of 80 million is almost exactly balanced by the 80 million or so unintended pregnancies each year, they mercifully content themselves with wider access to contraception rather than more draconian measures.

While acknowledging that a substantial proportion of the world's population need further growth to reach a decent standard of living, the chapter discussing the 'degrowth' necessary in rich societies such as our own is rather thin.

The one chapter I find unconvincing is that on money. The authors seem to be unaware of the measures by which governments control money supplies (or could if they tried) and wish to introduce a system by which money creation by bank debt should become illegal and currencies should have 100% backing – but with what isn't clear. A return to the 'barbarous relic' of the gold standard, perhaps?

At present, economic debate in the UK is focussed on how to achieve full employment and general prosperity through the resumption of economic growth. There is little talk of greater sharing, and planned 'degrowth' to conserve resources and reduce pollution is barely mentioned.

Conservatives claim we must avoid handing on our debts to future generations. To those who want to look beyond the immediate to the real problem, of avoiding handing on an impoverished and sterile planet along with broken societies, this book is a useful

introduction.

Peter Wrigley
(keynesianliberal.blogspot.com)

An Imam in Paris by Rifa'a Rafi' al- Tahtawi Saqi Books 2011 £16.99

Al-Tahtawi is an important figure in the development of Arab Liberalism. He was sent by Muhammed Ali as a religious guide to a group of Egyptians sent to France between 1826 and 1831 to learn about western sciences and the like, and thus witnessed the 1830 revolution. His task included observation of things French and it is fascinating to see a western culture viewed through other eyes. Perhaps we have something of what Jonathan Swift might have written if Lemuel Gulliver's travels had been intended for a Houyhnhnm audience.

On his return to Egypt, al-Tahtawi functioned variously as an educationist and translator, drifting in and out for favour with Egyptian rulers as a moderniser. Unfortunately, this work was undoubtedly curtailed by the assumptions of British imperialists but, as our perspectives globalise, it is important to see that there are Liberalisms other than our own, and it is particularly important in the context of Islam that its Liberalism should have its own sources from which to develop and also teach us.

Our friend Mohammed Nossier of the Free Egyptians party tells me that "Egyptian Liberals are often proud of Rifa al-Tahtawi; we recognise him as one of the earlier leaders who spoke very positively about Liberal values." Al-Tahtawi is an important role model in combating the claims of radical conservative Islamists.

Stewart Rayment

Talking Green by Colin Ward Five Leaves 2012 £7.99

As editor of the monthly *Anarchy*, Colin Ward was widely read by Young Liberals of the late 1960s. His *Housing, an Anarchist Approach* formed many of the ideas that we would put into practice through Community Politics and, whatever Mr Clegg may think,

need to be constantly revisited. Colin died in 2010 and, since then, Five Leaves has been putting together anthologies of his writing on particular subjects.

Talking Green is what it says on the packet to an extent, but for Radical Liberals its focus on the land issue makes it especially interesting; as we know, God gave the Land to the People, and Colin charts a number of our attempts to assert that fact.

The short pieces in this book are a good basis for some of the theoretical approaches to policy that we ought to be thinking about.

Stewart Rayment

Atlas of the Great Irish Famine edited by John Crowley, William J Smyth & Mike Murphy Cork University Press 2012 £55.00

The Great Famine has been described as the most pivotal event in modern Irish history. It sets the tone for at least the following century. In the years of the Celtic Tiger, it was possible to talk of Ireland (at last) moving to a post-Famine mentality, but in the current recession, which has particularly hit the Republic, this seems less certain.

There is an emptiness in parts of Ireland – those most hit by the Famine and consequent migration. It impacts on the landscape in ways that are almost forgotten – the ridges on a hillside where potatoes were once grown. This emptiness has yet to be fully resolved in the Irish psyche.

The Great Famine is also pivotal in the history of Liberalism, being the catalytic event that caused the split between the Peelites and other Tories and led in turn to the formation of the Liberal Party.

Over a million people perished between 1845 and 1852, and a greater number migrated, at least 1¼ million, whether voluntarily or not, in the wake of hunger. The Great Famine remains

an emotive subject, which is difficult to talk rationally about.

If you read de Tocqueville's account of his visit to Ireland, predating the Famine slightly, it is clear that in parts that it is an overcrowded country; we see this elsewhere. Famines had occurred before and, as the economy struggled to meet the needs of the people, migration in one form or another was common. The legacy of the Norman conquest of Ireland didn't help, but the aristocracy didn't treat tenants elsewhere substantially better while agriculture remained the dominant sector of the economy.

The famine was widespread across Western Europe (stemming from the north-east of the USA originally), but its impact and longevity were greatest in Ireland because of the importance of the potato as a staple. As we know, the response to the Famine split the government in Britain, and the state or social apparatus simply wasn't there to deal with the scale of the problem. Attitudes, both of those suffering and those who might help, were not attuned in the way that they would be now and it is now known that the widespread gluten intolerance of many people in western Ireland made some forms of relief inappropriate, although this could not have been understood at the time.

The outcome was a more viable but politicised Ireland, which, despite Mr Gladstone's best efforts, was to part from the rest of Britain. The dead hand of the Tories has much to answer for in that.

The detail of the Atlas is awesome; it will be the grounding for much future research into the Great Famine and its consequences.

Stewart Rayment

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Monday

A package arrives in the post. I find it to contain a rather stylish badge, which I consider wearing while I go about my business on the old demesne. Then I read what it says – “I made Eastleigh Happen” – and ring for my secretary. “Could you forward this to Dartmoor or Wormwood Scrubs or wherever the poor fellow is at the moment?” I ask him. “It was obviously meant for Huhne.”

Tuesday

Did you see that the Cleggs went skiing in Switzerland at Easter? I have been telling them for years that if this is Their Sort Of Thing then they should consider a stay in the north of Rutland. There, where the snowy peaks rise to meet the Lincolnshire Wolds, sport can be had that is the equal of any the Swiss can offer; moreover, our cheese does not have holes in it and you will not find yourself obliged to drink the dreadful gassy Dahrendorf lager in the evenings. You will no doubt have read that the Cleggs like to paint hard-boiled eggs and hide them about the chalet for their sons to find. I know that, when the family was slow to return to England, many reasoned that the boys must be a little on the slow side. The truth, I should point out, is that I tipped the little scamps half a crown a piece to hide their father’s passport and it took him simply ages to find it.

Wednesday

One of my ancestors built the almshouses in the village. There, amid ivy and wisteria, the older inhabitants pass their declining years – I suspect Meadowcroft has his eye on a spot there when the time comes for his son to take charge of my gardens. When I visit the place this afternoon, I find a chap called Littlewood berating the inhabitants. “Go back to work!” he cries. “You’d be much healthier. Here, have a cigarette.” He tries to interest me in his theories, but they merely remind me of the time that Laws tried to persuade me to sell the Well-Behaved Orphans. (I thought this outrageous – besides, the figures were not wholly convincing). Later, Littlewood challenges me to a hand or two of poker. Being perhaps unfamiliar with the finer points of Rutland six-card stud, he ends the evening rather out of pocket.

Thursday

A fine evening: I find that Littlewood’s shirt is quite sufficient to keep me warm as I walk by the shores of Rutland Water. My cattle low in the nearby fields, the shrill call of wheway and hamwee can be heard across the waves and I fancy I can distinguish the harps of the Elves of Rockingham Forest playing in my covers. (Strictly speaking, they are trespassing, but I find it best not to make a fuss: it is wise to keep on the right side of these fellows). The breeze is heady with the scent of May blossom and meadow flowers.

I fancy I can spy a familiar figure approaching. Sure enough, it turns out to be Clegg. “Isn’t it beautiful?” he asks me. “What we need is a new city built right here. Have you been to Milton Keynes? Wonderful place, I love it. Not enough to live there myself, obviously, but I love

Lord Bonkers’ Diary

it.” I begin to wish I had gone the full ten shillings with those boys of his.

Friday

To Whitechapel to conduct a party of tourists about the yards and courts of this insalubrious district. Today we are concerned neither with the crimes of Jack the Ripper (Nanny would often regale me with tales of them) nor with the life and times of Sir Percy Harris (the tour that brings the most visitors to our capital), but with the career of that

notorious gangster Violent Bonham-Carter. I tell them of Bonham-Carter’s early struggles and patronage of Barbara Windsor (the black sheep of the royal family and, when they first met, a promising bantamweight) and take them for a drink at the Lame Deliverer – the very pub where Violent is said to have done away with the biscuit magnate Jack “The Hat” McVitie. The landlord, who witnessed this notorious incident whilst enjoying a ginger beer in short trousers, is quick to point out that McVitie was widely thought to be “getting lairy” and to be “well out of order” – it was, after all, Violent’s manor. Whatever the rights and wrongs of the affair, a good time is had by all and I depart for St Pancras with enough in tips to keep me in Auld Johnston for another year.

Saturday

In my long experience, new parties grow like mushrooms but rarely survive long past breakfast. At one time, Lord Sutch and his party were all the rage: so much so that little Steel insisted we stand down in Sutch’s favour in half the constituencies across the country. IT did not come to anything and I never thought it would.

Today the talk is of someone called Farage. Farage? Rather a fancified, Frenchified name, don’t you think? Evan a little poncey, as dear Violent would have put it. I find it easy to imagine the man having his lunch: whereas you or I would choose a pork pie or gamey stilton, Farage would favour the leg of a frog or perhaps some snails. No doubt he wears a beret too and cycles the lanes of England selling onions. He may think this a clever way of meeting voters, but I cannot see him prospering.

Clear off, M. Farage: We don’t want your sort in Rutland! (In all fairness, I must add that, when I mentioned this to Meadowcroft, his eyes lit up at the prospect of someone clearing his vegetable garden of snails).

Sunday

When the Smithson & Greaves Northern Bitter is flowing in the snug at the Bonkers’ Arms, conversation often takes a philosophical turn. “Who would have thought at the last Liberal Democrat leadership election that, a few years later, one of the candidates would be deputy prime minister and the other would be in prison?” says one of my drinking companions. “But are you sure the authorities have got it the right way round?” replies another.

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