

liberator

Browne sacking shock



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- 💣 End the pubco scandal – Greg Mulholland
- 💣 Diverting aid from thieves - Rebecca Tinsley

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COMMENTARY

OFF THE FENCE AND INTO BATTLE

Credit where it's due, Nick Clegg's "I'm In" campaign on Europe may finally see the Liberal Democrats campaigning on Europe during the course of a European parliamentary election.

That would be a welcome break with precedent. In previous euro elections, the party has acted as though it viewed the exercise as, at best, a chance to train its organisation in target seats by campaigning on purely local issues or, at worst, something it wished would go away.

National campaigns have been hesitant and embarrassed, a situation not helped by mistaken attempts to appeal to eurosceptics by making incautious promises about referendums.

How often does it need to be said that eurosceptics will vote UKIP or Tory? With at least two choices of the real thing on offer, they will not be impressed by the Liberal Democrats suddenly trying to pretend unconvincingly that they too are eurosceptics of some sort, obsessed by pointless referendums.

That tendency was at its worst in the last euro elections, with Clegg lending his weight to calls for a referendum on the spurious grounds that there hadn't been one since 1975.

He now appears to have grasped something that has long been staring Liberal Democrat politicians in the face. Despite the weight of press hostility, emotional hysteria and nationalist bigotry on the eurosceptic side, there is a consistent one third or so of the population that is pro-European.

That one third is a minority but it is a considerably larger one than that which has ever voted Liberal Democrat. It is the obvious pool in which the party should be fishing.

The pro-European vote has effectively been abandoned in previous elections, perhaps on the assumption that it had nowhere much else to go. Not merely can that vote be awakened but it is essential that it is awakened ahead of any referendum eventually happening.

Through a combination of coalition legislation and political reality, the Liberal Democrats have ended up, possibly by accident, with a quite sound policy on Europe – that the party favours membership of the EU, is prepared to expound its benefits, and will tolerate a referendum only when there is something to have one about, by which it means some major proposed change in the UK's relations with the EU.

This is where the party should have ended up years ago instead of wittering on about referendums in a vain attempt to placate people who will never vote Liberal Democrat. It gives next year's euro candidates something to fight on and the party a reason to campaign. About time too.

TURKEY TWIZZLERS ALL ROUND?

Anyone who remembers enduring school meals may have looked askance at their free provision for infants.

What could have been one of the most interesting debates at the Liberal Democrats' Glasgow conference didn't take place because the commitment to free school meals for all five and six year-olds was announced only on the last day.

The Liberal Democrats won this concession in exchange for allowing the Tories to go ahead with their marriage tax break, although the coalition agreement allows the party to abstain on that proposal.

Liberal Democrat ministers argued that free school meals provided a popular benefit for children and their parents. Though they did not say so, it is also a simple headline and an easily grasped slogan to sell to the public.

This policy was interesting because it opened up a disagreement that did not follow any obvious left/right or pro/anti-coalition basis. Many members greeted it with enthusiasm, feeling the party had a tangible achievement to sell. Others were less pleased. If there was suddenly a vast sum of money around that could be spent on children, a series of more complex and subtle measures could be devised which would go a long way to combating child poverty. Blanket provision of free meals for infants, they argued, benefitted the offspring of richer families since the poorest already qualified for free food.

The debate was over universal rather than targeted benefits. It does, after all, seem rather odd for the party that wants to give free meals to infants regardless of their family's income to also loudly oppose blanket provision to pensioners of benefits such as the winter fuel allowance, regardless of their financial circumstances.

Supporters of universal benefits argued that giving free meals to all will tie wealthier people into the welfare system, and makes it more likely that they will be willing to contribute towards it. Opponents argued that tight public finances make universal benefits unsustainable and that, if new ones are created, other provision already targeted at poorer people will suffer, since overall spending will be held down.

Free school meals did make a good and simple headline. But as Ted Heath knew when he introduced it 40 years ago, so too did the winter fuel allowance.

This is a debate the party needs to have – does it support universal benefits unrelated to the recipients' wealth and, if so, which ones, and why some and not others?

RADICAL BULLETIN

PLAYING OUT THE CABLE

An 'investigation' was announced after the Liberal Democrat conference into who briefed the media in an unflattering way against business secretary Vince Cable.

Quite who has asked who to look at what remains opaque but, from the talk swirling round conference, anyone who wants to identify the culprit will have precious little investigating to do.

What happened was that, ahead of the economy debate, the media were briefed by sources close to Nick Clegg that Cable's call for greater caution on the nature and durability of the economic recovery had been voted down by 55-2 at a meeting of the parliamentary party.

This was an obvious lie, not least since, with David Ward suspended (Liberator 361) and Mike Hancock deprived of the whip due to his personal embarrassments, there could not have been 57 MPs at any meeting. Even if there had been, they would not have voted like that, and in fact no formal vote took place at the meeting concerned.

Indeed, one MP told *Liberator* that a rough count he kept of the tone of speakers suggested a 2:1 split in favour of Clegg's gung-ho attitude to the recovery against Cable's caution. He acidly added: "Among those supporting Nick were many colleagues who still have political ambitions."

The anti-Cable briefing rapidly unravelled, starting with Cable himself going ballistic at a parliamentary party meeting in Glasgow. This brought forth half a retraction from BBC political editor Nick Robinson, who said: "I am now told that no vote was held after a debate about economic policy at the Lib Dem parliamentary meeting a few weeks ago. However, sources close to both Vince Cable and Nick Clegg agree that the business secretary did urge the party to be prepared to relax fiscal policy if the recovery wasn't sustained. Mr Cable is said to have had the support of just one other Lib Dem MP. Mr Clegg persuaded all the others. So, it was 55 versus 2."

Robinson had previously reported: "One source close to the party leadership claimed there was a vote in which Clegg's position got 55 votes and Cable's just two." Since it's hardly likely that Robinson invented the whole thing, what motive could anyone 'close to the party leadership' have in seeking to make Cable look like a pathetic irrelevance, given that he is major public figure in his own right, not dependent on Clegg's patronage?

MPs tell *Liberator* that the incident is a measure of the paranoia in the Cleggbunker about real or imagined enemies in the parliamentary party who might mount a coup. There are no doubt there are party members who would welcome such a coup but, given the lack of plausible alternative leaders and the

dangers of a messy public internal fight, it is wildly unlikely that such an uprising would take place this side of a general election.

If 'sources close' take the coup idea seriously and are prepared to denigrate Cable over it, Lib Dem members will conclude that these people have finally taken leave of their senses.

NORMAN CONQUEST

After last year's botched Liberal Democrat reshuffle (Liberator 356), Nick Clegg made some widely welcomed moves this year, not least with sending Norman Baker to the Home Office.

Baker's reputation as an awkward squad liberal precedes him, and he has been given a platform from which to rein in, or publicly challenge, the notoriously reactionary home secretary Theresa May.

This appointment, though made by Clegg, may perhaps have been appreciated by prime minister David Cameron, who will see one of his main rivals for the Tory leadership being regularly berated by one of her own ministers.

Baker replaces Jeremy Browne, who put in a hapless performance at the Home Office having been generally well thought of in his previous ministerial post at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Browne, though personally a likeable character, is an economic liberal extremist well out of step with most other MPs and few outside the little right-wing cliques will be sorry to see him go.

Elsewhere, David Heath was sacked at Defra, though replaced by Dan Rogerson in a slightly more junior role. This perhaps bore out the predictions made a year ago that having a minister here would see Liberal Democrats blamed for the badger cull while gaining no benefit in rural constituencies where they rely in any case on the urban vote.

VOTE OFTEN

Glasgow did allow the Liberal Democrat conference to live up its boast of being the only one held by a major party at which ordinary members get to cast decisive votes.

The economy debate was turned into a foregone conclusion by Clegg's decision to deliver the summing up speech. This forced the conference to back or repudiate its leader, whatever people actually thought of the economy motion.

Add those put in that position to those who actually did agree with Clegg, and those who would vote for the party leader's position even if Clegg had called for law requiring people to fix turbos to their heads on Wednesdays, and a winning combination was assured.

Clegg did, though, avoid trouble by accepting most of the first of two Social Liberal Forum amendments. One wonders if he had told party president Tim Farron.

Farron's president's speech specifically talked about the need for new house building in the context of the second SLF amendment (the one Clegg did not accept) and Farron, as is his wont, garbed himself in the cloaking of social liberalism then, only to deliver an angry anti-SLF rant in the economy debate itself. The technical name for this rhetorical technique is 'having your cake and eating it', and it rarely works for long.

Steve Webb's proposing speech in the debate is understood to have been his 'punishment' for failing to toe the line on Syria.

Clegg then avoided further trouble with a bit of instant policymaking. Few appeared to notice what a departure it was, given it was made as a throwaway line in his summation speech, but Clegg declared his opposition to the idea that future cuts must all come from reduced spending, not from tax increases.

That may not go down very well the Tories, who want spending to bear the whole brunt of cuts, and it went down neither well nor badly at conference – since few noticed it – but he has publicly tied himself to that position now.

Dare anyone turn on the red light when the leader exceeds the time limit for a summation speech?

It looked like 'no' until SLF co-chair Gareth Epps intervened with those running the debate to point out that Clegg's eloquence was going on too long.

The tax debate was not a foregone conclusion since, after a punch-up at Federal Policy Committee (Liberator 360), it had been decided to let conference vote between the current 45p top tax rate and the restoration of the 50p rate.

Cable was arm-twisted into speaking against the 50p level but, since 'lukewarm' hardly did justice to the enthusiasm he expressed, it was obvious his heart was not in it.

Sensing trouble, a whipping operation began in which MPs, special advisers and other assorted 'payroll' votes were hastily ordered into the hall. Even so, the forces of darkness won by only 224 votes to 220. With conference now so small, this payroll vote can swing things if not countered, but no equivalent whipping operation was carried out on the other side, despite the invention of the mobile phone.

The defence debate, which revolved around an amendment not to renew Trident at all – as opposed to keeping part of it, as in the main motion – was again something of a foregone conclusion. But it will have struck those of a certain age as a major advance.

Back in the 1980s, the debate would have been between unilateralists and a leadership forced by cowardice in the face of SDP demands to be enthusiasts for nuclear weapons. Nowadays, the debate is between getting rid of all or merely part of the British nuclear 'deterrent'. Progress of a kind.

At the other extreme from the economy motion was that on the bedroom tax, which was a very rare thing – a foregone conclusion that the leadership would lose. Indeed, those who corralled MPs to vote for this abomination in parliament did not even bother to put a speaker up against the motion.

Some Cleggistas were heard to say that bedroom tax was the token motion on which the conference would be 'allowed' to defeat the leadership so that the party could point to its internal democracy. There was no 'allow' about it.

HAND PICKED

There have long been rumours that a list exists of people who should never be called to speak in conference debates, for fear that they will utter some irrelevant or offensive tirade.

Now we hear there is one for session chairs, even though this task is confined to members of Federal Conference Committee. Those allowed to chair debates on major policy papers are now approved by the leadership with anyone liable to be 'unreliable' weeded out.

There was also concern about the pattern of some debates. In those on taxation and energy, there were mini-debates on the 50p and nuclear options respectively and on each occasion a cabinet minister was allowed to speak late in the debate.

In the tax debate, this was balanced by SLF co-chair Gareth Epps being allowed to speak in support for the 50p rate, but in the nuclear debate it was not, with energy secretary Ed Davey getting the last word.

Nuclear was not really a left-right issue but it was certainly controversial, though not it seems controversial enough to be balanced.

RITE OF SPRING

The consultative session on the future of spring conference gave a robust response to ideas that the event should be either abolished on grounds of economy or reduced to a one-day event in London (Liberator 361).

An equally hostile response greeted the preposterous notion that individual regional conferences could hold the party leadership to account.

But a little more emerged about the financing of spring conference. The problem turns out to be not the cost of the event itself, but that of security.

The Home Office pays for security at the autumn conferences of the three main parties. Because the other parties have no precise equivalent of the Liberal Democrat spring conference, the government does not pay for security there (except presumably for ministers' personal protection), leaving the party with a £200,000 bill.

That the proposals for the future of spring conference were published without the Federal Conference Committee having seen them has been a further source of grievance.

CELEBRITY CULTURE

Making an unwelcome return is the idea that party committees should be elected by the whole party, rather than just by federal conference representatives.

Although Sue Doughty said she was not positively recommending the idea, she made it clear that it forms part of her review of party democracy.

While superficially attractive, the same reasons that led to its defeat in Charles Kennedy's time still apply.

If an election takes place among all party members, only those who enjoy a national profile can make themselves known and get elected, with the result that the same old clique of usual suspect parliamentarians, ex-parliamentarians and senior officers will dominate all organs of the party until kingdom come.

The one exception to this would be even worse – those who can make themselves known because they belong

to well-funded internal groups with the resources to run slates.

VVD CLINIC

The congress of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats in Europe takes place in London in November and will, among other things, approve the ALDE manifesto for next year's European Parliament election.

Few people of course read such things, but there is the chance they might do so and find out what the Liberal Democrats are theoretically committed to.

Thus party figures were alarmed to discover that the job of writing the first draft had been entrusted to a member of the Dutch VVD party. Differing political histories mean the VVD has no equivalent in the UK – a party that is fine on civil and political liberty but which makes David Laws look like a socialist on economic issues.

The VVD's draft proposed a massive cut in the EU budget by scrapping the entire common agricultural policy and all the structural funds. Agrarian-based ALDE member parties went mad, as did those in countries in receipt of structural funds.

Compromises were due to be found in international conference calls, but those at the congress may find themselves called upon to vote on some real issues.

GO HOME, AND GO MULTIPLY

Suzanne Fletcher of Liberal Democrats for Seekers of Sanctuary was horrified to find that the Home Office's infamous 'go home' posters adorned the wall of Glasgow's reporting centre for asylum seekers.

She raised the matter with chief whip Alastair Carmichael, who in turn took it up with the centre and received an assurance that the offending posters had been removed. But just before Fletcher spoke in the legal aid debate, word reached her from an asylum seeker who had attended the LDSoS fringe meeting that the posters were still there.

This led to a protest from Lord Greaves, who was told that the reporting centre had no intention of taking the posters down before 4 October (when they were due to be removed anyway), no matter what anyone had told Carmichael.

As Fletcher said: "What a disgrace, and makes the point why the voiceless need support through legal aid, when even the powerful are ignored."

END OF HER TEATHER

Sarah Teather's denunciations of coalition policy on poverty and immigration this summer came as a pleasant surprise, since she had always appeared to be a down-the-line leadership loyalist.

Less pleasant was the manner of her announcement that she would not contest Brent Central again, since her attacks on Nick Clegg and the party will be thrown back at any new candidate, making their task harder to hold the seat.

Least pleasant of all was the vitriol hurled at Teather on Liberal Democrat Voice, when she announced she would step down, over her vote against equal marriage. She was wrong, but so too was Alan Beith, who received little but respectful tributes when he announced his retirement from parliament. Maybe

bullying a young woman is easier.

There has been some discussion that multi-ethnic Brent Central should seek an ethnic minority candidate to succeed Teather, though this would open the awkward question of how to draw a candidate from one minority background without offending other minorities that would also like to have the candidacy. Others say former council leader Paul Lorber represents the party's only hope of holding the seat.

But another figure has offered his services. Step forward Lembit Öpik. Fresh from throwing away his Montgomeryshire seat in 2010 and coming fourth in the party ballot for London mayoral candidate in 2012, he now eyes Brent Central.

In an astonishing piece in the Huffington Post credited to: "Lembit Öpik, former Lib Dem MP, UFOlogist at the Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena (ASSAP)", he wrote: "I've made private approaches to the leader's team. I've offered to meet them and discuss my concerns behind closed doors."

Curiously, Clegg's team has been unable to find time to take up this invitation. Despite this discourtesy, Öpik says: "Clegg's not a terrible person. Even though his people made personalised anonymous briefings against me, and though he broke a commitment he made at the time of his leadership election, I forgive him."

It's not clear what Öpik thinks he was promised, but here is what he has now offered: "So, now there's a vacancy in Brent Central. It's time for someone to stand up and offer an alternative view of what the Lib Dems stand for. And, if they're not hypocrites, the current leadership will welcome my decision... I merely offer Brent Central Lib Dems the chance to decide whether they feel their future is more tied to the Clegg team or a more traditional liberal and left wing agenda, represented by me and many, many others who feel little or no resonance with the current brand of what's called 'Orange Book' politics."

Even with party membership in its present dire state, it doesn't (thank heavens for small mercies) yet have to choose only between the Orange Bookers and Lembit Öpik.

ALL THAT JAZZ

Conference goers who happened upon an evening of contemporary jazz hosted by Lord German would have noticed the discreet publicity at the event for The European Azerbaijan Society, and heard a very brief speech from its secretary.

For those not versed in the politics of the Caucasus (including, it must be said, several Collective members) it must have seemed that Azerbaijan was among the more enlightened of the post-Soviet republics. After all, would it be represented at a Liberal Democrat conference were it not?

Embarrassingly, a mere week later, a statement appeared on the Alliance of Liberal and Democrats in Europe website headed: "Lack of freedom remains ahead of Azeri elections."

This went on to say that ALDE has "been strongly advocating political freedoms in Azerbaijan and supporting its member party Musavat in its brave struggle for freedom and democracy for many years. Unfortunately, serious concerns remain as the Azeri opposition remains under pressure and fundamental

freedoms keep being denied ahead of the presidential elections.”

Gerben-Jan Gerbrandy, an MEP of the Dutch social liberal party D66, noted: “The relations between the EU and Azerbaijan are intensifying, but, as we develop this relation further, we should demand full respect for democracy and human rights”.

Is this really the sort of country that should be running a fringe reception at a Liberal Democrat conference presided over by a peer?

MYSTICAL MEANS

An arcane ritual is said to underlie the appointment of a Dalai Lama, with those responsible seeking heavenly signs to guide them.

Despite the party’s current preoccupations with equalities, something equally opaque guides the choice of chairs of Liberal Democrat policy working groups, and indeed their composition.

The Federal Policy Committee has a habit of picking over the membership of policy working groups in great detail: presented with recommendations, different names get suggested in one of the Liberal Democrats’ more obscure processes. The new public services working group was no different.

The recommendation for chair was Jeremy Hargreaves, surely a man with too much time on his hands as he has already chaired two such groups this parliament. Someone, somewhere, must trust him, as barely a mention was given to the other nomination for chair. But then Sandra Gidley had only ten years’ experience as an MP and as a local councillor before that. In the end, a vote was taken, with Hargreaves narrowly winning.

The recommendations were also notable for the absence of Liberal Left chair Linda Jack and the leader of the campaign against the NHS Bill, Charles West. Both names were reinserted by FPC.

ARE THOSE YOUR ROBES I’M SITTING ON?

As if the House of Lords were not already idiotically large, the word is that even more

peers will be created in the New Year, though not in such profusion as happened this summer (Liberator 361).

Could this be where those such as Liz Lynne, passed over last time, get their ermine?

One fairly safe bet is that people on the last elected peers panel will be thinly represented since Nick Clegg, like his predecessors, makes a point of sticking up two fingers at this attempt to democratise Lords appointments.

People with open chequebooks, though? Now you’re talking! This may include, if rumours are to be believed, someone with a large chequebook who was previously turned down.

TWO GUV’NORS DOWN TO ONE

‘Two jobs’ Tom McNally finally shed one of his roles in early October when he resigned as leader of the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords.

He has combined this role since 2010 with being a justice minister, with the result that it is easy to find peers who believe the demands of both jobs mean he did neither effectively, and that he had an obvious conflict of interest when peers objected to something the Ministry of Justice was doing.

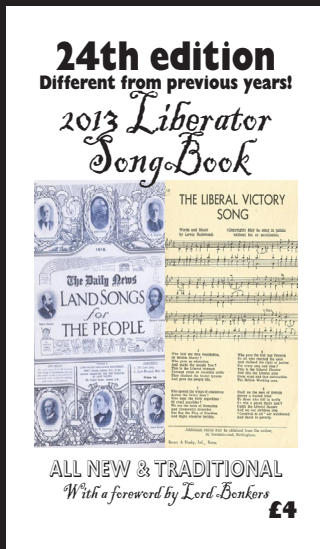
This was illustrated by his having been probably the only person in the hall to vote against the emergency motion at the Glasgow conference on legal aid cuts – the party was against MoJ policy and he was stuck with it. McNally’s repeated rigid defences of government policy at conference fringe meetings have also caused offence (Liberator 356).

Who could succeed him? McNally followed Shirley Williams, who followed Bill Rogers who followed Roy Jenkins, who was appointed at the merger.

Alert readers will have spotted that the qualification for being Lords leader is to have been a prominent SDP member and, apart from the appalling Ian Wrigglesworth, the House is running out of those.

But the job went to Jim Wallace, a former MP, lawyer and Liberal, who commanded support from all sides, despite breaking the unwritten rule of never having been in the SDP.

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HOW TO BE A LIBERAL MINISTER

Liberal Democrat ministers must now consider life after 2015 and cannot be hidebound by conventional thinking, say Felix Dodds and Simon Titley

Labour MP Gerald Kaufman wrote a book based on his experiences in government, called *How to be a Minister*. It is a book that all potential ministers should read.

Lately it seems that some of our Liberal Democrat ministers might benefit from reading it. With the next general election only eighteen months away – and ‘business as usual’ with the Tories an unlikely outcome – these ministers also need a crib sheet on a set of policy areas that define who we are as Liberals.

Coalition partners – In 2010, the Liberal Democrats formed a coalition not with the party of choice but with the only one that could create a stable government.

The political space we as Liberals have sought is not as Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg defined our position in his recent conference speech, when he said: “Now we hold the liberal centre while our opponents head left and right.”

Liberals have always defined themselves as distinct from Labour and the Conservatives. We are not on a linear scale somewhere in the middle. Historically, we have been on our own Liberal scale, with economic liberals at one end and social liberals at the other.

Meanwhile, the neoliberal consensus, which has dominated British politics for the past thirty years, is coming to an end. The leadership of all three mainstream parties continues to cling to this consensus, even though the recent financial crisis has signalled its eventual end.

If the Liberal Democrats wish to prosper beyond 2015, ‘me too’ politics is not the answer. Why should anyone vote for the party if it lacks a distinctive offer? If it wants to thrive, the party should be leading the debate on providing a real alternative to conventional right-wing policies. And it should be leading efforts to realign the left and find allies among members of Labour, the Greens and others who feel alienated by the current stale party politics.

Liberal ministers should ask: Are we providing a true alternative to obsolete right-wing politics?

The economy – Capitalism, as practiced today, has expanded inequality both here and around the world while using natural resources as if they were unlimited. In doing so unchecked, capitalism has made the world a more unsustainable and unsafe place.

The economic and social wings of the Liberalism have historically been divided on economic issues. However, the Liberal Democrats should have united these factions by advocating a new economy based on the best of J.M. Keynes and his disciple E.F. Schumacher.

As William Beveridge said, “Liberals believe our guiding force should not be self-interest or class conflict, but the determination not to rest while any

are condemned to want, disease, squalor, ignorance or unemployment.”

The economic crisis was an ideal chance to channel this philosophy and reform the economy around a new set of values and policies. We could have used the recovery package, as many countries did, to spur economic growth while creating a greener, more sustainable world. South Korea spent 87% of its recovery package on green areas, China spent 35%, Germany, France and the United States spent 20%, while the UK spent just 8%. The country lost the chance to invest in the future, in jobs, in hope and in a long-term, sustainable recovery. Labour’s mistake has continued under the coalition.

Not only have we failed to create an economy based on sustainability, our recovery is fixated on debt reduction, which threatens a real recovery of any kind. This policy is based on the belief that a national debt over 100% of GDP marks the end of the world, even while the academic underpinning of this assertion – the work of Harvard economists Reinhart and Rogoff – has been roundly debunked. In passing, we would remind readers that in the UK we have exceeded that level for a large part of our history. Between 1914 and the 1960s, our debt as a percentage of GDP was over 100%. So why do we consider debt reduction a higher priority than creating a robust economy that addresses present and future challenges?

Liberal ministers should ask: Is our economic policy supporting the creation of a society that is more equitable and more stable, and an economy that accounts for environmental externalities?

Education – We all know that the tuition fees issue was a disaster. The question is what that policy should be in the future.

If we truly value education and an educated society not based on privilege, why should tuition fees be charged in the first place? A better-educated society benefits everyone, so university should be a free resource for expanding minds and creating the next generation of an ever-growing educated society.

How do you pay for this? Beyond the higher tax revenues that come from a better-educated populace, we need to realise that the UK is no longer a global superpower. We need to stop acting like it and cut down our defence budget accordingly.

Also, new developments reduce the costs of education and may allow us to expand access even further. Education is changing, with over 700 million lessons downloaded on iTunes last year alone. Online courses are in many instances free.

Liberal ministers should ask: How can we expand education for all without putting a financial burden on

the next generation?

Foreign policy – Syria was a classic example of how inconsistency can cost a party its credibility. Over ten years ago, the Liberal Democrats argued that the British government needed a second resolution at the UN Security Council to legalise any action in Iraq. But this year, the leadership decided it did not need UN Security Council approval for action in Syria.

As an internationalist and multilateralist party, the need to work within the international legal framework is paramount. We must strengthen international law, not weaken it. A failure to get our way does not warrant unilateral action. In the coming decades, the challenges we face will be only greater and we must ensure international norms compel other countries to act within international law.

Liberal ministers should ask: Will policy strengthen or undermine international norms?

Environment, energy and climate – While Liberal Democrats used to have the best environmental policies, today it is difficult for anyone who cares about the environment to be confident that the party will keep to its green policies.

Liberal Democrats made the wrong call with their recent policy shift on nuclear power. As a party that has consistently opposed nuclear power, this recent change creates the impression that the Liberal Democrats are no better than the other parties.

Do we need nuclear power in the Britain? Not according to the UK Commission on Sustainable Development, a source that the government could have consulted if it had not closed it down.

The problem is that successive governments, first Labour and now the coalition, have not introduced the policies needed to reduce energy consumption. This makes nuclear power seem inevitable, but only because of the failure to pursue the safer alternative of energy conservation.

We live in a resource-strained world with scientifically-defined planetary boundaries and enormous future challenges. It is clear the impact of climate change will cause water and food shortages. How we accelerate the move to a low-carbon economy will be critical.

Liberal ministers should ask: How can we promote a low-carbon economy and integrate natural capital accounting into economic policies?

Companies and regulation – If Gordon Brown had not removed the banking system's checks and balances, we would not have suffered so greatly in the 2008 financial crisis. Smart regulation should be the goal but current reforms of the banking system have not yet ensured that past mistakes will not reoccur.

Structural problems in the economy have always been present and recent comments by Vince Cable on a possible housing bubble are just the latest example of a phenomenon present since the tulip bubble in 1637. Crises will continue unabated unless we change the rules and fix the problems.

In 2008-2009, we saw the linkage between the increases in energy prices and food prices. There are some real perfect storms looming and, without smart regulation, crises will recur.

The finance markets should have to prove that their new cocktails are not a potential problem – they should be checked by a government body before being allowed into the market. One excellent idea is to require

companies listed on the stock exchange to report on their environmental, social and governmental impact. This would enable the market to truly understand which companies are addressing these challenges and place a proper price to reflect this.

Liberal ministers should ask: Will policies strengthen or weaken the regulatory framework and protect the people?

Defence – British defence policy has been underpinned by nuclear weapons for over sixty years. Although many Liberals have been sceptical, neither the Liberal Democrats nor the Liberal Party beforehand have yet gone so far as to support unilateral nuclear disarmament.

The end of the Cold War and the huge cost of replacing Trident, however, have changed the terms of the debate. The Liberal Democrat response was the new policy it adopted this September of a part-time deterrent. Like the ridiculous 'euro bomb' proposed by David Steel and David Owen in 1986, it is not a coherent defence policy but a political expedient, and it will come apart under scrutiny.

Britain is no longer a superpower. It neither needs nor can afford nuclear weapons. Its role in a changing world should be to support the UN playing a critical role in peacekeeping and supporting the reduction of armed forces everywhere.

Liberal ministers should ask: Will its defence policy lead to a safer non-nuclear world?

Major disruptions – The future will present many challenges and innovations with a major impact on how society functions. Some estimates predict that new technology could replace two billion jobs worldwide. These developments may include nanotechnology, 3D printers, downloadable education, self-health assessments, and driverless cars.

Such changes will inevitably affect jobs and wages, and how we might create a stable society. They will also profoundly affect governmental tax bases and will require new thinking in many areas, including ethical considerations. Can we be the party to start that conversation?

What will be the contribution of Liberalism in the first half of the twenty-first century? Are we just another political party that, when it enters government, forgets what it stood for and the values that underpinned it? Or are we a party that strives for a world that is more just, more equitable, more sustainable, more multilateral, more educated, and more cooperative?

Future challenges will be complex and the world may become a more dangerous place. Liberalism could, and should, be the beacon of light that guides us. We could lead the nation to a better future for every woman, man and child, and for the planet itself, but only if we abandon a timid mind-set and think big.

Felix Dodds's is an environmental campaigner whose latest book is 'One Only Earth – The Long Road via Rio to Sustainable Development'

Simon Titley is a member of the Liberator Collective

SOMETHING LIB DEMS SHOULD DRINK TO

The 'pubco' model is destroying pubs and communities but two Liberal Democrat ministers are in a position to right a historic wrong, says Greg Mulholland

Somewhere near you, there is a pub you like. You probably don't know, but it will be owned by one of the large leased pub companies or 'pubcos'. You shouldn't need to care who owns it, but you do need to, for not only does it threaten the ability of the people running the pub to make a fair living, it also makes that pub part of the appalling tale of the Great British Pubco Scam.

Hundreds of pubs are failing, despite a perfectly adequate turnover, and thousands have closed unnecessarily. So how did we get to a situation where so many of our pubs, our favourite locals, are owned by pub companies and why, especially to liberals, should it matter?

The problems were of course caused by the unforeseen consequences of the well intentioned but deeply flawed Beer Orders, which rightly restricted the number of pubs that a brewer could own but it did not restrict non-brewers.

This led to the establishment of huge stand-alone pub companies, which came to dominate and distort the sector. Large sums of money were raised, especially through securitisation, to acquire pubs from brewers obliged to dispose of them, and then after that from other pub companies.

Following the initial golden handshakes, bankers, speculators and financial engineers spotted the opportunity and, aided by investment bankers, pub company bosses produced elaborate financial models and projections that assumed practically perpetual growth in rents and the price that they could charge for beer and other produce to their 'captive market' of tied licensees.

Perhaps the most suspicious part of the whole thing is the so-called 'wholesale' price of beer. The myth, perpetuated by pubcos, brewers and their lobbyists, is that somehow the existence of the pub companies ensures that brewers have to offer substantial discounts to their tenants.

In reality, the wholesale price of beer is inflated to create an amount that will ensure pub companies a considerable profit per cask or keg. While the pub companies will secure a 'discount' of this sum, they will pass on only a small part to the tied tenants, meaning that so-called discounted prices are often around 70% higher than you could buy at your local brewery.

Seeing they were on to a good thing, the pubcos went on an acquisition spree, buying up pubs for more than their actual value, based on this imaginary value of ever increasing beer prices and profit for nothing.

FAT CAT SPECULATORS

Yet this model seemed to go largely unchallenged,

simply because there was enough money in the sector to allow just enough to go round, after the fat cat bosses and speculators had taken their millions.

However, around 2007, the tide starts to go, and the property crash and economic downturn followed. Share prices collapsed by not far short of 100% and the pubco model was exposed as the large companies were plunged into billions of pounds of debt.

The winners were the insiders and directors. The losers were the publicans, their communities and the pensioners whose funds were unwisely left money in the pubcos.

With worried creditors and dismayed shareholders, a new plan was hatched based on further inflating beer prices to plug the gaps caused by the property crash and on 'churning' over-rented and overcharged tenants; in other words, taking so much from pub turnover, often an outrageous and parasitic 20-30%, that when one tenant failed another was brought in, deposit and all, when the previous one had lost everything.

The rotten core of the model continued to be the manipulation of beer prices. This is shown very starkly when looking at pubco price lists and wholesalers' prices side by side. The same duty increases apply, the same increased manufacturing costs apply, the same increased overheads apply, yet for the same product the price increase to a tied tenant increased nearly 4.5 times that of a free-of-tie publican, in six years, for the same product.

With such remarkable drops in share prices and staggering debt levels, the pubcos and their lobbyists seek to divert attention and to blame all the problems on anything but this property scam.

Everyone else, from the governments, to supermarkets, to poor licensees are to blame. Many licensees are bullied out of their pubs, some go bankrupt, many lives are ruined. The cost to the UK economy – in loss to US hedge funds, tax not paid and tax credits and bankruptcy – runs into billions.

Asset stripping to pay off debt becomes commonplace, with thousands of pubs sold off, many to the large supermarket chains without communities having a say due to the grotesque inadequacy of planning law. Communities up and down the land lose their pubs, pubs that in many cases were viable under a different, fair and sustainable model. A pub or pubs near you will have been among the victims.

So even you don't ever visit pubs or care much for them, perhaps now all liberals will realise what has happened and know that it cannot be allowed to continue.

The fundamental problem remains that the large

companies take more than is fair or sustainable from pub profits. This overcharging includes both hugely inflated beer prices and excessive rents and, in what is clearly an abuse of the justification for higher tied prices, average tied rents in 2013 are higher than tied rents.

This makes it difficult or impossible for many licensees to make a living, and has and is causing the failure of pub businesses up and down the country. Research this year by CGA Strategy showed that 57% of pubco tenants earn less than £10,000 a year – less than the minimum wage.

Enterprise Inns and Punch Taverns, the two largest pubcos, collectively disposed of over 5,000 pubs between 2008 and 2012 – one third of all of their pubs in the just four years. No other part of the pub sector has seen disposal levels of anything like this, showing that it is the large, leased pubcos and their restrictive tied model that are failing on an unparalleled scale.

Surely it is time for action to put the Great British pub ahead of those responsible for the Great British pubco scam.

In January 2013, the coalition government announced that, due to the clear failure of a second 'last chance' attempt at self regulation, it would introduce a statutory code of practice for pub companies, which would enshrine in law the principle that the tied licensee should not be worse off than the free-of-tie licensee.

The key question then of course became whether ministers would have the courage to take on the vested interests and instead listen to the consumer, publicans and small businesses.

Ensuring that tied licensees should not be worse off than free-of-tie licensees means an end to the pubcos over-renting and overcharging. The simplest and cheapest and only realistic way is to include in the code the right to an option to pay a fair, independently assessed 'market' rent only and to buy beer from anywhere. That was the solution put forward by the select committee, which has produced four reports into the sector with the pubcos ignoring all the key recommendations since 2004.

The good news is – or should be – that this decision is in the hands of two Liberal Democrat ministers, Jo Swinson and Vince Cable. This was, however, the situation back in 2011 when, inexplicably, Ed Davey, the then minister responsible, decided he would not introduce the statutory code of practice.

SERIOUS ERROR OF JUDGMENT

This was a serious error of judgment, first exposed through a freedom of information request then by the situation in the sector having not improved one iota. Vince Cable admitted that the House of Commons had been right to demand a review in autumn 2012.

That review, inevitably, demonstrated that the issues expressed in 2011 were as bad as ever, if not worse, and so BIS announced it would at last introduce a statutory code. The idea that the pubcos could regulate themselves, to anyone with any knowledge of the business model and its history, was absurd.

So will Liberal Democrats do the right thing and stop the pubco rip-off and take on crony capitalism? Why wouldn't they? Why wouldn't anyone?

There has been a cynical campaign of misinformation and lots of baseless, hysterical scaremongering and

threats of legal challenge to try to scare off officials and ministers from meaningful reform. This is one of those times when we need strong political leadership and real courage to ignore the myth, distortion and dishonesty.

There really is no justification as to why pubco lessees should not have the option to pay a fair market rent. Indeed, there is a bright future for pubs with a market rent option – and for the economy: increased certainty and confidence for small business; more jobs and investment; small brewers would have access to many more pubs; and consumers would have a greater choice of cheaper beer.

So it is time for liberal reform.

The future for the pub, with a market rent only option for pubco licensees, is bright. Pubs can become centres for enterprise and innovation again and customers can enter, knowing that the person named above the door can earn a decent living wage without much of the turnover being extracted and shipped overseas to keep creditors quiet.

The implementation of a statutory code with genuine free-of-tie option would free up the sector and allow it to prosper and would play a significant role in economic growth.

In 2010, Vince Cable referred to those responsible for the banking crisis as "spivs and gamblers" after their reckless behaviour brought the UK economy to its knees. Can he any longer be blind to the irresponsible capitalism that has done immeasurable damage to pubs and communities?

As liberals, we believe that the market should function without government intervention when it is succeeding in a way that does not lead to socially unfair outcomes or exploitation. When a market is not operating in a fair or open manner, liberals firmly believe that governments should intervene to correct market failure. Without a market rent only option, the pubcos will continue to charge rent and beer prices not based simply on how much they can get away with to stave off creditors.

The key question that the pubcos can't address is why they cannot offer licensees the option of paying a fair independently assessed market rent and the freedom to buy product wholesale. They have no answer.

So, the question can be answered only by government. The big brewers would never have given up their stranglehold on the choice of beer sold in pubs. The monster created by the beer orders in trying to deal with this, the pubcos, will not and cannot stop taking more than is fair from pub profits unless forced to do so.

It is time for Vince Cable and Jo Swinson to be heroes of liberalism and fairness, to support small business, and publicans and their consumers by doing the right thing and back a market rent option for tied tenants.

Greg Mulholland is Liberal Democrat MP for Leeds North West, Chair of the Parliamentary Save the Pub Group and Co-ordinator of the Fair Deal for Your Local campaign

DIVERTING AID AWAY FROM THE THIEVES

British people are generous to overseas disaster funds but hostile to overseas aid, which they fear is abused. Too much of it does end up in the wrong hands and Rebecca Tinsley suggests how to stop this

Opinion polls show the UK's foreign aid programme is deeply unpopular, even among Liberal Democrat supporters. Look no further than the internet comments when The Gambia's totalitarian leader recently left the Commonwealth. "One less kleptomaniac dictator scrounging off the British taxpayer," was the predictable tone.

Domestic austerity has increased opposition to the coalition's pledge to earmark 0.7% of the budget (£12bn) for overseas development. Yet, the British public are as generous as any nation, if not more so, when donating to international causes.

The problem for voters is how the UK government is seen to spend its aid budget. A YouGov poll in July 2013 found that 69% believe aid fails to reach ordinary people, or is wasted by corrupt governments.

Alas, they're right. Yet, encouragingly, 41% still support the principle of government aid. The challenge for Liberal Democrats is to find ways to make UK taxpayer's money effective, and seen to be effective.

In *Liberator* 359 (June 2013), I described how current aid relies on the mistaken belief that most of Africa's rulers represent their citizens, and care about improving their people's lives. In truth, the wealthy elite keeps its subjects in fear, ignorance, ill-health and poverty precisely because this ensures the ruling class remains unchallenged. More than anything, the elite wants to stifle the growth of a middle class and civil society, who might demand accountability and a share of power and national resources.

Hence we must distinguish between those who tell us they speak for Africa and the silent millions who are usually only heard on local talk radio, if they are heard at all.

Below are some ways we could make aid more effective. However, the coalition narrative, that aid spending keeps the UK safer, convinces no one, and must be dropped. Since the British public is so hostile to immigration, we should reframe aid as a way to make life more tolerable in developing countries, giving people less incentive to come to the UK.

People from Somalia don't actually want to leave their families, be ripped off by smugglers, treated abysmally by racist Libyans, and then endure a perilous journey to Europe. If home is peaceful and prosperous enough, most will stay there.

Note to the government: if you keep going to war with poor nations, there is a chance their citizens will end up as asylum seekers in the UK. In 2008, the largest number of asylum seekers (14%) came from

Afghanistan, while 7% were from Iraq.

The following ideas focus on Africa, where I have experience, although they are applicable elsewhere. First, the UK should work with other governments to remove impediments to Africa's success. For instance, agricultural subsidies in the EU, USA and Japan distort the true price of outputs, making it hard for African farmers to compete. We should also stop dumping our surplus on Africa. It used to be Liberal policy to pay UK farmers to be countryside managers rather than to produce excess grain, etc. What's more, transporting food around the globe, when it could be grown locally in Africa, is environmentally disastrous.

The IMF and World Bank prevent emerging economies using the very same protectionist measures that we, in the industrialised world, adopted when we were at a similar stage of development. Working multilaterally, we must also take regulatory action to limit capital flight.

KICKBACKS AND THEFT

Each year, much more capital leaves Africa (\$40bn) than arrives as aid. The African elites drain their countries of revenue from natural resources, land, kickbacks and theft, sending it to banks in London, Switzerland, etc. This is great for the Notting Hill housing bubble, but less positive for African citizens. Just half the capital leaving Africa would pay for the badly needed infrastructure necessary for trade and economic development.

Cancelling debt sounds nice but it misses the point: irresponsible African leaders will continue to borrow and waste billions on behalf of their governments, saddling their citizens with debt. So, no debt relief until there is fundamental change within the recipient nations, including taxing their own wealthy citizens.

The likes of Goldman Sachs and the governments of China, India and the Gulf States are buying vast tracts of agricultural land in Africa, and then leaving it fallow. When market conditions are favourable, they will grow food to export to their own countries. The World Bank and UN call this 'land investment,' claiming it will benefit local people. No sign of that yet. (Go to www.Landmatrix.org for more information). Should we really be giving aid to governments that sell their own people's land, pocketing the proceeds, so Saudi Arabians can fill their stomachs?

Finally, developed nations should make it easier and cheaper for immigrant workers to send remittances home.

The ideas above are ways in which Britain can work

with its international partners. Below are suggestions for unilateral action focusing on the UN's Millennium Development Goals on health and education. Most of the goals have failed because too many rulers spent revenues and aid on internal security in order to hang onto power, or on

Series 500 Mercedes with which to enjoy that power. Famously, there are said to be more Malawian doctors in Birmingham than Malawi. Our aid would be better used training these professionals in situ to a high standard, in exchange for a contractual commitment from those we educate to work in their home country for at least ten years after graduation.

Doctors and teachers are understandably reluctant to work in remote villages, so standards are often dire in rural areas. Several small charities provide professionals with motorbikes so they can commute, and it works.

Distributing treated malaria nets and training people how to use them has cut childhood mortality; training trusted, traditional birth attendants with the basics of modern midwifery has cut maternal mortality – in some parts of Africa, a woman has a 1 in 7 lifetime chance of dying in childbirth, while the comparable figure for Ireland is 1 in 42,000.

Providing clean water has a huge impact on cutting childhood mortality because so many infants and toddlers died from water-borne diseases. All of these initiatives deserve UK support.

Providing energy-efficient stoves would cut the environmental degradation caused by using firewood. They also reduce the number of children burned to death each year by falling into fires – 195,000 since you asked. Children also suffer from bronchial and eye complaints because of smoke from traditional fires in huts.

Knowledge is the key to empowering local people, but it requires a massive improvement in education across the continent. Teachers are badly paid in many African countries, and have low status. Our aid could educate teachers in situ to a high standard, with the status of British qualifications, thereby encouraging bright local people to go into the profession. If we are giving aid to their governments, we should make it a condition that teachers are properly paid, demanding proof that their salary reaches them and that they turn up to work, and we should stipulate that they don't demand bribes or sexual favours from students.

GAP YEAR ELITISM

Moreover, many talented young Westerners long for a chance to work overseas. A Teach First style programme to support British graduates while they train African teachers would also reduce the elitism that persists among gap year participants (usually only the children of the relatively wealthy in the UK can benefit from a year overseas before university).

Girls are deterred from attending school if there are no latrines or safe places to pee (men loiter around

“It is time we listened to African commentators who accuse their leaders of behaving worse than the colonialists”

schools waiting to rape girls who squat behind bushes). Providing sanitary towels would also make it easier for girls to attend school. Girls are often kept home to do domestic and agricultural work. The Bolsa Familia is a successful programme that pays poor mothers to send their children to school regularly. It

has had a remarkable impact in Brazil and Mexico, and should be replicated in Africa, with our support.

There are impressive home-grown African charities providing simple fixes to community problems, and they deserve our backing. Respected local people will have far greater impact than exotic visiting white folks. The FCO and DfID employ many people in each African capital. Their work should entail identifying these credible local agents of change. If a small charity like mine can sort sheep from goats, so can Our Woman in Khartoum or Abuja.

We must also attach conditions to any government-to-government aid we give. This is unfashionable in Western aid ministries because it smacks of neo-colonialism, yet this is how our leaders have been manipulated by Africa's kleptocrats. It is time we listened to African commentators who accuse their leaders of behaving worse than the colonialists.

We should demand transparent systems that prove salaries are reaching doctors, nurses, bureaucrats, police and soldiers; ask for receipts, require competitive tendering, and all the benchmarks we demand of ourselves in procurement and government finances in the UK – or that we should be demanding.

We should insist that countries we support post on school notice boards and broadcast on local radio how much of the central government budget has been allocated to each village. Locals will soon start asking why the money never arrived. Equally crucial to empowering people is the BBC World Service. We should also be supporting local radio throughout the developing world on the basis that knowledge is power.

Finally, let's disregard hype about economic growth rates in Africa, or Africa's 55 billionaires. What is relevant is the extremely low level from which economies are growing, and the vastly unequal distribution of wealth resulting. The World Bank believes 48.5% of Africans still live below the poverty level, proof that the current system of aid and governance needs a fresh approach.

Let's hope the Liberal Democrats have the guts to dump the prevailing development industry narrative, with its self-righteous jargon.

The British taxpayer will support aid if it's seen to work. The current shambles risks alienating voters, so, to paraphrase Lampedusa's Prince of Salinas in *The Leopard*, we must change in order to preserve what we have.

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

SPINNING THE WHEELS INTO POVERTY

The Stop the Fixed Odds Betting Terminals campaign was all over Liberal Democrat conference, even sponsoring the credentials lanyards. It is clearly a big organisation, but what is it about? Co-founder Derek Webb explains

Liberal Democrat minister Alistair Carmichael has said, “Gambling addiction is a ticking time-bomb.” This time bomb is ready to blow in respect of Fixed Odds Betting Terminals (FOBTs), betting shop roulette machines, now officially classified as Category B2.

Our Campaign for Fairer Gambling exhibited at the three major party conferences recently. We were promoting our Stop the FOBTs campaign, asking for a reduction of the maximum stake on FOBTs from £100 per spin (yes £100) down to £2.

FOBTs were legitimised in the 2005 Gambling Act under Labour, but it was a cross-party consensus in the wash-up. Labour, with some awareness of the dangers of FOBTs, retained ministerial power to effect a reduction in the stake from £100 to £2 – which can be done without primary legislation.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport recently held a consultation on the triennial review of gaming machine stakes and prizes, which also incorporated FOBTs, and made an announcement in October.

Although there were some changes in stakes and prizes on some machines, there has been a delay in addressing the FOBT issue based on a new Code for Responsible Gambling and Player Protection by the Association of British Bookmakers (ABB) and proposed research commissioned by the Responsible Gambling Trust (RGT).

The Gambling Commission (GC) and the Responsible Gambling Strategy Board (RGSB) had sight of the DCMS consultation and submitted a letter to culture secretary Maria Miller. The RGSB says that, if the FOBTs were a new product, it would advise against them. But the RGSB then goes beyond its remit and absurdly implies that the precautionary principle should not apply to an existing product. This is a denial that a dangerous product already out there is obviously more dangerous than a product that is not available.

The GC itself has refused to recognise publically the validity of relevant FOBT evidence. Based on the British Gambling Prevalence Survey of 2007, FOBTs have a stronger association with problem gambling than any of the other 15 identified activities. The GC excuse for ignoring this was that there are hundreds of gambling research papers. True, but none comparing FOBTs in this way. DCMS’s excuse for not recognising this evidence is that the researchers said they recommended more research!

Secondary analysis was also conducted on the BGPS of 2010, although it was not peer reviewed or published until after the cut-off date of the consultation. This estimated that 23% of FOBT revenue came from problem gamblers and that, if one included at-risk gamblers, the proportion increased to 40%. Based on the most recent statistic of an annual win of over £1.5bn, this equates to around £350m and £600m respectively, far higher amounts than in respect of any other gambling activity.

FOBTs account for 40% of problem gambling activity reported to Gamcare, a support charity for problem gamblers, but FOBT gamblers comprise only around 4% of gamblers and with only around 1% being regulars.

The Campaign for Fairer Gambling commissioned research conducted by 2cv in Newham, London, one of the poorest boroughs, which showed that 87% of gamblers think FOBTs are addictive. The average cash inserted to start with is £55 and the average amount bet per 20-second spin is around £17. The average amount lost on FOBTs per year by a regular FOBT gambler is close to the total average disposable income per person.

POORER AREAS

Recent Scottish Health Survey research shows that residents in poorer areas are seven times more likely to be problem gamblers than those in wealthier areas. Betting shops are around 2.5 times more likely to be



located in poorer areas than wealthier areas. The demographic of the FOBT gambler is more heavily accented towards the unemployed or lowest income quintile – the male 18-to-34 age group (particularly those aged 18 to 24); at-risk gamblers and a variety of ethnic backgrounds – than any other significant gambling activity.

Football betting advertising attracts young, inexperienced gamblers into betting shops. Many of them are also immigrants or migrants from countries where they have had no exposure to this form of gambling. There is no other country in the world foolish enough to have betting shops with the facility to bet on roulette machines at stakes of up to £100 every 20 seconds.

Although there are up to 70 different games on the machines (with most at a £2 or lower maximum), of the £1.5bn or more lost, around £1.3bn is on roulette. This is about 2.5 times more than lost on casino roulette, including losses by non-doms and visitors to high-end casinos in Mayfair where a £10,000 per spin game could be operational.

Casino roulette is on average several times slower than FOBT roulette, so FOBT gamblers tend to lose several times faster than a same stake casino roulette gambler. One of the licensing objectives of the 2005 Gambling Act is that gambling should be fair and open, but FOBT gamblers are not informed how bad a deal FOBT roulette is.

FOBT gamblers get so frustrated that criminal damage to FOBTs is a regular feature. But this crime goes unreported as it is often committed by FOBT addicts who are also the biggest losers, so they are welcome back into the shop. The track record of bookmakers in accepting bets from under-age gamblers is abysmal, but they are keeping all those illegal winnings, which we estimate to be in the £50-100m range. Another licensing objective that the Commission is failing to deliver is the prevention of crime being associated with gambling.

The GC is of course also failing to deliver the third objective, the prevention of harm to young and vulnerable persons. One of the three definitions of vulnerable persons by the commission to police is “persons who spend more than they can afford.” In Newham in East London, 62% of FOBT gamblers said that they gambled until all their money is gone.

HORRENDOUS COST

Problem gambling has a horrendous hidden social cost, particularly if the problem gambler is young and from a poor background. How does a cash gambling addict keep finding the cash? US research estimates that the average cost of a problem gambler is more than £8,000. This research is now out-of-date and, as FOBT gamblers are more likely to have one of the highest social costs, this figure is clearly a very modest estimate in respect of FOBTs.

“Problem gambling has a horrendous hidden social cost, particularly if the problem gambler is young and from a poor background”

Further, historical British research is also likely to be an underestimation. Using landlines and contacting householders to carry out research is not a true reflection of the FOBT demographic. Also, the BGPS relates only to past year behaviour rather than lifetime behaviour. So while only 1% of respondents in a year

might reveal problem gambling behaviour, if, for example, the average gambling lifetime is 60 years and the average problem gambling span is four years, then 15% of gamblers experience problem gambling at some stage of their lives.

Gambling addiction is not yet recognised as a serious health issue, with only one industry-funded NHS clinic in London. GPs do not have adequate resources and are often prescribing anti-depressants, which in themselves can become addictive.

The GC is not helping local authorities either in their wish to act against the growth of betting shops, or the moving of shops to superior locations, which is fuelled by the FOBTs. This further demonstrates that the GC is an unfit for purpose unelected quango run by administrators with more interest in their careers and protecting the operators than protecting the consumers.

To top it all there is no economic benefit of FOBTs. The Landman report explains that as FOBTs are very labour-unintensive, allowing FOBT growth to continue would result in job losses and even a loss of revenue to the Treasury.

We were very pleased at the response our campaign had at all three party conferences, particularly amongst rank and file members, councillors and employees in the public sector, who are aware of how detrimental FOBTs are. Many future and prospective candidates intend to campaign on the FOBT issue. Many current MPs understand the issues, particularly when from significantly impacted constituencies.

However, there are still some appalling attitudes such as “losing gamblers are stupid”, which ignores all the negative social costs that could have been averted. There is also the “let people do what they want with their money” philosophy. But this is often used only by persons advocating increasing corporate profits, rather than advocating for more lifestyle freedoms.

There are no other high street gaming machines with stakes in excess of £2, so the status quo protects a bookmaker monopoly.

Derek Webb was a successful poker player, businessman and the inventor of Three Card Poker. He now philanthropically funds the Campaign for Fairer Gambling and the Stop the FOBTs Campaign (www.stoptheFOBTs.org)

ORANGE SKIES

Do Liberal Democrats do God? Jonathan Calder takes issue with a book that makes that claim

This book gained some notoriety on its publication, when the press alleged that Steve Webb's introduction claimed that God was a Liberal Democrat. My first reaction to this was to be impressed that He had managed to find a coherent philosophy behind the party's changing policy positions, but I suppose that is omnipotence for you.

It soon turned out that Steve had merely claimed that god was a liberal – I am not sure if that makes any more sense, but it was deemed less controversial.

But churches and political parties do have much in common. They offer company to the odd and the awkward, and give you the chance to belong to an institution that existed before you were born and will endure long after your death. Viewed in this light, the Second Coming of Christ has much in common with the Liberal revival or the realignment of the left.

So, having belonged to a political party for 35 years, I cannot find it in me to make fun of others' religious beliefs. This is despite the fact that I long ago worked out that I was a High Church atheist – I love church music and buildings, but that does not mean any of the beliefs they are connected with are true.

Tim Farron would not agree with me. He sets out to prove the existence of God – a task that would have made even St Thomas Aquinas hesitate. What Tim comes up with is the chumminess with slight sinister undertones that you hear in charismatic young preachers who tour university Christian Union groups: "Christianity is therefore intellectually plausible and, given that the consequences of Christianity being true are pretty massive, you owe it to check it out for yourself."

The God these Liberal Democrats are doing is very much the Christian God. Other faiths do not get a look in, which is a little strange in modern Britain.

For the most part, the book is a ragbag of good causes and it is not clear how much God has to do with them. Alan Beith writes in favour of restorative justice, and his support may well flow from his personal faith, but there are plenty of atheists who support it too and plenty of Christians who are in favour of retribution.

Equally, I turned first to Duncan Hames's chapter on environmentalism, because I feel something like the Christian concept of stewardship is badly needed in modern Britain. But the chapter is short and every acre that was despoiled in the Industrial Revolution or afterwards was owned or sold by an aristocrat who insisted his children and servants went to church every Sunday.

There are some notable omissions. There is nothing on the Establishment of the Church of England (which I favour on the grounds that it keeps the church quiet) or on faith schools. It is easy to despise the latter when they demand more outward signs of religious observance from parents, but their critics should

sometimes stop to ask themselves why they are often so much more popular than schools run by the local authority.

The chapter that got most media attention was Greg Mulholland's, in which he suggests that the party is in danger of driving out religious believers because of its 'moral conformity'. He does put his finger on the tendency of political groupings to turn on people who hold views that differ from those of its most members, but I am not convinced religious believers are any more its victims than anyone else.

Take the way Greg introduces his concerns, describing an incident from the last general election: "When I was knocking at one house I had called at a few minutes before, and started chanting at me. A rhyme about being a Catholic and about where I could shove my rosary beads. I have never been on the receiving end of discriminatory hate before and it is, even for a thick-skinned politician, a really unpleasant experience."

Surely bigotry is most often encountered in clashes between different religious groups? Again, it seems unfair to pin it on atheists.

What is at the heart of Greg's chapter is the demand that political beliefs that are derived from religious convictions must somehow be above criticism. I do not think this is a legitimate move in debate, if only because it ties in with the sort of arguments that begin "As a..." These try to imply that you cannot criticise someone's opinions without insulting his or her gender, ethnicity of sexual orientation and turn politics into a form of Top Trumps.

More than that, if people hold just the views on social questions that you would expect them to hold in view of their backgrounds, then the suspicion is that, far from being deeply held, these views have been acquired in childhood and never properly examined.

Let's end on my favourite chapter. Andrew Stunell, in a pleasingly eccentric contribution, praises our secular society and celebrates the work of the Holy Spirit through history. So maybe I should thank God I'm an atheist?

'Liberal Democrats Do God' is edited by Jo Latham and Claire Mathys. Published by the Liberal Democrat Christian Forum, 2013, £6.99 (<http://ldcf.net/web/liberaldemocratsdogod>)

Jonathan Calder is a member of the Liberator Collective

AN UNWANTED MEAL TICKET

Free school meals for all infants is a poorly thought out piece of populism that many councils and schools will struggle to implement, says Margaret Rowley

I have to confess I was somewhat taken aback when I turned on the TV to catch the late evening news in my hotel room on the final evening of conference. There was Nick Clegg saying that, from next September, the government would be providing free school meals for all children aged five to seven.

The announcement came out of the blue. Our policy, as I understand it, is that in the long-term we would introduce an 'education credit' to support children from low income families, which would include "a free breakfast and midday meal if required".

I've no problem with that proposal – help would be directed to where it is needed. But free school meals for all children aged five to seven whether their parents can afford it or not, and whether the children want it or not? Surely this is not a priority when county council budgets are being ruthlessly cut.

I don't have a very good relationship with school meals, having been sick after the only one I have ever eaten. When I was at school in the market town of Horncastle in Lincolnshire, most people ate their dinner at midday and had tea at 5pm. In the small private school I attended from the age of five until 11, I walked (on my own when out of the infant class) the half mile through the town to eat my dinner that my grandmother would have ready on the table for me. My one experience with school meals was at the 11-plus exam. This was held at the county primary school, and it was expected that all pupils should stay for lunch that day. I began to feel somewhat groggy during the final paper of the day and, although I managed to finish and dash to the loo, I have never touched a school meal since. Despite this mishap, I duly passed the exam, went to the local grammar school and continued to escape from the soggy cabbage and other unmentionable horrors by walking the shorter distance to where we then lived for my dinner every day.

I realise things have changed somewhat, although my own children also came home for lunch when they went to the local school in the village where we lived, until my elder daughter went to secondary school some distance away and took a packed lunch.

I trust this new plan will include the option of children taking their own packed lunch, or indeed going home for lunch. No doubt everyone eating the same meal is a good socialist principle, but it does not fit well with a party that believes in personal freedom.

In the publicity surrounding the announcement, it was said that this arrangement would provide the children with a "hot, healthy meal at lunchtime". Really? An investigation undertaken by Birmingham's school inspectors for BBC1 West Midlands in the

wake of the horse meat scandal showed that food from all the local take-aways sampled contained the meat as advertised, but only one third of the school meal samples did.

As for 'hot', how will it be possible to serve hot meals in schools lacking a kitchen, without losing nutritional value either by reheating or by keeping the food hot for too long? It is worth bearing in mind that meals do not need to be hot to be nutritious. The opposite is often the case.

There are three first schools in my rural ward, each with around 70 pupils aged between four and nine. None of the children are currently entitled to free school meals, and consequently there are no kitchen facilities.

Will the county council be given sufficient extra funding to build kitchens and employ extra staff to cook or reheat the meals? More likely perhaps there will be a meals-on-wheels arrangement, which would be a logistical nightmare given the distances involved and again would be costly. And what about the remaining 30% of the children in the schools who are too old to qualify? Do their parents get an option to pay for the meals? Would they want to?

This seems to me to be a poorly thought out scheme, introduced as a populist measure without any proper debate either within the party or through wider consultation.

Some extra finance is needed to improve nutritional standards for school meals already provided but, at a time when funding for education is being squeezed, giving free meals to all infant school children cannot be the best way of using scarce resources.

Margaret Rowley is a Liberal Democrat councillor in Wychavon

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TIME TO CLOSE THE CASINO

Kiron Reid questions whether the shareholder model works

Shareholders are supposed to be the owners of the business, who take risks by investing in a business and receive the profits through dividends. But it doesn't work like that in the vast majority of cases.

Once the company is set up and shares are sold, shareholders are not investing anything in the company – they are not giving anything real to the company. They are paying the shareowner.

In return, they get the dividends from the company. They give the company nothing but they get money back. An individual or private company gets paid, and an individual or private company gets the return through dividends.

Except at the start of the process, there is no actual investment. Yes, buying shares can be seen as 'investment' by showing 'confidence' in a company. Yes, you take a risk that, if the share price falls or the company collapses, you lose some or all of your money. But it is only in the latter extreme case that you forfeit anything in the interests of the company.

Yes, my friends who work in tax and company law explain that pension funds are invested in shares so dividends pay for the pensions of many people.

The BBC commentators explain the importance of shareholdings to pension funds and of pension funds to our economy, and highlight the effect that share price volatility (and increases or decreases) can have on those investments and individuals' savings for retirement. None of this justifies why people who do not invest in a company, and do not usually take any significant risk, should continually drain off profits from the company – particularly from utility, infrastructure and education companies and those providing other public services. Or banks where shareholders and executives form an unholy alliance – unsustainable salaries in return for dividends – that deprive savers of interest and borrowers of a fairer rate. All of this money could be better used.

Maybe I've got this wrong. Maybe shareholding is a genuine investment in a company that actually puts money into that business to help it do its business and that should engage ownership. There is new investment when there is a rights issue, or some rescue attempt to shore up a company.

Yes, there is a genuine investment when shares are first issued. The original purchaser should get a return if that is successful. But why should this carry on down the line if they sell the shares to a new owner? Why should these payments go on for years and years – money for nothing?

Companies and markets obviously realise this as, when they want an injection of real money, they issue new shares – diluting the value of the shares, often repeatedly doing it.

I don't believe the 'not for profit' model is a garden of roses because of the greed and dishonesty (or is it peer pressure and ambition?) of the individuals in charge and their auditors or regulatory/remuneration committees. Charities, councils and housing

associations have all gone down the route of "we have to pay our bosses top whack to get the best as they would earn so much money in the private sector." It is nonsense and robs the funders (usually the taxpayer – individual or corporate) and recipients of services. Maybe the dividend payment model should be limited to the first two sales, and sellers should have to give a small proportion back to help the company invest in its long-term future.

The shareholder model has surely had its day as the dominant economic model. If you invested in Railtrack you lost; you have lost in Lloyds (at the moment, maybe not if you still hold your shares); you lost in the Royal Bank of Scotland and Northern Rock. Salutary reminders that shares can go up as well as down.

Shattering the 'too big to [let] fail' myth, and shattering the warm image of Mrs Thatcher's share-owning democracy, I think many believed in that and tried to achieve it, but those little people did not own the companies or influence them in any real sense.

The big financiers did; or the big-headed financiers or institutions gambling on shares and other markets who took risks that helped shatter the economy and throw millions around the world into misery.

I complain when others criticise and don't have any constructive solutions. I don't know the answer on a new model. But 20 years as an interested observer of economics shows me I wouldn't trust an economist to run the economy based on most of their own predictions.

Many of the lessons from 'alternative economics' have proved right time and time again – some have gone wrong. It's a better hit rate than shareholder capitalism. It's time for the shareholder lottery to be superseded by a model of ownership that does value real and long-term investment over short-term profit and gambling. Can conventional economists really say that this criticism is wrong?

Kiron Reid is a member of the Liberator Collective

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UNKNOWN MANIFESTO

Few will read the ALDE manifesto for Europe, but it should have the courage to call for further democratisation of the EU, says David Grace

In November, Canary Wharf will be flooded with hundreds of Liberals for the 34th Congress of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE). British Liberal Democrats belong to this party, although few members and almost no voters know this.

For years, party managers fought European elections on national issues, many without relevance to the European Parliament. Preparations for the 2014 elections are promising. Liberal Democrats will proclaim support for the EU rather than apologising for it and demanding ill-defined reform.

ALDE is drafting a common manifesto and the British party is drafting its own national manifesto.

ALDE is a broad church. British Liberals often regard their continental allies as more right wing. The real picture is more complicated. In some countries, the Liberal family contains two parties: Denmark has Venstre (Left), part of the last right-wing coalition and Radikale Venstre (Radical Left), part of the current left-wing coalition. (In *Borgen*, Birgitte Nyborg's Moderate Party is the fictional counterpart of Radikale Venstre).

The Netherlands has the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) and Democrats 66 (D66). Our own British broad church contains equivalents of supporters of all these parties. In Croatia, Lithuania and Slovenia, the group has three parties. Consider the battles we have at home. Imagine the difficulties of reaching agreement across this spectrum, yet ALDE does it.

Broadly, the group stands for environmental sustainability, free trade, completing the European Single Market, further integration and democratisation of the EU, individual freedom and human rights, gender equality and equal marriage. This leaves plenty of room for argument, so what should the 2014 ALDE Manifesto say, even if no-one reads it?

Euro-sceptics blame the euro for crises in Greece, Cyprus, Italy, Spain and Portugal. They ignore that the euro itself is a strong currency performing better than sterling or the dollar. The weaknesses of southern European economies lie in poor national governance, unsustainable spending and failure to collect taxes.

The EU problem is that a single market and monetary union cannot function smoothly without fiscal union as well. Euro-sceptics will conclude: abandon the euro. The ALDE should take the opposite view and promote a fiscal union and a real, well-regulated banking union. National recovery plans have been ineffective. Only by creating the tools for common European economic, industrial and energy policies can we boost trade and competitiveness, stimulate research and education, build trans-European networks and complete the single market.

Liberals who subscribe to Keynesian economics are told they won't work with the current level of national debt. The European Union as a whole, however, does have the strength and scope to develop Keynesian solutions if member-states will let it. A key step would be for the European Union to have its genuine own resources – the ability to raise taxes just as the USA federal government can. Carbon taxes, as Jacques Delors proposed, would be an obvious candidate. The EU should also have the power to issue euro-bonds.

ALDE should support the EU's leading role in global action against climate change and indeed call for tougher targets for reduction in greenhouse gases. The ideal model for this is contraction and convergence as conceived by the Global Commons Institute.

ALDE should recognise that Europeans must take responsibility for their own security. Not only is the American umbrella an anachronism; its withdrawal is likely. There is great scope for increased co-operation in procurement, training and specialisation of forces to share burdens. It is absurd for all EU member-states to continue to arm themselves against their friendly neighbours when unilateral defence would not solve such a problem.

Euro-sceptics who attack the EU as undemocratic usually oppose relinquishing national vetoes. This is the clue to their underlying xenophobia. By 'undemocratic' they mean that foreigners' votes count as well. The EU is more democratic than the UK; most decisions are taken by the 'ordinary legislative procedure' – co-decision by the European Parliament elected by the people and the Council of Ministers representing the member-states. Proportional voting is the norm and there is no upper house containing hereditary peers and appointees.

ALDE should have the courage to say that, for the union to have more powers to develop fiscal union, its democracy must be strengthened. The President of the European Commission should be the candidate nominated by the political group with the most votes in the European elections.

This may happen in 2014 as the three main party groups will nominate such people but the European Council (heads of government and state) could ignore the results. The president should choose the members of the Commission just as a British prime minister chooses the cabinet. The 'ordinary legislative procedure' should be extended to cover nearly all areas of competence. The European Parliament and the Council of Ministers should have a limited right of legislative initiative (compared with none at present). Treaties should take effect for signatories and not be blocked by recalcitrant states.

David Grace is a former Liberal Democrat European Parliament candidate

OBITUARY: STAN HARDY

Simon Hughes pays tribute to a pillar of local liberalism

Stan Hardy has died suddenly aged 93, and the second half of one of the great campaigning London Liberal couples will be heard in person campaigning no more.

His death came suddenly even though Stan had been in declining health. Stan was so many things - mentor and political guru, adviser and friend, supporter and counsellor, but at the same time, a very tough taskmaster and a formidable questioner.

Stan was also printer and organiser, fundraiser and funder, local party officer and federal conference regular, and endless source of news and gossip often - over very late night cups of tea at the home he shared for so long with his wife Maud.

When she died 15 years ago, Stan's friends feared that he would have neither the energy nor the companionship to keep going.

But he proved everybody wrong, and some of Stan's greatest campaigning came in his later years - for Dulwich Hospital, for better care for older people and those with mental illness, for the funding of community centres, for good parks and for properly devolved decision making.

Born in Camberwell, Stan was sent at one month old to the Gordon Road workhouse, where he was apparently ill for much of the next three years.

He then returned to live with his family - until he left school with no qualifications aged 14.

It was probably the Youth Parliament at Cambridge House which in later teenage years cultivated Stan's interest in political debate. But it was where he came from and what he saw and experienced during his upbringing which influenced him most.

During World War 2, Stan was in the Pioneer Corps, serving in Italy, northern Africa and the Mediterranean, and ending up as sergeant.

He was very proud of being part of the Allied miniature government which moved into towns after they had become occupied by the Allied forces and took them out of Nazi control. He particularly talked of the Allied invasion of Italy and his work in helping to set up a free government in Sicily again.

He met Maud and joined the Liberal Party after the war and they ran their own printing company.

Stan's first political obligation was to the Liberal Party in Dulwich where he made sure we chose good parliamentary candidates and fought good campaigns. It was Stan and Maud who were instrumental in supporting the now Baroness Susan Kramer in her first parliamentary election when we she stood in Dulwich and West Norwood in 1997.

Stan tried to persuade me to become the candidate in Peckham in the late 1970s - and had the membership secretary of the then Peckham Liberal Party replied more speedily to my enthusiasm to join, I might have become active in Peckham rather than Bermondsey, been a candidate in a by-election in 1982 not 1983 and history might have been different.

But the small group of Bermondsey Liberals captured me first, and from 1980 onwards Stan and Maud supported me and our growing number of other councillors.

Stan, along with friends and colleagues took over responsibility for Hume House in Lordship Lane in Dulwich which was the old Dulwich Liberal Club - and founded the Hume House Trust when the club itself ceased to function.

Stan became increasingly committed to campaign for health and social services, particularly for pensioners and the mentally ill. He became a huge ally of the Southwark Pensioners Action Group and the wider pensioners' movement and was one of our most effective campaigners when we challenged the Maudsley NHS Trust in opposing their plans to close the only 24-hour, open access centre in Britain for the mentally ill.

Maud was awarded the MBE for political and community service in 1992; nobody had worked out to do a shared MBE for the two of them!

When Stan made clear after Maud's death that he wasn't going to give up he became even more important to other members of his close family and friends.

He was one of the best and most loyal friends who many Liberals and others ever had. Stan was great with young people - encouraging new members, inquiring after them and supporting them.

Some of his best friends were young gay people who he supported through difficult times and personal crises like the most understanding uncle or godfather.

He loved the multicultural community Dulwich had become. And his community never stopped loving him.

In his very last years he became famous as the South London Press 'Star of South London', as one of the paper's 'Our Heroes'. He took this award - from actor June Whitfield - in his stride.

In 2011 he was interviewed for the BBC by Melvyn Bragg about childhood in workhouse and in poverty.

In his very last years, Stan moved to Gloucestershire to be nearer to his family and to his friends Kevin and Kath Daws. He had spells in hospital but was settled in a nursing home when he died. He was campaigning in Gloucestershire - as well as in south London from afar - literally up until his last day.

Simon Hughes is Liberal Democrat MP for Old Southwark and Bermondsey.

The Coalition and Beyond: Liberal reforms for the Decade Ahead
ed. Stephen Tall
www.liberalreform.org.uk

It was with some doubts that I opened Liberal Reform's booklet. Perhaps it was the pale blue colour that put me off. Perhaps I suspected that it was a further step down the path sketched by the *Orange Book*. Indeed, Liberal Reform claims its commitment to 'four-cornered freedom' derives from David Laws's introduction to that infamous book.

I checked and actually Laws's essay on reclaiming liberalism identifies not four varieties of freedom but four strands of liberalism – personal, political, economic and social. I have no problem with the broad definition of the first three but social liberalism is not so much a fourth strand as a way of looking at the first three. My image would be a tetrahedron with social liberalism at the apex connected to the other three on the base.

The booklet is much better than my initial trepidation suggested, with a wide range of opinions from a broad group of contributors. David Boyle on public services, Claire Tyler on social policy and Norman Lamb on health all advocate policies for flexible provision to meet individual needs and not centrally-determined models and targets.

Other essays pick up the themes of accountability and decentralisation, which have long been parts of Liberal thinking. Tom Papworth's solution to the housing crisis goes further in devolving power by replacing local planning authorities with neighbourhood co-operatives of landowners. This does not convince me as anything but a recipe for entrenched Nimbyism.

Alison Goldsworthy's call for the state to go on a diet echoes George Osborne's rhetoric if not his preference for Byron's hamburgers. I agree that the state is not always the best provider, and that for decades politicians have promoted the big lie that you can have a high level of public services and low taxes, hence the high levels of debt. However, dismantling state services with no other prescription for solidarity in society invites trouble and ultimately more spending on police and prisons, as some American states could



REVIEWS

testify.

Susan Kramer continues her campaign for variety and localism in banking. However, not every essay in the booklet promotes diversity. Richard Marbrow draws attention to contradictions in Liberal Democrat policies and writes as if politics were simply an exercise of gathering scientific data and then doing the right thing. In a pluralist society where different citizens want different things, there is never just the right thing to do.

Nick Thornsby raises the question of the working poor and the need for a living wage and, while he does not completely solve it, he does outline the shape of an answer. Antony Hook recalls the party to its longstanding but little advocated support for the European Union.

This booklet ranges wider and with a more open mind than the online pronouncements I have come to associate with Liberal Reform. It genuinely explores how ideas at the heart of liberalism can inform policy-making in the Liberal Democrats.

David Grace

Seasons in the Sun by Dominic Sandbrook Penguin 2013 £10.99

Around for some time, but now in paperback, read this and its predecessor *States of Emergency* and one can see that Sandbrook is trying to do two deeply politically unfashionable things. He is quite simply out to rescue the reputations of the Heath and Callaghan governments.

Not the reputations of Ted Heath and Jim Callaghan themselves, both of whom have succeeded in being remembered as dully decent men washed away by forces they could not control, but the reputations of their governments,

both of which are commonly thought to have been disasters.

Sandbrook reserves his special animosity for Tony Benn, depicted throughout as a hypocrite so guilt tripped by his upper class background that he is willing to say and do anything the trade unions demand, right through to calling for a siege economy.

His colleagues would have none of it, but there was no principle for Benn so important that he would resign his cabinet seat over it, and no prime minister dared sack him given the power of Labour's left wing.

The unions are another subject for Sandbrook's scorn. He makes a familiar argument that the strikes in essential industries in 1973-74 and again during the winter of discontent made it impossible for governments to function and drove public loathing of the unions to such heights that Margaret Thatcher won in 1979 above all by promising to tame them.

He argues, though, that the union leaderships were not too powerful but too weak, unable to make deals and stick to them because they had lost control of their shop stewards and local officials who had seen that industrial power was the best way to break through the era's pay controls. Faced with this, neither the Heath nor Callaghan governments could do much and both collapsed.

Sandbrook suggests that the Heath government in particular represented a wasted opportunity had the unions taken it – Heath got on well personally with union leaders and wanted to bring them into a consensus-style management of industry.

Callaghan, who helped sink Harold Wilson's modest union reforms in 1969, reaped what he had sown a decade later as the unions' antics destroyed public

support for Labour. Sandbrook does, though, credit Callaghan with keeping afloat a government that lacked a majority and with creating an improving economy after the inflation of the mid-1970s.

He does not accept the subsequently widely-held idea that Callaghan could have won had he held 'the election that never was' in October 1978, arguing that Labour was by then doomed whatever it did. Nor does he think that Callaghan had any realistic option but to impose the pay ceilings that sparked the winter of discontent.

Sandbrook's most notable venom is reserved for the period in between Heath and Callaghan – Harold Wilson's second coming in 1974-76 – where he paints a picture of a lackadaisical and disengaged prime minister forever taking the path of least resistance as the economy collapsed.

It is well-known now that Wilson suffered from some deteriorating mental condition and resigned because of it. If even half of the bizarre behaviour attributed to him by Sandbrook is true, he clearly should never have led Labour after 1970.

The Lib-Lab pact is accorded little space and, in what seems an omission, its ending is not really explained, nor indeed are the reasons for the Liberal upsurge in February 1974, a phenomenon that certainly scuppered Heath. Sandbrook does, though, reasonably enough point to this vote flowing back to the Tories in the late 1970s, putting Thatcher into power amid public disgust with the unions and the political party they sponsored.

Outside high politics, there are also long and entertaining accounts of the Thorpe scandal and of the attempts by former military figures to raise ludicrous private armies to fight the unions.

The political and industrial climate of the late 1970s is now so utterly remote that I doubt there are any contemporary lessons to learn. But if you were there, this is fascinating stuff. If you weren't but have always wondered why Labour spent 18 years in the wilderness, the unions never recovered their powers, why the Heathites were forever eclipsed in the Tory party and what gave birth to punk, it is all here.

Mark Smulian

Cycle of Violence by Grayson Perry @las Press 2012 £16.50

2012 was Grayson Perry's year – a MEGA exhibition at the British Museum and a compelling documentary on British culture. To top that, @las has republished his 1992 angst-ridden *Cycle of Violence*, written and drawn when the responsibilities of life were crowding in on an uncertain artistic future.

Like many graphic novels, not for the squeamish (sexual violence and murder throughout), but it has a happy ending.

2023 – a greener, psychologically adjusted planet... we're working on it.

Stewart Rayment

The Tobermory Cat by Debi Gliori Birlinn 2012 £5.99

What's the story in Tobermory? The Cattist faction of the Liberator Collective has unwittingly walked into a controversy.

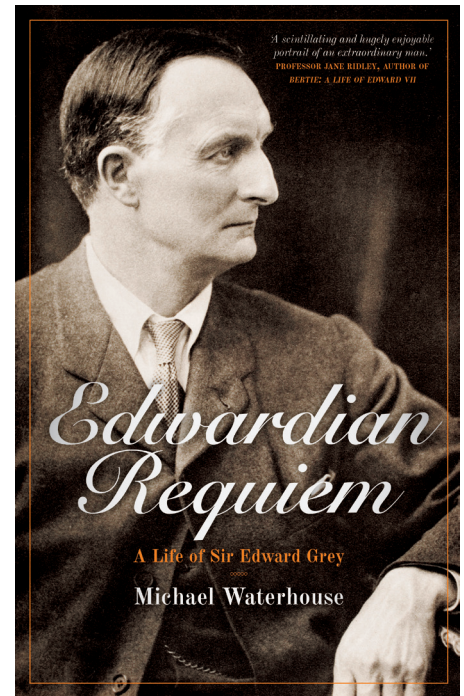
Debi Gliori has a strong track record as a creator of children's books. Her Mr. Bear has variously won the Red House award and been short-listed for the Kate Greenaway Medal. Reading her *Tobermory Cat*, one can guess at the genesis of the book, to help the tourist trade of a much loved town. The story is not a Mousehole Cat, but has its charm. The fiddling connection could have been less obtuse (or developed further?)

Debi Gliori's efforts notwithstanding, a local artist, Angus Stewart, had developed his own *Tobermory Cat* – both based somewhat on an actual cat. I would like to think that they can live alongside each and both benefit the local economy; I hope so. After all, Saki brought us a cat called *Tobermory* a good century before.

Stewart Rayment

Edwardian Requiem: A Life of Sir Edward Grey by Michael Waterhouse Biteback 2013 £25

If Sir Edward Grey were reading this book, he would admire the way its subject moved between the duties of high office and the pleasures of country life. At home



with the high handed intrigues of the French or Germans; taking a trout or noting the song of a wren. How much smaller those who occupy the Palace of Westminster seem these days.

Grey was foreign secretary under Campbell Bannerman and Asquith. One of the LImps – imperialist in matters of foreign policy – he had strong ties with the radical wing of the party when it came to domestic social reform. He practiced this in his relationship with trades unions in his business life.

The big question about Grey has to be, 'did he start the First World War?' The answer is of course 'no' but, as a leading player, it is worth recalling his role in these events. Lloyd George in his War Memoirs treats him unfairly, but then he would, seeking justification for his own position and, of course, publishing coincided with Grey's death.

A general criticism might be levelled against Grey that he did not consult his cabinet colleagues enough. When first made foreign secretary, Grey had not held high office and the party was in the midst of the 1906 general election.

Waterhouse thus considers Grey's early days credible if a touch naïve. Furthermore, with a major domestic agenda, which was to brew into serious battles with the Lords, most of his colleagues saw Grey as a safe pair of hands and were happy to let him get on with it.

Andrew Adonis, writing in the *New Statesman*, thinks this

position was naïve, even suggesting that Grey might have stopped the war; like Lloyd George, he no doubt has his motives. Philip Zeigler, in *The Spectator*, is more realistic. We all have the benefit of hindsight.

Grey was undoubtedly gutted by his failure to stop the war. "The efforts of a lifetime go for nothing. I feel like a man who has wasted his life." Slaving away at European peace over a decade, averting war in 1912, but with circumstances overwhelming two years later; Waterhouse's text may be within the established canon, but his evidence supports that view, especially when read in the context of the turmoil of day-to-day politics.

Once the First World War commenced, there is an element of anti-climax in Grey's career. Waterhouse frequently refers to Grey's encroaching blindness, but does not furnish details of it. There are obvious reasons why the period 1906-13 should be treated in more detail, but after that Waterhouse presents us with more of a sketch, which is somehow less satisfying.

Was Grey a great foreign secretary? Waterhouse considers that he was not a Canning or a Palmerston; does this confine him to a second division?

Michael Waterhouse fought Leicester East against Tom Bradley (who would shortly join the SDP) in the Conservative interest in 1979. A century on from the events that shaped the twentieth century, it is timely to have a reappraisal of the role of one of the key players. There may well be a case for Grey as the greatest foreign secretary of the twentieth century; I would certainly put him in the first division.

Stewart Rayment

Landscapes from The History House by Lucy Brennan Shiel (exhibition) London Irish Centre

The Irish Potato Famine was a formative event in the creation of the Liberal Party. The famine was not limited to Ireland, but had its most profound effects there, not least the mass emigration that followed.

A map of a location reveals significant local features, helping those who move through the

territory to avoid becoming lost in hidden conditions and unknown contours.

How much more important it might be, then, to have some awareness of the profound and significant events that shaped the lives, the conditions that shaped the emotional and social realities of the past, the contours and inner landscapes of our families and ancestors?

We understand much more now about the effects of repression and trauma, the unspoken resonances of the past on those who are raised in its presence. The children of a generation who experience profound tragedy often re-experience the emotional effects without really knowing why or how. Daily life can lose much of its sparkle when surrounded on all sides by the shadows of unspoken wounds and losses.

Unmourned lost objects bind us painfully to the past. The losses that remain long unacknowledged are those that stay embedded deepest in the heart, in the denied unconscious. The repressed returns, because we continue to live as though the conditions that first created our responses are still here, and in that unexamined mechanical way of repeating old perceptions, we very often struggle then to be present to the real possibilities of the alive present moment.

The London Irish Centre will be hosting an exhibition in November on this theme. Roscommon was one of the worst hit counties and the old Strokestown demesne now hosts the National Famine Museum in Ireland. The poet Kieran Furey was inspired by this in his collection *The History House*, and in turn inspired the landscape artist Lucy Brennan Shiel.

As Brennan Shiel's paintings and Furey's poems resound and arrive in the heart, we come to the soulful spaces of history, to witnessing, memory and mourning. We must confront complex issues of empathy, belonging and the historical abuse of power. We must attend to these voices reaching for other hearts to hear. Surely too when we witness the ancient roots of violence, we do something to stem the repetition of this violence. Violence is like a virus, it spreads not only through acts of war, but through social, cultural and familial pathways too.

The famine of the mid-nineteenth

century had a profound impact on the Irish nation, landscape psyches and lives. Between 500,000 and 2.5 million people perished over seven years.

The possession of the lands, communities and fecundity of a whole region, like that which happened in Ireland in the mid-nineteenth century, the genocide of a whole generation, of a culture and a cultural identity is unquestionably traumatic and it is difficult to understand why there is such small reference to it in British history teaching. Perhaps this has changed, but I don't recall being taught anything about the 'crimes of empire' at school in the 1980s, rather those the civilising effect of empire and Christianity.

The paintings and words offered are not in pursuit of apportioning political blame, but are gateways for the expression of living meaning. They provide portals through which the excluded can be honoured and released. They open up space for old pain to be worked through and in a context of recognition that is restorative not punitive, they stand 'for' the human, not 'against' the enemy.

Brennan Shiel's poetic landscapes have a deep melancholic resonance. She guides our attention to the shared violation, to the oppressed and damaged land. She speaks about her powerful sense of the grief 'in' the land itself, land that had not only all the traumatised dead cast into it, but suddenly no one to care for it or manage it properly. This exhibition is an impassioned call for more awareness of the effects of the genocide on successive generations in Ireland. But it manages simultaneously to invoke an empowered space and spirit for deep healing.

'Landscapes from the History House' is at the London Irish Centre, Camden Square, London NW1 9XB, from 7-28 November 2013.

Sarah J Lloyd

Winter draws on, as the first Lady Bonkers used to say. The leaves have fallen from the trees and the wheways (or are they hamwees?) have left for Africa. At this time of year I am at my happiest when reading and writing in front of my Library fire.

Rest assured, gentle reader, I still enjoy rude health and only last week made my annual trip to Hebden Bridge and the spring which bursts from the hillside above what used to be the headquarters of the Association of Liberal Councillors and is said to bestow long life upon all those who bathe in it. This evening, however, I have a tumbler of Auld Johnston, that most prized of Highland malts, at my elbow and a spaniel at my feet and do not feel inclined to move. So let me share the day's postbag with you.

Here is a letter typical of those I receive from ambitious young Liberal Democrats; it asks me which book the writer should read to maximise her chances of becoming a Member of Parliament. My answer is always the same. In order to be selected for a half-promising seat, you need a roadworthy bicycle and a copy of Wainwright's *West Country Marginals*. Once you have been adopted, however, there is only one volume that will do: *A Fortunate Life: The Autobiography of Paddy Ashdown* (which is by Paddy Ashdown, incidentally).

I know of no book that sets out half so clearly what is needed to win an election campaign. I don't mean the chapter on 'The Winning of Yeovil' that was made available free on the electric internet recently, excellent though it is. In *Its Way*: no, I am thinking about the section on jungle warfare in Sarawak where Ashplant explains how to mount patrols, the best way to lay an ambush and how to treat an open wound using red ants. It was no surprise to me when, armed with this knowledge, we took control of South Somerset District Council.

I recognise this letterhead: it belongs to the Deputy Prime Minister. I have to confess that I wrote to him the other day in somewhat intemperate terms. You see, it had recently been drawn to my attention that someone who holds the most ridiculous views had been appointed to the Home Office and I let Clegg have both barrels for allowing it to happen. How can we possibly be taken seriously as a party when we allow such things to happen? I demanded. Clegg, I see, has replied in emollient terms, saying that he agrees with my view of the matter but Cameron is adamant that Theresa May must be Home Secretary and there is nothing he can do about it. I suppose that is coalition government for you.

Lord Bonkers' Diary

This one comes from the Zoological Society of London, thanking me for my observations on the possible discovery of yeti in the Himalayas. I shall not be at all surprised if they turn out to have the beasts in Nepal and Tibet, because we have them here in Rutland. They favour the frozen north of the county and can be a considerable help in delivering Focus leaflets to the more isolated lamaseries.

Yeti are gentle creatures and quite harmless to us humans (assuming you are human – one has to be so careful nowadays). However, they have an inordinately sweet tooth and have been known to follow mountaineers for days in the hope of being given a piece of Kendal Mint Cake. As this behaviour can easily be misinterpreted, I felt it necessary to place the facts before the proper authorities. Meanwhile I shall have a word with Farron and see if he can pull a few local strings and secure a supply of their favourite sweetmeat to send to the far Himalayan peaks.

What's this one? It's an invoice from my wine merchants – let us put it to one side. This one is more promising: what do I think of twerkers? I think this is from a young person having a jape; they hope I'll say something about "What about the twerkers?" being a common cry at the political meetings of my youth or declare that I support twerkers' control of industry and thus reveal myself to be a silly old buffer who is out of touch with the modern world.

Well, they'll have to get up earlier in the morning to catch me out! I think the twerkers are damned fine fighting men and Joanna Lumley had absolutely the right idea. Ayo Twerkhali!

It may be rather a scruffy (indeed, if I am honest, rather a muddy) note, but this one is the most cherished communication of the day. It comes from the King of the Badgers and thanks me for my continued vocal opposition to the cull. It is also magnanimous enough to wish David Heath well for the future, saying that he has been forgotten by all but the most vengeful badgers. Whether Heath has yet forgiven Clegg for putting him in the job in the first place is another matter.

The fire has burned low, my glass is empty and there is a distinct aroma of singed spaniel. It is time, gentle reader, for me to turn in. Good night.

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