

# liberator



- 🔦 Iraq's election and disintegration – special report
- 🔦 WWI and the Liberal government – David Dutton, David Grace and Jonathan Calder
- 🔦 Torture while hot air blows – Rebecca Tinsley

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# COMMENTARY

## MISTAKES NOT TO REPEAT

The run-up to the 2015 general election is already starting to resemble the situation before the 2010 one.

There is the main opposition party scarcely more popular than the incumbent government, which itself is unpopular but not catastrophically so.

This time, the opposition leader trails his party and the prime minister trails his, but neither the Conservatives nor Labour could reasonably be said to have a decisive advantage.

Barring something quite unforeseen, this is not going to be 1979 or 1997, when governments had utterly lost public confidence.

It's therefore quite possible that there will be another hung parliament.

Some senior Lib Dems view the prospect with horror, since continued coalition with the Conservatives would complete the party's destruction in one half of the country while coalition with Labour would begin its destruction in the other half.

Parties don't though get the results they always wish for. While some Lib Dems might privately wish for five quiet years in opposition in which to rebuild the party's battered credibility and organisation, voters may not allow that to happen.

Since the possibility of a coalition remains live, the Lib Dems would do well to plan for it, unlike in 2010 when although it was a possibility no-one really believed it or had done much to prepare.

Some of the mistakes made are now obvious: going for a big and undeliverable 'win' on voting reform when proportional voting for local government could probably have been implemented with minimal fuss; being obsessed with making coalition 'work' by getting too close to the Tories and dumbly swallowing horrors like the NHS reforms and bedroom tax; and failing to secure delivery of things with which the Lib Dems had loudly identified themes, notably tuition fees.

Nick Clegg's penchant for academically bright but politically clueless advisers – of whom it is well-known that many Lib Dems MPs despair not very privately – has also been shown up as a dreadful error of judgement.

Nor was much done to take advice from European liberal parties with long experience of building coalitions.

There are a couple of important principles that should be adopted now in case the Lib Dems find themselves negotiating another coalition next year.

The first is to make sure that if the party campaigns aggressively on an issue it is then delivered even if this means giving away something important – but less critical – during negotiations.

The second is not to try to do everything. Continental parties normally form coalitions that deliver on

what the parties involved can agree upon. If the Lib Dems had only guaranteed support for the coalition agreement and otherwise backed only what accorded with party policy, the fears over another coalition would have been greatly allayed.

## TURNING ROUND AND BITING

The report from Iraq in this issue of *Liberator* is necessarily anonymous given the writer's work there.

But it shows, as does the news from that country, the final wreckage of Tony Blair's delusions and deceits.

Bombing in Libya apart, the Coalition at least has to its credit that it has not gratuitously started any wars, been complicit in the slaughter of thousands of people, or deliberately lied to the population about the need to engage in an armed conflict – substantial achievements compared with Labour's record.

The great delusion behind the Iraq war was that democracy could be imposed at gunpoint and that after a bit of shock and awe Iraq could be forcibly turned into a sort of Middle Eastern version of Switzerland.

Instead, the country now faces collapse. Kurdistan is almost certain, and quite rightly, to declare itself independent, while the advance of the fundamentalist militia Isis threatens not merely a government far worse than that of Saddam Hussein, but one that menaces its neighbours by seeking to dissolve international borders in Sunni dominated areas.

The potential exists to drag in Syria, Iran, Saudi Arabia and maybe others in a regional conflagration of the kind that ignited in Europe a century ago.

Parliament showed some wisdom last year when it refused to become embroiled in Syria.

However vile the Assad regime is, the experience of Iraq has shown that foreign interventions can have unpredictable and undesirable consequences.

The issue is not that the UK should never get involved in foreign interventions but that it should not react by sending the modern equivalent of a gunboat every time some foreign dictator commits an atrocity and especially that it should not wade into foreign battles with no idea of how it will secure its desired outcome or how to extricate itself.

Whenever the Chilcot report appears it will - unless it turns out to be the usual establishment bucket of whitewash – forcibly remind the public of Blair's duplicity and mendacity and so by association do Labour no good.

Some though may notice a wider point from Iraq in Blair's case, and the poll tax in Margaret Thatcher's – that after about six years prime ministers go a bit mad and loses touch with reality. Not long to go for the incumbent if he is re-elected.



# RADICAL BULLETIN

## IN THE LIONS' DEN

Deputy leader Malcolm Bruce is a popular and respected figure in the Liberal Democrats who does not normally get done over by angry dissidents.

Such was the tide of anger against Nick Clegg and party headquarters at the Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors annual conference that Bruce, as the main leadership representative present, took a monsterring.

Those present say that he was clearly shocked by the extent of criticism of the national party from councillors and campaigners who, after May's disasters, have had enough of the Westminster bubble's clueless occupants telling them what to do.

The main anger was over an out-of-touch central party that didn't grasp the Lib Dems disappearance in large swathes of the country. There was also unhappiness with messaging, especially the 'Party of In' and 'Stronger Economy, Fairer Society' slogans.

Bruce's suggestion that David Laws represented "part of the solution" attracted jeers of derision.

Matters got off to a bad start on the Friday when Nick Clegg's top strategist Ryan Coetzee gave a presentation presumably intended to motivate those present.

However he insisted that party material should proclaim 'Coalition achievements' to the exclusion of all else prefaced by several sentences about party values and principles none of which reflected the preamble to the constitution.

Coetzee then said there was no time to discuss messages with an election 10 months away, a stance that did little to impress those present.

## FOR YOUR EYES ONLY

The pre-manifesto document is due to come to the Glasgow conference and there are already concerns among MPs who have seen it that, worthy as the content may be, it will not do the job of attracting public attention and giving people a reason to vote Liberal Democrat next year.

So secret is this document that perplexed peers were asked to comment on it without seeing it.

David Laws is ostensibly in charge - an unfortunate choice since, as former MP David Howarth demonstrated to the Social Liberal Forum conference - the British Election Survey's data shows that hardly any voters share his preference for a combination of cultural liberalism and laissez-faire economics.

As one exasperated MP noted: "Above all there seems to be no sense of any political strategy about who we need to target at the next election and what might appeal to them.

"The underlying messages seems to be 'more of the

same' and 'business as usual' rather than 'holy shit, we're on 7% in the polls and the public think we have cocked up the past four years, we had better come up with something radical, different and new'."

Among the more alarming references said to be there is the elimination of the deficit and then to always balance public budgets, which would have Keynes' corpse undergoing rotation.

And how come the Liberal Democrat 'summer campaign pack' managed to include "policy offers" that "will be in the 2015 manifesto", when the pre-manifesto had not yet even been published?

## ON MANOEUVRES

Just before the Conservative half of the Coalition carried out a reshuffle, rumours circulated in the press that Jo Swinson would replace Ed Davey as energy and climate change secretary and that Danny Alexander would be confirmed in preference on Vince Cable as the party's chief economics spokesman

Who might have an interest in Davey's departure? Perhaps by chance someone who wants him out of the way because they are angling for both the leadership and to be 'chief economics spokesman'?

Among Alexander's problems are that he is a truly dreadful media performer.

There are, for example, surely traffic bollards that would have acquitted themselves less embarrassingly on Channel 4 News over the policy change on the bedroom tax.

His four year career of going on television as a rabbit tapped in George Osborne's headlights gives him a hill to climb against Davey, or indeed anyone else, in a future contest for the top job.

Further rumours suggest that Nick Clegg has left any Lib Dem reshuffle until after the Scottish referendum since, unlike the Tories, he actually has numerous MPs from there.

It has to be wondered what the point would be of a reshuffle in late September?

The government's legislative programme is set and almost over, no new minister would be able to do much or make any impression on the public.

## STALIN WOULD BE PROUD

Is there no limit to the Lib Dems ability to cock-up everything related to the accusations made against Lord Rennard (Liberator 365)?

The mishandling has pulled off the remarkable achievement of seeing both Rennard's accusers and supporters lose confidence in the processes used.

That though is now dangerous, since the Regional Parties Committee (RPC) has said Rennard should remain suspended from membership for criticising the party's processes.

Since even Nick Clegg has done that on several occasions, rigid enforcement of this would leave the party with few members.

Whatever one thinks of Rennard, the idea that anyone can be suspended from Lib Dem membership for criticising party processes is as absurd as it is repellent.

The latest outrage came after a hearing of the English Appeals Panel (EAP) on Rennard's suspension, whose decision that he should stay suspended was communicated by the party press office to the BBC before Rennard was told the outcome. The party has since apologised to him.

The EAP had heard Rennard's appeal against his continued suspension. A version of the outcome has been circulating unchallenged among parliamentarians.

This said that the RPC felt it would be premature to end Rennard's suspension because of his criticism of the processes.

Rennard supporters say he offered an apology to the four women who accused him of misconduct once he saw the full Webster report, but could not do so earlier as it was withheld from him for 11 months, leaving him unable to mount a defence and with only what has become a disputed summary in circulation.

The EAP is understood not to have criticised Rennard for failing to apologise during the period in which the report was withheld, and itself made remarks that could be interpreted as committing the new offence of criticising party processes.

What happens next? Three of Rennard's accusers have, regrettable if understandably, left the party, and the errors made in allowing their grievances to go unattended for so long are now well known.

After both a police investigation and Webster it is hard though to see how their now rejected demand for a further investigation could have been met or who could have conducted it.

Rennard has the options of taking the EAP's rulings to the Federal Appeals Panel, or contesting his suspension in court.

The latter option might lead to interesting disclosures with the potential to embarrass a wide range of people

## HOME SOUGHT FOR WELL-BEHAVED CONFERENCE

The Liberal Democrat autumn conference returns to Bournemouth in 2015 after a lengthy absence.

This year's event is accidentally being held in Glasgow for the second year running because the booking originally made with Liverpool had to be changed due to a clash with the Scottish referendum.

Venues are now scarce, as the recent trend towards using major inland cities has been hit by the withdrawal of several from the subvention system.

This is the mechanism by which a local authority subsidises a conference (of any kind) because of the boost provided to the local economy.

Birmingham was the latest to withdraw and Manchester too is reportedly backing out. With Liverpool often booked up, this leaves Brighton and Bournemouth for autumn conferences, plus Glasgow if it remains in the same country as the bulk of the party.

There are a few more options for spring conferences, and no doubt some smaller venues will come into play after next May.

Gateshead, a highly successful spring venue in 2012, has been ruled out by party bean counters as too expensive, while Harrogate lost goodwill when at the last minute it withdrew from hosting the spring 2013 conference.

Blackpool, the final stronghold of the "don't you know there's a war on" approach to hospitality, has been ruled out indefinitely for its crumbling venue and decrepit hotels, while Scarborough is not compliant with disability discrimination legislation.

## PARACHUTE BRIGADE

Latest reports suggest that fewer than 200 selected Liberal Democrat parliamentary candidates are in the field, meaning the party needs to make about two selections a day to get a full slate next May.

But only up to seven or so seats a week are advertising, some of which get no applicants.

No one has found any remedy beyond a lot of last minute parachuting in of the enthusiastic and arm-twisted.

## BEDROOM TROUBLES

Since the Federal Policy Committee failed to set up a working group covering welfare, a policy paper to inform the next general election manifesto is being written by Lord German, co-chair of the Liberal Democrat work and pensions committee.

German has had to do without a co-chair from the commons since Greg Mulholland got the hump earlier in the year, but can now call on John Hemming.

One FPC member who has seen the draft policy paper was disturbed to find it so awful that it was "reading like it was written by a spad, because it probably was".

Spads of course are the highly paid special advisers who are supposed to understand policy and its political impact.

An alternative policy paper is being drafted by a small group of dissidents, which should make for a fine row.

## OPPOSING FORCES

Nobody has managed to quell the row over the Public Services Working Group (Liberator 366) and conference now faces the prospect of an awful lot of amendments and separate votes.

The dispute centres on whether former Shrewsbury candidate Charles West was or was not given an adequate opportunity by group chair Jeremy Hargreaves to put his view, in particular on the purchaser/ provider split in the NHS.

West's supporters say Hargreaves stifled debate on anything with which he disagrees.

Hargreaves' supporters say West's ideas were not adopted because hardly anyone on the group supported them, nor did so on the Federal Policy Committee when they got there.

FPC objected that the paper West submitted included many changes that had never been proposed to the working group, while the dissidents argue this happened only because Hargreaves refused to allow them to be raised.

# IRAQ VOTES AMID CHAOS AND CONFLICT

Iraq held a partly successful election just before the ISIS assault saw the government lose control of half the country to armed fundamentalists. With Kurdistan set to break away, can the country survive, asks a correspondent recently based there

I was first asked to write this article about the Iraqi elections and the shape of the future in early June - even before I had emailed it the situation in Iraq had changed dramatically; ISIS had attacked Mosul and started to advance towards Baghdad.

The Council of Representatives elections and Kurdistan Governorate elections took place in April as the 18 Governorates elected the MPs who choose the president and prime minister. The Iraqi courts have now ratified the results after the Electoral Management Board (EMB) adjudicated the electoral complaints and the results recalculated under the complicated variant of the Sainte-Lague system with quotas for women and minorities, although 22 women won seats outright.

As the first Iraq election without the presence of coalition troops, the general consensus from the international community was that it went well. Obviously that has to be qualified - 50 deaths over three days in election related violence would not normally be a positive indicator, but in Iraq it is.

The expectations were that the death toll would be far higher and there were credible threats of attacks by ISIS against both the (EMB), which is in the heavily fortified Green Zone and on individual polling operations across Iraq, but particularly in Baghdad.

That Maliki would win the election was never really in doubt; however his hopes of winning an outright majority were ambitious and unlikely. There were serious defections from Maliki's State of Law party list prior to the election. Despite that, he won the largest number of seats but not a majority (92 out of 328), which means that coalition negotiations are well under way. It was always expected to take several months before a government is formed, which echoes the situation after the elections held in 2010.

Maliki's increased popularity among voters is at odds with the growing unease of his political opponents and the opposition is more fragmented than in 2010. Even before the current crisis, several parties refused to work with him, claiming he is not trustworthy and accusing him of centralising power, silencing dissidents and oppressing the Sunni minority, which has led to widespread demonstrations and unrest.

The Sunni parties generally performed badly, having deep internal divisions and none are willing to work with Maliki unless demands are met around the alleged misuse of anti-terrorist laws against Sunni protestors and reform agreed of the De-Baathification laws, which are seen to discriminate against senior

Sunni politicians.

The Sunni-dominated governorates of Anbar and Ninevah to the west of Baghdad, which share a border with Syria were already in deep conflict with escalating levels of violence between ISIS, local tribes and the Iraqi government to regain control of the city of Fallujah. It is estimated by UNHCR that more than 400,000 people were displaced internally. The conflict escalated last December when Iraqi security forces dismantled a long standing Sunni protest camp in Ramadi.

Despite the best efforts of the EMB in providing dispensations for internally displaced voters to vote conditionally in neighbouring governorates, the turnouts were low, due to politicians being unable to campaign effectively in Anbar and the threats of violence against polling staff and voters in those areas. Mosques were reported to be preaching against the elections, describing them as un-Islamic and threatening violence against people who did intend to vote.

It was clear that this atmosphere was intimidatory and depressed turnout. Polling day provided reports of suicide bombers and mortar attacks on polling stations in Anbar and Ninevah where thirteen people were reported killed and 36 injured.

While this security situation is the most urgent issue and the reason that Maliki was effectively re-elected, the challenges that the incoming government face are numerous and structural.

The economy is weak outside the hydrocarbon industry and has unemployment of around 20%. According to the UN, 23% of Iraq's live in absolute poverty. The electricity supply is poor and there is no proper sewerage system across much of the country.

Iraq scores heavily on the Transparency International league tables for corruption, making it hard for external investors to do business. Iraq remains one of the most dangerous places in the world for journalists. Sectarian violence has been on the increase - and 2014 has seen the highest death tolls since 2007, mostly from fighting in Anbar and Ninevah governorates and car bombs in Baghdad designed to undermine confidence in the government.

However, whether any party that had been elected would be capable of solving the issues that plague Iraq is contentious.

Politics is split along sectarian lines and politicians bow to religious sensitivities to chase votes. The recent attempted change in the law to allow girls of nine to be married was seen as an attempt to appeal to the



fundamentalist Shi'ia vote. The lack of public outrage on this issue was disturbing.

Predictably, the political parties have yet to reach the level of maturity that provides for effective governance. They are frequently unstable coalitions where skills in campaigning and raising the profile of candidates among their sectarian core vote which far outweigh their ability to present a credible programme for government.

Rarely in the media coverage were party programmes discussed on issues such as health, housing or education, inevitably more focus was on the criticising opponents or the security situation.

Despite good broadcasting rules around impartiality and fair reporting, many TV stations are owned and heavily influenced by the political parties. There were reports of parties 'buying' votes with promises of land or jobs and the effectiveness of the existing political campaign finance regulations need to be evaluated in practice.

Somewhat at odds with the levels of governance, Iraq has an operationally sophisticated and politically astute EMB, which has technical assistance from the UN and an international NGO. They also have good regulatory practises, which comply with international standards for democratic elections.

In an attempt to reduce the potential for allegations of fraud, a form of automated voting was introduced using a pre-issued e-card for voters and which required a fingerprint to be taken to vote. The only concerns raised about this process were by political entities who feared that voters could be identified – such is the authoritarian legacy and climate in Iraq that there seemed to be few concerns or questions raised about this method of data collection either from citizens or the severely underdeveloped civil society sector.

There were a limited number of international election observers due to the security situation. The Arab League provided observers and they were positive about the process that they observed. Much of the observation was undertaken by political entity agents and domestic observers from local NGOs who had access to the polling stations and counting and sorting centres and training from international NGOs. Reports of electoral infringements have been widely publicised and a number of complaints were investigated by the EMB.

The election results in Kurdistan have been less analysed in the media. Somewhat surprisingly the Kurdish parties campaigned on and ran separate lists, rather than putting aside their internal differences to run on a joint one which – at more than 60 seats - would maximise their influence in Baghdad as they had in previous elections. This is probably the result of the increasing self confidence of the Kurdish parties, particularly the KDP, who are feeling buoyed up by their heavy election win in the Kurdish elections in September 2013.

Even before the current crisis, and the Kurdish annexation of Kirkuk, relations between Maliki and the Kurdish parties were poor. The relationship between Baghdad and Kurdistan was becoming increasingly fraught as the Kurds pushed for more financial independence – a move Baghdad was resisting personified by the dispute over the sales of crude oil to Turkey direct from Kurdistan, which was seen as a prelude to further moves towards independence for Kurdistan. Iraq's Oil Ministry has

responded by declaring legal action against Turkey.

The crisis has enabled the issue of Kurdish independence to gain real traction, particularly in the light of the violent unrest in much of the remainder of the country. It will be held as soon as it can be organised, although initial reports from the USA suggest they will not support it.

Inevitably there is much speculation about the future of Iraq. Effectively it has already shattered into Kurdistan, the ISIS-declared caliphate in the Sunni north and west and the Shi'ite south.

Even with the expert, technical US support to the Iraq army, they have demonstrated they will struggle to hold back the ISIS advance which is buoyed up by a major recruitment of foreign fighters, significant funding from Sunni donors and criminal activities and heavy equipment from the Iraqi Army left behind as it fled the fighting.

The Kurdish referendum for independence will almost certainly receive an overwhelmingly positive vote. What Kurdistan's future prospects are and how independence will destabilise the region are debateable. Kurdistan has oil – even more so now they have control of Kirkuk and they are probably the most secure supplies in Iraq, outside those around Basra.

Erbil is highly developed with high property prices, shopping malls, office developments, a fledgling tourist industry and consulates are locating there away from the violence of Baghdad.

It is likely that most of the international community would see independence as an inevitable next step for Kurdistan, although it is likely to concern near neighbours with high Kurdish populations, which includes Iran.

The remainder of Iraq is vulnerable to attack from ISIS and its avowed intention to expand its self-declared Islamic State. The lack of progress by the Iraqi army in recapturing any significant territory means that Baghdad is still seriously under threat.

Volunteer Shi'ia units have been hastily formed by Maliki to defend religious shrines and fight alongside the army, but are taking heavy casualties.

ISIS sleeper cells almost certainly already exist in Baghdad and intelligence reports say Sunni jihadists have infiltrated the army. In the past few days, ISIS signature waves of car bombs have taken place in Baghdad, which intelligence suggests are testing the reactions of the army and volunteer militia which signal a serious attack is being planned.

Should Baghdad become under the control of ISIS, it will be questionable if the state of Iraq can survive. It is difficult to see a scenario where boots of another state will not be put on the ground to contain the situation. The Sunni Gulf states have not so far offered any substantive assistance to Baghdad and have only moved to secure their own borders.

The speaker and president have been elected, and Maliki continues as caretaker prime minister although increasing voices are from Shi'a leaders and the Iranians say he should not press ahead with his candidacy, however, he seems determined to do so.

Iraq faces the problem of some many emerging democracies – how to manage power transitions and what to do with departed leaders.

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Liberator's correspondent was working in Baghdad until being evacuated in mid-June due to the deteriorating security situation.

# TORTURE WHILE THE HOT AIR BLOWS

International law on protecting dissidents is hamstrung by a 366-year-old treaty and only the European Union offers hope, says Rebecca Tinsley

In June an unlikely duo, William Hague and Angelina Jolie, hosted the London summit on rape in conflict.

Delegates watched as officials from around the world pledged to improve their nation's record on sexual violence in war.

In many cases, those same officials returned to countries that systematically exclude women from medical care or legal redress in the event of rape, blaming them for surviving their ordeal, rather than dying honourably while fighting off their attackers.

Some of the very nations condemning rape allow and even encourage their armed forces to oppress minorities by raping women and girls.

Yet, the officials wanted to be seen to be in favour of virtue and against evil. As happens so often at summits, diplomats sign international treaties, conventions and covenants, knowing they will be disregarded in practice, just as their regimes ignore their own domestic bills of rights and constitutions.

Lest we forget, Stalin abolished capital punishment while killing millions of his own citizens.

Optimists argue these events serve a purpose by highlighting issues previous ignored, raising the bar of expectations, and nudging countries to reform so they can stay in line with their peers.

However, policy makers often fail to follow through on worthy initiatives, merely ticking the box, flattering themselves that something more than hot air results from these august gatherings.

## QUIETLY AMUSED

More cynical leaders go home after their shopping trips (an incentive to attend international summits) and revert to type, quietly amused by the credulity of earnest Western do-gooders.

Unfortunately the UK is guilty of its own hypocrisy on rape. While we condemn it, we deny asylum to some female democracy activists who have been raped during interrogation in their country of origin.

My human rights group, Waging Peace, is currently trying to stop the deportation of two brave Sudanese women, one a campaigning journalist and the other deemed suspect in the eyes of the Khartoum regime because she is from Darfur.

Both had traumatic treatment at the hands of the Sudanese authorities; both endured rape in custody, and both fled to the UK, believing they had sufficient grounds to be considered for political asylum. One is now in a detention centre, and the other is in legal limbo, like so many courageous activists who sacrifice their safety to replicate British fairness, democracy, pluralism and tolerance in Sudan.

Putting the UK's double standards to one side, the impediment at the heart of any well-intentioned international initiative like the London rape summit is the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia.

It still determines the impunity with which regimes can treat their citizens with no outside interference. If you strip away the self-righteous hyperbole at ratification ceremonies at the United Nations General Assembly, you are left with Westphalia *uber alles*.

Laws are meaningless unless there is some method of enforcing their provisions. Take the International Criminal Court, which opened in 2002. Without the power to arrest those it indicts, the institution is mocked and reviled, characterised as a neo-colonialist strategy to humiliate African leaders. Until it starts indicting white war criminals, so it will remain.

The UN, still the source of most international law and institutions, was built on the highest expectations, yet in practice it achieves only the lowest common aims. For example, at the 2013 Commission on the Status of Women Russia and the Vatican joined forces with the bloc of Muslim countries to remove any language from the communiqué suggesting beating women was a bad idea.

Some human rights campaigners and academics claim this is the golden age of international human rights law, a period that began in the aftermath of the Holocaust in 1948 with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Genocide Convention.

Sadly, the roll call of atrocities since then from Indonesia to Burma and Cambodia, from Chile to Guatemala, the Soviet Union and China to Zimbabwe, suggests a less edifying track record.

During the Cold War, we averted our eyes from massive human rights abuses when those rulers were "on our side" against the Communist treat. Now, we take the same selective view depending on whether or not a regime proclaims it stands with us against Islamist terror.

In the brief hiatus (Francis Fukuyama's End of History) between the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and 9/11, the most revealing tests of our collective morals occurred in Bosnia (1992-95) and Rwanda (1994), countries in which we had no economic or geopolitical interest.

We no longer had the excuse that global considerations were at play, as they had been when we turned a blind eye to Saddam, Zia, Suharto, Rios Montt and Pinochet. Hence, we did worse than nothing, in the case of Bosnia actively conniving to prevent the Bosnians defending themselves.

Arguably the tone was set in 1993 in Somalia. The loss of 18 American lives in Mogadishu in the 'Black Hawk Down' battle caused the world's unipolar



power to lose its appetite for humanitarian intervention. Because of Mogadishu, the people of Bosnia and Rwanda were left to die; despite the fact that the international community had plenty of warning genocide was imminent.

The fate of Bosnia and Rwanda was symptomatic of our selective application of existing international human rights laws, which should, in theory, have overridden the Treaty of Westphalia.

## **UN DISGRACE**

Following the disgrace of Rwanda the UN adopted the Responsibility to Protect doctrine, known as R2P.

Yet, as UN diplomats spoke movingly of 'never again' at the R2P ceremony in 2005, Sudan was ethnically cleansing 90% of its black African villages in Darfur.

More recently, R2P was invoked to justify intervention in Libya, but ignored in the case of the continuing misery in Syria. No wonder the Russians and Chinese accuse the so-called "coalition of the willing" nations of hypocrisy.

One is tempted to conclude that almost the only truly functioning international laws involve trade and finance. Enforceable laws and punishments evolved in the first place to regulate and protect property rights, not to safeguard human dignity.

Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised that today the international laws with teeth are those concerning property and money.

When business interests are involved, most nations willingly delegate jurisdiction to supranational tribunals with power to apply sanctions and punitive measures, with, for instance, the laws of the sea, copyright, space, counterfeit and other commercial areas.

In the absence of enforcement provisions in most other international laws, treaties or conventions, there are less effective ways to hold nations to their promises, such as reciprocity for example, applying trade tariffs or imposing extortionate visa fees on a country's citizens. This rarely happens when it is human rights, rather than money or trade at issue.

The Petersen Institute found sanctions, especially targeted so-called smart sanctions, have been effective in 40% of cases since 1990. However, our-arms-salesman-in-chief, David Cameron, is unlikely to jeopardise relations with India by raising the status of women or with Saudi Arabia by calling for religious tolerance.

Nations concerned about atrocities and war crimes can also name and shame the perpetrating country and its leaders.

Yet, as the UK and the US have found when lecturing the world on human rights abuses, corruption or the environment, they are open to charges of hypocrisy. The disapproval of individuals like Archbishop Desmond Tutu might have more impact.

*“Our-arms-salesman-in-chief, David Cameron, is unlikely to jeopardise relations with India by raising the status of women or with Saudi Arabia by calling for religious tolerance”*

The exception to this jaundiced worldview is the European Union, the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Courts of Justice and Human Rights.

On several occasions we at Waging Peace have only prevented the deportation of Sudanese democracy activists back to certain death in Khartoum because of last-minute applications under the European Convention on Human Rights.

As terrified men and women have been dragged onto planes, handcuffed, a fax from the European Court has arrived, literally saving the lives of the wretched Sudanese dissident concerned.

Yet the ability of European countries to establish continent-wide standards for the environment, employment and other matters is under threat from the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership currently being debated.

TTIP will allow corporations to sue governments for blocking their access to markets using national or European regulations. In other words, if the UK or the EU votes for certain standards of safety in children's toys, or to restrict products tested on animals, or to ban GM seeds, our laws can be challenged by corporations and swept aside.

Strange, then, that Nigel Farage has not been outraged by this potential surrender of UK sovereignty to TTIP. (Nor has he ever questioned the loss of UK military command and control implicit in membership of NATO).

A second assault on European institutions comes from the UK government due to the long-running war within the Conservative Party. It is rumoured David Cameron will use his conference speech in September to further appease his troublesome Euro-phobes by attacking not just the European Union but the Convention on Human Rights and the Strasbourg court.

Speaking on the day he left government in July, Ken Clarke called the European Convention the bedrock of British values for which Britain fought in the Second World War.

Sadly, it remains one of the few examples of multilateral human rights law with teeth.

The European Union and Europe's courts are also the best example of meaningful legal institutions that other regions such as Africa might look to as models - this at a time when the African Union recently voted to give its leaders immunity from prosecution for genocide and war crimes against their own citizens.

For these reasons we must cherish and defend our European institutions.

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Rebecca Tinsley is director of Waging Peace

# CLEGG'S LESSON FROM THE BRONZE AGE

Liberal Democrats can do 'local' but not 'global' even with an institution like the EU that they support, says George Potter

At the height of the Late Bronze Age, Europe and the Mediterranean were witnessing a flourishing of civilisation. Literature, science and mathematics were advanced. Vast trade routes linked parts of the world ranging from Syria to Scotland. Populations were growing and supporting sophisticated societies and cities. In and around the Aegean there were beautiful cities and palaces with running water and flushing toilets.

Then, 3,200 years ago, it all vanished. Societies and civilisations collapsed. Populations plummeted, cities across Europe and the Middle East were destroyed and abandoned, trade routes collapsed, literacy virtually disappeared and huge amounts of learning were lost forever. In the place of multiple, advanced civilisations, the frontiers of human society shrank to small and isolated village communities.

This was what historians refer to as a 'systems collapse'. There have so far been two in European history, the first being the Bronze Age collapse and the second being the disintegration of the western Roman Empire. Both were followed by dark ages lasting centuries.

In each case it appears there were multiple causes; ranging from climate change and population pressures to migration, warfare and disease. In each case complex societies and political systems were too fragile to withstand the pressure they were facing and collapsed into far simpler forms.

The importance of this is because, as it is said, history may not repeat itself but it does rhyme.

## FRIGHTENINGLY FRAGILE

When we look at the modern world we see complex, interconnected, highly specialised and frighteningly fragile societies threatened by population pressures and climate change on a scale never before witnessed in human history.

Political systems are fraying around the edges with increasing numbers feeling alienated by systems that are failing to deliver. Instability is occurring everywhere from Syria to Somalia to Ukraine.

Yet at the same time our societies are at unparalleled heights. Never before have living standards been so high and so many been so relatively comfortable.

We enjoy modern conveniences in all but the most impoverished of homes, the ability to buy and sell products to and from anywhere in the world and live in times which are probably the safest and most secure for individuals in human history.

An alarmist might look at all this and say that signs are everywhere that we are living in the run up to the third systems collapse in our history.

Certainly the challenges we face, particularly man-

made climate change, genuinely pose the greatest threat to humanity that we have ever known. The potential for a collapse of European (and global) civilisation in the face of pressures too great to cope with are there.

But just because there is a possibility of something does not, by any means, make it certain. There have been many times in the past when it seemed like human civilisation was facing challenges too great to survive and yet it did. The Black Death is just one such example from European history where society survived when destruction seemed inevitable.

Nonetheless, the challenges we face are real and existential. If humanity does not rise to meet the threat of climate change, for example, while it is unlikely that our species will go extinct, civilisation as we know it most certainly will.

Which brings us to Liberalism. Liberalism as a philosophy combines, without contradiction, the drive for decentralised, localised structures with the desire for ever greater cooperation at an international scale. Under the present circumstances, this is exactly what the world needs.

All the problems in the modern world are global. Climate change, globalisation, economic downturns, unrest and food security. All of these have a global impact, which ensures that nowhere is immune from events somewhere else in the world.

A famine in India increases food prices in Inverness. Civil war in Syria leads to a greater risk of terrorism in Sheffield. A banking crisis in America causes unemployment in Aberystwyth. Carbon dioxide emitted in Putney helps sea levels submerge an island in the Pacific. Everything and everyone is connected.

But as those same examples show, all the problems in the modern world are also local and require local communities with the power to overcome them. Climate change cannot be tackled without fewer people using their cars and better flood defences being built in Plymouth.

Foreign fighters flooding into and destabilising Syria and Iraq cannot be stopped without British communities countering the radicalisation of some young men. Food shortages cannot be reduced without a village in Kenya building a new irrigation system.

And with both global and local solutions to the problems facing humanity, there is no reason why they cannot be overcome, allowing our modern world to survive problems that destroyed previous civilisations.

Unfortunately, while Liberal Democrats and UK politicians as a whole are quite good (or at least getting better in comparison with the past) at understanding and supporting the need for the local solutions to local problems, they and we are not so good at understanding and supporting the need for global level

solutions to global problems.

The best example of this is the European Union, which composes the largest and most advanced economy and free trade area in the world. By pooling sovereignty it offers the collective clout needed to tackle dilemmas such as global climate change, the failings of now irreversible globalisation and the rise of other great powers such as China and Russia in a way that any individual European country would find itself too weak to accomplish.

## **FAILING MISERABLY**

Instinctively, Liberal Democrats, as a whole, understand this and support UK membership of the EU. Regrettably, that seems to be as far as it goes. While an effective EU is essential in order for European civilisation to survive the challenges facing it and to improve the lives of its people, Liberal Democrats seem to be failing miserably to put our money where our mouth is when it comes to these principles.

Take, for example, the recent debacle over the president of the European Commission. The commission is the government of the EU. Just like the UK government it is headed by an individual, the president, who appoints the portfolio holders of their government.

But until now the president was always appointed as the result of secret horse-trading in backrooms by the leaders of national governments. Democracy and accountability had nothing to do with it. The government of the largest economy on Earth was appointed behind closed doors.

This lamentable state of affairs finally changed only this year when the European Parliament, empowered by the Lisbon Treaty and already possessing the power to sack the commission, collectively committed to the principle of candidates for president, who would be put forward by each party in the parliament to see who won a majority. Notably both the British Conservative's group in the European parliament and UKIP's group failed to put forward candidates.

Of course, proportional representation being proportional representation, no party won a majority in the European elections, making things rather complicated.

But the MEPs and European parties themselves were still determined to establish the principle that it should be the directly elected and accountable people's representatives who chose the government of the EU.

So it came to be that one Jean-Claude Juncker, of the conservative European Peoples Party, received the backing of the European Parliament to become president, as his party was the largest in the parliament.

He even received the backing for the job of his lead opponents, Martin Schulz of the socialists and Guy Verhofstadt of the liberals, for the sake of the principle.

On the face of it, all was well. The government of the EU would now be determined by the composition of the parliament and accountable to it – a big step forward for democracy.

Of course, we all know what happened next. Eurosceptics condemned the post-election formation of a coalition to back Juncker as being an “undemocratic” and David Cameron, with the backing of the British

media, strode forth to do battle against the “federalist”, “anti-reform” Juncker and the “backdoor power-grab” by the European Parliament, to use quotes from Cameron himself, in an attempt to convince national leaders to block Juncker from becoming president.

What was missed in all of this was that the “anti-reform” Juncker had actually run on an election platform of reforming the eurozone, strengthening ‘social solidarity’ policies and giving “an answer to the British question” in the form of a deal which let the Eurozone integrate further without the UK while keeping Britain in the EU. Not that any of this was noticed by Cameron or the media.

Of course all of this was to be expected. No modern Tory leader would pass up a chance to try and portray themselves as fighting against Brussels or be afraid of completely misrepresenting reality in the process. That Labour's Ed Miliband would run scared of the tabloids and agree with Cameron over Juncker is hardly surprising either.

## **TRULY APPALLING**

But what was truly appalling was that Nick Clegg, not content with having tried and failed to sabotage the selection of the European liberals' candidate (Liberator 364), also backed Cameron over the European Commission. In an interview he warned: “We mustn't establish the precedent that the European Union commission president is hand-picked by the parliament.”

Thus an important element in the reform and development of the institutions of the European Union towards the democratic accountability necessary for it to function in a way capable of tackling the urgent problems we face happened despite the opposition of the Liberal Democrats.

The challenges facing the human race can only be solved by local and global action. At the moment, organisations like the European Union are the best tools we have for working on a global scale.

Slowly, belatedly and thanks in large part to the original promotion of ‘community politics’ by liberals, the principles of the need for localism are entering British conventional political wisdom. The practice still leaves much to be desired and much more to be done but progress is being made directly as a result of work by liberals over the decades.

The same thing needs to be done if we are to hope ever to find global solutions for global problems and use tools like the EU effectively.

Liberals have a long, proud history of adopting correct, minority opinions ahead of their time and making them mainstream. If we care for the future of our civilisation then we must strive to do so again. The Juncker debacle shows the Liberal Democrats still haven't learnt to put internationalist principles into practice. We had best learn soon as time is running out for us to do so.

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George Potter is a member of the Liberator Collective



# MASTERMAN'S WAR

Charles Masterman would nowadays be called a spin doctor. Jonathan Calder recounts a liberal whose responsibility for wartime propaganda exposed atrocities, even if he wasn't believed

Charles Masterman is an attractive figure among Edwardian Liberals.

Before being elected an MP in 1906, he undertook social work in the London slums and worked a journalist. His best book, *The Condition of England*, captures his temperament well. Though ardent for social progress, he had a melancholy streak and could look beyond politics for salvation, quoting the 19th-century nature mystic Richard Jefferies more than once.

Masterman was responsible, as a junior minister, for putting Lloyd George's National Insurance Act of 1911, which laid the foundations of the welfare state, through the Commons.

This meant spending hour after hour at the dispatch box as the Conservatives fought over every line of the bill. It also won him the hatred of the Tory press and every reactionary voice from the British Medical Association to the headmaster of Eton.

He was lucky in his first biographer. Masterman's wife Lucy, who was to survive him by 50 years, was later a parliamentary candidate herself and was active in the Women's Liberal Federation in the 1970s, provided a portrait of "the vivid, tormented man I loved".

There are too many undigested extracts from her diary for it to rank as great literature, but besides its value as a picture of Masterman, it is an invaluable resource for anyone seeking to understand the big beasts of that Liberal government.

For not only did Masterman serve under both Lloyd George and Winston Churchill, he and Lucy became friends of both families. So in her biography you will read Lloyd George's recollection of his childhood: "If we kept the law about trespassing when we were children ... we should have nowhere to play but a dusty strip of grass by the high road. I never remember during all our visits passing a 'trespassers will be prosecuted' notice without him remarking 'I hate that sort of thing'."

And you will read what happened when Masterman, who had been on holiday in France and reading reports of the siege of Sidney Street with increasing alarm, got back to London.

He burst into Mr. Churchill's room at the Home Office with the query "What the hell have you been doing now, Winston?" The reply, in Winston's characteristic lisp, was unanswerable. "Now Charlie. Don't be croth. It was such fun."

Masterman was appointed chancellor for the Duchy of Lancaster in 1914 at the age of 41. In those days any MP joining the cabinet was obliged to resign his seat and fight a by-election – this requirement was abolished a few years later by the first Labour

government.

Because Masterman was identified with Lloyd George's reforms – and because he had won the enmity of Horatio Bottomley and his populist *John Bull* magazine over a scandal where he was deemed to have shown insufficient zeal for investigating the mistreatment of boys in a reformatory – he had become a controversial figure.

As a result, he was defeated in his Bethnal Green constituency and again at a second by-election in Ipswich shortly afterwards.

## UNPOPULAR REFORMS

It is easy to blame the Tory press, but it is worth pausing to reflect that reforms carried out on behalf of the people are not always popular with those people. If Lloyd George's measures were such a leap forward, should Masterman not have benefited from being associated with them?

The same paradox may exist for the National Health Service too. The other day I heard Tim Farron claim that William Beveridge had lost his seat at Berwick in 1945 because of a campaign against him by the British Medical Association, and David Boyle has told me that some working class people were wary of the NHS after its establishment in 1948. Certainly, the (admittedly very middle class) 1950 Ealing comedy *The Magnet* shows people proud their local hospital is run by a charity and not part of the NHS.

At the very least, Charles Masterman's career shows that policies that are right in the long term may be unpopular in the short term and that the usual description of him as an 'unlucky' politician does not tell the whole story.

The Liberal Party gave up its attempt to get Masterman back into the House of Commons just as the First World War broke out. Instead, he was put in charge of Wellington House, the organisation responsible for British war propaganda.

For many this has cast a shadow over his memory. As John Horne argued in *History Today* in 2002, after the First World War was over public opinion was dominated by a backlash against the cost of victory and in particular against the industrialised killing of trench warfare. Scapegoats were needed to explain how this catastrophe had come about.

Horne wrote: "Propaganda was a key culprit. Liberals and socialists, in particular, considered the 'people' to be inherently pacific and rational. Ordinary individuals could only have continued the butchery of the Western Front because they were misled and 'manipulated'."

Atrocity propaganda was held to be the prime example of this manipulation. The Labour MP

Arthur Ponsonby argued: “The exaggeration and invention of atrocities soon becomes the main staple of propaganda.” He asserted that Allied governments had circulated stories of German ‘frightfulness’ in Belgium ... “in such numbers as to give ample proof of the abominable cruelty of the German army and so to infuriate popular opinion against them”.

The idea that German atrocities towards the civilian population when they invaded Belgium and France in 1914 were an invention of the Allied propaganda machine took hold to such an extent that many were slow to believe accounts of the Holocaust during the Second World War.

Yet the true position is different. As Horne argues, the contemporary argument between the Allies and Germany was not so much about what the German Army had done but whether it was justified.

There were official inquiries in Belgium, France and Britain, the last chaired by the Liberal peer Lord Bryce. The reports varied considerably in tone but all claimed that German soldiers had killed large numbers of civilians in cold blood and deliberately inflicted enormous physical damage.

The German government responded with the White Book of May 1915. Curiously, this did not deny the ‘facts’ alleged by the Allies but argued that German actions were legitimate reprisals for the real atrocity in the German view – mass resistance by Franco-Belgian civilians in a war of francs-tireurs.

(free shooters) – he term used to describe the irregular military formations deployed by France during the early stages of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, and Horne cites research suggesting that the German military in 1914 was obsessed with the idea they would face such opposition again.

The result was killing on a scale that is startling to readers raised on the idea that German atrocities existed only in Allied propaganda.

Six-and-a-half thousand civilians perished, mostly in ten days in the second half of August. Deportations to Germany and the use of civilians as ‘human shields’ were widespread. Some 20,000 buildings (including whole villages) were burned down, including numerous historical and cultural monuments.

In the worst incidents, scores or even hundreds of civilians were killed. The notorious destruction of Louvain, including the historic university library, with the death of 248 civilians, was the result of panic by German soldiers who, convinced that they faced a rising of the inhabitants, mistakenly fired on each other.

Horne concludes that, though there was exaggeration and fantasy on the Allied side, the accounts of atrocities had their roots in the accounts of victims traumatised by the behaviour of the invading Germans.

## ATTEMPTED GENOCIDE

Similarly, Masterman gave widespread publicity to the Ottoman Empire’s attempted genocide of the Armenian people. There is no doubting the truth of those reports, yet you will still find the Turkish government denying the genocide and blaming the very idea of it on Masterman.

Masterman’s techniques were subtler than Ponsonby allowed. Lucy paints a picture him insisting that all propaganda was factually based: “It was within a

month of his taking up the work that I saw him facing complaints not markedly different from threats from a prominent newspaper owner, afterwards ennobled, who was aggrieved that the ‘news’ he had sent in on ‘atrocities’ on Belgians, in particular the assertion that the Germans had cut the hands from a Belgian baby, had not been made use of ... Masterman remained immovable ... ‘Find me the name of the hospital where the baby is and get me a signed statement from the doctor and I’ll listen’ was all he would say.”

Lucy’s biography was published in 1939, and it is interesting that by then she felt the need to put ‘atrocities’ in scare quotes.

The writers Masterman recruited to the Allied cause – Arthur Conan Doyle, Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy, Thomas Hardy, Rudyard Kipling, HG Wells and many more beside – make a mightily impressive list.

He also commissioned an equally impressive list of war artists, with the result that the galleries of the Imperial War Museum remain one of the most rewarding places for lovers of 20th-century British art to explore.

One triumph of Wellington House was the use of the figure of Edith Cavell, a nurse celebrated for saving the lives of soldiers from both sides without distinction, who also helped some 200 Allied soldiers escape from German-occupied Belgium.

For this she was arrested by the German authorities, court-martialled, found guilty of treason and sentenced to death. Despite international pressure for mercy, she was shot by a German firing squad.

This year, when protestors understandably objected to the use of General Kitchener on a commemorative £2 coin to mark the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War, the alternative portrait they suggested was that of Edith Cavell.

Masterman did return to Westminster in 1923 as MP for Manchester Rusholme, defeating a Conservative called John Thorpe - father of the future Liberal leader - in the process.

He acted as something of a mentor to the numerous new Labour members, schooling them in parliamentary procedure and tactics, in a way that reminds the modern reader of Donald Dewar in the first reconvened Scottish parliament, where he was half first minister and half kindly professor.

Along with so many Liberals elected in that brief revival, Masterman was defeated the following year.

By then he was struggling with addictions to alcohol and prescription drugs and he was to die in 1927 at the age of only 54. Lucy passes lightly over his decline, but a later biographer, Eric Hopkins, tells you all and (perhaps more than) you want to know.

Masterman remains a compelling figure for Liberals, and his period in charge of Wellington House was an honourable episode in a fascinating career.

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Jonathan Calder is a member of the Liberator Collective.

# FROM VERSAILLES TO BRUSSELS

The origins of the European Union and the federalist movement can be traced from one British Liberal's despair at the Treaty of Versailles and the persistent attachment to nation states, says David Grace

In 1919 the peace negotiations to end the Great War were going badly.

Delegates from all over the world had descended on Paris, but only three politicians mattered - David Lloyd George, prime minister of the UK,

Georges Clemenceau, French premier and Woodrow Wilson, president of the United States of America. The Germans weren't invited.

At the end of March Lloyd George took his staff off to the Hotel de France et d'Angleterre in Fontainebleau to discuss what to do about French demands for reparations from Germany.

The Prime Minister cast each of them in a role play. Henry Wilson, chief of the imperial general staff, first enacted a German officer protesting about what dire results for Germany the proposed crushing terms would do; then he switched to the part of a French woman describing the anxieties and fears of the long war and demanding revenge on the Boche.

Lloyd George himself insisted that the peace terms should not destroy Germany. His private secretary, Philip Kerr, was given the unenviable task of converting this exercise into the Fontainebleau Memorandum, which Lloyd George duly presented to Clemenceau and Wilson, warning that if Germany "feels that she has been unjustly treated in the peace of 1919 she will find means of exacting retribution from her conquerors".

Little did he know how percipient his rhetoric was. The previous November telling Liberal MPs that the principle issue of the general election would be the nature of the peace, he had proclaimed with traditional Welsh understatement: "Are we to return to the system of national rivalries and competitive armaments or to initiate the reign on Earth of the Prince of Peace?"

Nevertheless in the end he gave way to

Clemenceau's demands and Kerr was roped in again to draft punitive clauses in the Treaty of Versailles and, as Lady Bracknell would have observed, we all know what became of that unfortunate event.

## IMPERIAL FEDERATION

Kerr, later Marquis of Lothian, was originally a Unionist but one of a radical and reforming bent. Having started public life as a colonial administrator in South Africa, he had played a role in the miracle of uniting two former British colonies and two former Boer states into the Union of South Africa, barely nine years after they had been at each other's throats.

Between 1910 and 1916 he edited the Round Table, a

journal of imperial and international affairs where he called for the evolution of the British Empire into an imperial federation.

From 1916 to 1921 he worked as private secretary to Lloyd George where his influence infuriated Churchill, Balfour and Curzon who regarded him as a one-man second Foreign Office whose views carried more weight than the first one.

Lloyd George converted him to liberalism and he turned down the opportunity of a Unionist seat in the House of Commons. In 1921 he left Lloyd George's service to become managing Editor of the News Chronicle. He played a leading role in the Industrial Fellowship Movement of the 1920s, which campaigned for partnership between employers and trade unions and he was part of the Liberal Industrial Enquiry, which produced the famous Yellow Book of 1928.

Kerr served in Ramsay Macdonald's National Government but resigned with other Liberals over the abandonment of free trade in favour of imperial preference in 1932.

But he was best known for his advocacy of international federation. Surely it was his guilt over his part in the Versailles Treaty that drove him into serious consideration of the causes of war and what was needed to stop it.

Perhaps it was this experience that persuaded Kerr to become the leading advocate of a federation of democracies throughout the inter-war years.

In 1922 and 1923 he gave lectures in Williamstown, Massachusetts on the prevention of war, which he believed could only be achieved by multinational federation.

He saw Britain and the USA as being the heart of a global federation of the then 14 democracies in the world, which other countries would later join. While relations within countries were subject to law, international relations were lawless, anarchic. The fundamental cause of war was the division of the world into sovereign states, which recognise no higher authority. Not a point I remember Nick Clegg making to Nigel Farage.

At the Liberal Summer School in Cambridge in 1933, Kerr commented on the rise of militarism in Japan, fascism in Italy and of Hitler to the German Chancellorship.

International anarchy led to nationalism, protectionism, autarky and eventual war. In 1935 he gave his most famous lecture in America.

Echoing the words of Edith Cavell before her execution in 1915: "I recognise that patriotism is not



enough. I must have no hatred or bitterness towards anyone”, he also challenged the prevalent peace movement in the UK with his title, “Pacifism is not enough - nor patriotism either.”

Kerr picked up an old theme of Immanuel Kant that peace is “not merely the negative condition in which war is not being waged. It is a positive thing. It is that state of society in which political, economic and social issues are settled by constitutional means under the reign of law... Peace...does not just happen. It is the creation of a specific political institution. That institution is the state.”

Nor did his words fall on stony ground in Britain. In 1938 disgusted by the Munich agreement, three young Oxford graduates, Charles Kimber, Patrick Ransome and Derek Rawnsley bought a beer barrel, wrote a pamphlet calling for an international federation and invited around 60 people to drink the beer and discuss the pamphlet.

Thus began Federal Union, which grew to a membership of 10,000 with 200 branches around Britain supported by the Times, the Manchester Guardian and the New Statesman and 100 MPs as well as Lothian.

The Federal Union Council included William Beveridge, Lionel Curtis, Ivor Jennings, Professor Joad and Barbara Wootton.

“Europe must federate or perish,” said Clem Attlee. I don’t recollect Blair, Brown or Miliband echoing the sentiment.

Lothian wrote a pamphlet for Federal Union called The Ending of Armageddon just before he was appointed British ambassador in Washington where he continued the federal theme in speeches between September 1939 and May 1940.

## **DICTATORSHIP AND PATRIOTISM**

Lothian told the Americans that the principles of democracy should lead to federation. The war was between democracy and dictatorship; pacifism would not defeat dictatorship and patriotism would not build a federation.

Meanwhile Federal Union’s activity bore strange fruit. As France fell, Churchill and the British cabinet, at the instigation of a French civil servant working on munitions in London, a chap called Jean Monnet, offered the French prime minister Paul Reynaud an immediate federal union of Britain and France. Reynaud accepted and Churchill boarded a train to take him to a destroyer, which would carry him to France to sign the agreement. Then came the news that the French cabinet meeting in a hotel in Bordeaux had deposed Reynaud in favour of Petain.

Churchill left the train and returned to Downing Street. After the war Monnet returned to France where he persuaded foreign minister Robert Schuman to propose the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community. The rest, as they say, is history.

Nor was this the end of Lothian’s story, although he died in December 1940.

Mussolini had exiled many political opponents to the island of Ventotene (following the custom of Roman emperors, like Augustus who sent his daughter Julia there as punishment for her numerous adulteries). Among these political prisoners was Altiero Spinelli, later to become a European Commissioner and then an MEP. As early as 1941 with the outcome of

the war uncertain, Spinelli and his colleagues were discussing what shape Europe should take when peace finally came. They smuggled into the island publications of Federal Union including work by Lothian and under the influence of these ideas wrote the Ventotene manifesto entitled Per un’Europa Libera e Unita (For a Free and United Europe), which argued that, if the fight against the fascist powers was successful, it would be in vain if it merely led to the re-establishment of the old European system of sovereign nation-states in shifting alliances.

This would inevitably lead to war again. The manifesto was smuggled out to the mainland and circulated among the Italian resistance and thence to resistance movements across Europe.

In 1943 Spinelli met resistance leaders from many countries, including Germany, in Geneva. The manifesto became the founding document of the European Federalist Movement. Yes, friends, European federalism began with the ideas of a British group and pre-eminent among them, the British Liberal, Kerr.

Simon Titley once gave me the perfect image for the futility of war and it is one I throw in the face of UKIP and all lovers of national sovereignty.

It is the Menin Gate in Ypres, built as a memorial to the British and Commonwealth soldiers who died in and around the Ypres Salient but whose bodies were never found. In all 300,000 men lost their lives of whom 90,000 have no known graves. More than 54,000 names are inscribed on the gate.

I do not know if Kerr ever visited but it is likely and if he were there at sunset, he would have heard buglers from the local fire brigade play the last post. They have done it since July 1928 (in World War Two the ceremony was at Brookwood in Surrey). They still do it today. I urge you to go and while there to visit the extraordinary Flanders Fields Museum in the Cloth Hall which shows the war from the perspective of British, French and German soldiers.

As a European federalist I am often accused of utopianism. I reply that what is utopian is to imagine that we can outlaw war between nations without federation. In August 1914 HG Wells described the nascent conflict as “The war that will end war.” Lloyd George’s characteristic comment was “This war, like the next war, is a war to end war.”

The peace treaty he gave the world in Versailles fully justified his scepticism.

Kerr, whose job was to write part of that dreadful document, found and promoted a better way.

Today’s Liberals and today’s Liberal leaders would do well to glance away from the focus groups and polls and learn a little history, so that none of us will be condemned to repeat it.

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David Grace is a member of the Liberator Collective

# NOT QUITE UNITED FOR WAR

Despite the public mood of 1914, there were many influential Liberals who deplored the rush to war, including Asquith's great critic Lord Loreburn, explains David Dutton

One of the most striking features of the coming of European war in August 1914 is that British participation did not, at the beginning at least, shatter the country's incumbent Liberal government.

Little over a decade earlier, the Liberal Party, then in opposition, had come close to disintegration as a viable political force as a result of disagreements over involvement in the Boer War.

The issues of 1914 were, of course, very different, and the Liberals were not a pacifist party per se. But the party did stand for principles of international cooperation and diplomatic arbitration. Many Liberals had been at the forefront of recent attempts to reach a lasting understanding with Imperial Germany. Military partnership with the autocracy of Tsarist Russia was difficult to reconcile with any plausible definition of what it meant to be a Liberal.

Yet, against the odds, the party survived the war crisis virtually unscathed. It is true that two cabinet ministers – Lord Morley and John Burns – did resign. But the former was, by 1914, little more than a quaint survivor of the Gladstonian era; the latter, the first authentic working-man to sit at the cabinet table, spoke for few except himself within the party hierarchy.

Two others, Sir John Simon and Lord Beauchamp, also tendered their resignations, but were persuaded by prime minister Herbert Asquith to withdraw them, not least by the argument that their departures would not prevent British involvement in the conflict, but merely hasten the return of Conservatives to the government.

## MORAL ISSUE

Beneath the level of the cabinet, C.P. Trevelyan, a junior minister at the Board of Education, also left the government. But the possibility of a wider Liberal revolt was effectively removed when, conveniently for the interventionists, Germany violated Belgian neutrality, which Britain had guaranteed in 1839, thereby creating the sort of 'moral' issue around which the majority found it possible to rally.

As one backbench MP put it on 2 August: "It is almost impossible to believe that a Liberal Government can be guilty of the crime of dragging us into this conflict in which we are in no way interested."

Within days, however, the position had been transformed: "When Germany decided on an unprovoked attack upon Belgium, whose neutrality Germany equally with ourselves had guaranteed, it seemed impossible for us to stand by."

This is not to suggest that Asquith's administration

faced the July crisis with an almost united front. Approximately half the cabinet felt varying degrees of disquiet at the prospect of British intervention. Indeed, there had always been more potential within the government for a major breach on a question of foreign policy than on any other issue.

Divisions of ideology, which had come so near to breaking point at the time of the South African war, had never entirely disappeared. Much has been written about the dysfunctional constitutional and governmental structures of the continental belligerents.

But the British system was not immune from this criticism. It had been possible, since the formation of the Liberal government in December 1905, for the foreign secretary, Sir Edward Grey, to pursue a policy about which many members of the cabinet felt grave misgivings and with aspects of which they were unaware.

As David Lloyd George later put it: "We were made to feel that, in these matters, we were reaching our hands towards the mysteries, and that we were too young in the priesthood to presume to enter into the sanctuary reserved for the elect ... We were not privileged to know any more of the essential facts than those which the ordinary newspaper reader could gather from the perusal of his morning journal."

From the outset of his foreign secretaryship Grey seemed ready to shape British foreign policy around the Entente with France, concluded in 1904. In particular, in January 1906, and without consulting the full cabinet, he gave the go ahead for talks between the British director of military intelligence and the French military attaché on possible Anglo-French cooperation in the event of war.

Over the following years the Entente (complicated in 1907 by a similar agreement with Russia) was transformed, almost imperceptibly, into an expectation of support for the French, which it would be very hard to escape.

Then, at a special meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence in 1911, from which likely ministerial dissidents were excluded, a detailed discussion took place of the immediate deployment of a British Expeditionary Force to France in the event of the outbreak of war.

When the radicals within the government discovered what had happened, two stormy meetings of the cabinet were held at which the administration was on the very edge of breaking up.

The radicals believed that they had secured assurances regarding Grey's future conduct, but in practice little changed. Naval conversations in 1913

led to an agreement on the fleet concentrations of Britain and France, which only made strategic sense on the premise of a wartime alliance between the two countries. As Britain entered the July crisis of 1914, the government was strictly speaking correct in insisting that no formal agreement existed binding Britain to a specific course of action. In practice, however, Grey's scope for manoeuvre was extremely limited.

What the dissidents of 1914 needed above all else was leadership. Granted his history as a prominent anti-war 'pro-Boer', many looked to the chancellor, Lloyd George, to provide it. But Lloyd George's stance had been evolving for some time since his Mansion House speech of July 1911, warning the Germans of the possible consequences of an aggressive stance over the Moroccan crisis.

He was one of the first of the cabinet 'waverers' to make his way into the interventionist camp.

Lord Loreburn, appointed lord chancellor in 1905, might have provided the necessary leadership if ill health had not forced his sudden retirement in June 1912. By elevating Loreburn to the Woolsack, prime minister Henry Campbell-Bannerman showed his determination not to be dictated to by the right-wing Liberal Imperialists.

It was also part of Campbell-Bannerman's design to ensure that his government should be a broadly based representation of the entire party spectrum, rather than the preserve of a particular faction. But that ministerial balance was not maintained. Illness forced Campbell-Bannerman's own resignation, and Asquith's elevation to the premiership, early in 1908; the retirement of the octogenarian Lord Ripon was perhaps inevitable; and, as has been seen, Lloyd George's adherence to the radical camp, at least on questions of foreign policy, was in doubt after 1911.

"Always remember", Loreburn told C.P. Scott of the Manchester Guardian that same year, "this is a Liberal League Government" – a reference to the Liberal Imperialist body set up in February 1902 with Lord Rosebery as president and Asquith, Grey, Fowler and, subsequently, Haldane as vice-presidents.

With Loreburn's resignation in 1912, one of the last effective restraints on the Grey-Asquith-Haldane axis was removed.

He viewed the British declaration of war on 4 August 1914 with dismay, later writing: "The key to the 1914 imbroglio was our position vis-à-vis with [sic] France. This hampered, as it seems to me, our power to see straight as well as to speak straight of our intentions."

But, out of office, his problem was how to bring his influence to bear, especially granted his own now fragile state of health. Given the public mood, which largely accepted the justice of British intervention, he shifted his analysis away from the rights and wrongs of British participation and towards the necessity of reaching a diplomatic resolution of the conflict.

He was one of the first to appreciate the potential role of the as yet neutral American president Woodrow Wilson, and made contact with him.

He was also among the first to think through the awful consequences of a long war of attrition. Loreburn began to ask difficult questions in the House of Lords and, echoing his pre-war concern about secret diplomacy, called for more openness in government, especially once the formation of a coalition in May

1915 effectively removed the option of an alternative government.

When Wilson's envoy Colonel House returned to London early in 1916, Loreburn felt able to assure him that the movement for peace by negotiation was growing.

## CIVILISATION DESTROYED

By 1917 Loreburn was less isolated than earlier in the war, as an increasing number of people began to question whether the concept of victory could have any meaning in the context of the price paid to achieve it. He was in contact with the former Unionist foreign secretary, Lord Lansdowne, and gave public support when the latter used a letter to the Daily Telegraph in November to call for a negotiated peace before civilisation itself was destroyed.

Loreburn also used the platform of the new weekly journal *Common Sense* to develop his views. He became an advocate of the future parliamentary control of British foreign policy and of the creation of a post-war League of Nations.

In the event, the war came to a relatively sudden and unexpected end. Any hope that Loreburn might play some sort of role in the construction of the peace soon passed.

Even so, the Versailles settlement contained, at least in its framework, some of the points for which he had campaigned. Furthermore, a League of Nations was created and remained at the heart of international diplomacy for the next 15 years.

But the Treaty of Versailles was never the wholesale implementation of Wilsonian idealism for which Loreburn might have wished. He blamed the harsher features on the French, suggesting it was a treaty of which Louis XIV would have been proud.

But Loreburn's final and perhaps most important contribution came in 1919 with the publication of his account of the origins of the Great War. He used *How the War Came* to rehearse the critique of British diplomacy that he had been making ever since Grey had become foreign secretary.

"The point of view presented in these pages," he argued, "is that of a Liberal who has always thought the infusion of imperialism a course of danger, and who believes that the tragedy of the war would not have come upon us if the ministers of 1914 had been true to our traditional principles".

The British declaration of war, Loreburn insisted, had been skilfully presented as a response to the German violation of Belgian neutrality.

In fact, "The nation found itself bound by obligations of honour contracted toward France in secret, [and was] constrained ... to enter upon this war, whether Belgium was invaded or not."

Loreburn's book stands as a powerful indictment of Grey's conduct and represents a lasting monument to one who refused to accept the inevitability of war and who challenged those who, he believed, had abandoned the noble Liberal values of conciliation, cooperation and international peace.

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David Dutton is emeritus professor of twentieth century British political history at the University of Liverpool and author of *A History of the Liberal Party in the Twentieth Century*.



# WEBB FILLS THE POTS

## Pensions reform has been a success story for the Liberal Democrats, despite George Osborne's best efforts, says Janice Turner

Let me give you it with both barrels from the top: our pensions minister Steve Webb's success in getting into the Queen's Speech plans for a new type of private sector pension, in addition to a stream of other initiatives since 2010, marks him out as the most radical and successful pensions minister in half a century.

That's a big thing to say but Steve deserves the praise. In his four years in the job he has refused to get bogged down by technical detail or corporate interests, and has kept as his lodestar the determination to serve the interests of ordinary working people, especially those least able to fight their own corner. The pensions industry may agree with some of the things he's done and disagree with others, but he is held in extraordinarily high regard.

His latest proposal has the potential to improve the retirement prospects of millions of private sector workers who currently save in what are called 'defined contribution' (DC) schemes, or 'money purchase' pensions.

The best type of schemes in the private sector is a final salary scheme, known as 'defined benefit' (DB). It defines what benefit you're going to get when you retire so you know that, for example, if you build your pension up at a rate of 1/60th of your final salary per year, after 40 years you would be entitled to a pension of 40 sixtieths of your final salary.

But owing to disastrous policy changes by both Labour and Tory governments, these are declining fast, and until now the only alternative for private sector workers was being part of a DC scheme.

Ordinary DC schemes have major drawbacks. While DB schemes give you a guarantee of how much you'll get in your pension, DC schemes depend entirely on your investment return and the level of charges you have to pay. Your pension builds by investing your and your employer's contributions in the hope that the investment return will be enough to provide you with a decent retirement. With DB schemes any risk of a shortfall is borne by the employer. DC schemes dump all the risk on the individual saver.

There are even more problems than this. When someone in a DC scheme reaches retirement they usually buy a pension, called an annuity, from an insurance company. But these are now widely criticised as up to a quarter of your pension pot could be swallowed up in fees and charges. The Financial Conduct Authority carried out a review of annuities and its scathing report concluded that annuities represented very poor value for money.

Other options have appeared on the market such as 'income drawdown' where you buy the option of taking a bit from your pension pot each month without actually buying the annuity – but you still have to pay for the privilege.

George Osborne has complicated matters still further by unilaterally announcing this year that from 2015 DC retirees will be allowed to take the lot as a lump sum and do whatever they want with it. Some other countries allow this, such as Australia.

While this sounds attractive, the whole point of a pension scheme has always been to protect us from ourselves – to put money where we can't get at it until retirement, when it will pay out a monthly income until we die. If we were all disciplined and far sighted enough to save our money for 40 years pension schemes wouldn't be necessary. Of course, retirees already have the freedom to take a sizeable chunk of their pension pot as a lump sum.

### BUYING LAMBORGHINIS

But allowing the option of blowing the lot on a Lamborghini means that a lot of people will indeed spend it all in a very short time and then find themselves living for 20 or 30 years on nothing more than the state pension. This will be a major problem for a future government. We know this because Australia has just announced a consultation on reversing their policy, to compel people to spend at least some of their pension money on an annuity.

The Osborne option doesn't help people saving in DC schemes who actually want a pension when they retire. What people want from their pension is a reasonable idea of what level of pension they may eventually get; one that gives them the best value for their contributions over the years; and a simple pension they can trust.

Collective Defined Contributions (CDC) can deliver on these. They are a kind of third way between DB and DC schemes. First, instead of having your own personal pot and the responsibility to decide how it is invested, your pension is pooled as in DB schemes and the scheme makes the investment decisions. Because all the members' money is invested together like DBs instead of in thousands of individual pots, this brings savings from economies of scale, access to a wider range of asset classes and lower administration fees.

It also sounds the death knell for annuity providers as the pension gets paid out directly from the fund – this in itself could save perhaps 25% as a result of cutting out the insurance companies. CDCs are becoming known as 'target pensions' as they will establish a target benefit – eg 1% of your earnings each year you're in membership. It's not guaranteed, but it will give savers a much clearer idea of how much they are likely to get.

Studies have been carried out to establish the difference in value between the UK's DC schemes and the Dutch CDC pensions on which Steve's proposal is based. The insurance company Aon estimates that for the same money the CDC system would get you

a pension 30% bigger than under our current UK system. Another study suggested it could be as much as 50% higher.

So the new CDC pension could give you greater certainty of outcome, is less complicated for the ordinary saver, would pay out the pension directly from the scheme, and be better value for money.

The way forward is for CDC pensions to be set up on a large scale, reaching more than £1bn in value. I would like to see people with the Self-Invested Personal Pensions (SIPPs) – introduced by Margaret Thatcher – to be able to transfer into a CDC scheme. The shouts of disapproval from the purveyors of SIPPs show that they see this is a major challenge to their comfortable profit stream.

But this huge move is simply the latest of many important reforms introduced by the Liberal Democrats in government. On state pensions Webb has brought in the 'triple lock' pension guarantee. After Margaret Thatcher broke the 'earnings link' in 1980, successive Labour and Tory governments allowed the state pension to decline – under Labour Gordon Brown increased the state pension by just 75p a week.

The Liberal Democrats are writing into law a guarantee that pensions will rise by the rate of earnings, prices or 2.5%, whichever is highest. Our party has implemented this every year of this Parliament which means that the state pension is £440 higher per year now than if it had been updated just by earnings since 2010.

## INTERGENERATIONAL FAIRNESS

To all those raising the issue of 'intergenerational

*“The opposition from some parts of the financial services industry show that target pensions will keep more money in your pension with less leaching out in fees and charges”*

fairness' with a view to cutting pensioners' benefits, may I point out that today's pensioners have spent some or all of their careers paying up to double the tax that people pay today. In the 1970s basic taxation was 33% and anyone successful enough to pay the highest rate of tax paid 83%.

Our party in government has also reformed the Pensions Regulator's remit to the long term benefit of DB schemes and their sponsors, introduced auto-enrolment of three million people into workplace pensions, and clamped down on rip-off pension charges.

There are many challenges ahead in pensions. One

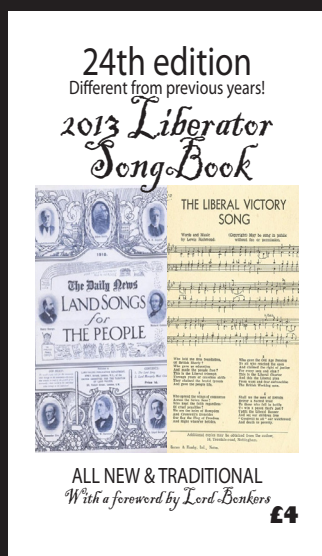
outstanding item on the agenda for example is to ensure that every pension scheme has real representation of the members on its board. On CDC there's a lot of work to be done in establishing what for the UK is a radical new system.

But I congratulate Steve Webb for his Social Liberal vision and his determination to bring in major changes that will transform the retirement of millions of people. This could be the most positive change in pensions for private sector workers in half a century. That's the scale of our Liberal Democrat minister's achievement.

The bottom line is that the Liberal Democrats have done more in four years for the retirement prospects of the millions of people in the private sector than 40 years of Labour and Tory governments. Take that to the electorate.

---

Janice Turner is an executive member of the Social Liberal Forum and co-chair of the Association of Member-Nominated Trustees



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# BROWNE STUDY

## Gareth Epps wonders why Jeremy Browne has bothered to write a book that would focus the Liberal Democrats' attention on a segment of the electorate that doesn't exist

The debate between centrists, economic libertarians and radical or social liberals has degenerated somewhat in the 10 years since the production of the much-misunderstood *Orange Book*.

The parody that has passed for debate has seen the last-named accused of being Labour-lite: ironic given most leading social liberals have spent their lives fighting Labour at least as much as the Tories.

At times the debate is not helped the other way. The reports this March that the cheerleader for the arch-economic liberals - Taunton MP and ex-minister Jeremy Browne - had attacked the preamble to the Liberal Democrat constitution at a fringe meeting of a ginger group appeared to be provocation. It was nothing compared to the reaction that met his book - a fact that clearly delighted Browne. It has not helped that debate - and this is why.

This review was started some time before this May's elections, and concluded after the results. They only served to emphasise the chasm between those, including Jeremy Browne, trying to write seriously about future political challenges on the one hand, and public opinion on the other.

A chasm which Browne himself described after the Newark by-election as being between 'authentic liberalism' on one hand, and 'insipid centrism' on the other.

Although the criticism of the latter is valid, it is not clear what Browne thought he was doing by promoting a lot of non-Liberal Democrat policies that would help the party communicate its message.

And, of course, the vast majority of Liberals reading this would agree with the challenge. Where Browne is right is in criticising the 'split-the-difference' triangulation so beloved of the current leadership alongside the bland value-free announcements of Autumn 2013, and their fear of striking a position that could not be accepted by either Labour or the Tories.

The trouble is our definition of 'authentic liberalism' is massively at odds with his in many areas. The problem, in a nutshell, is that his definition is of a corporatist economic liberalism undiluted by what most of us understand as the social liberalism that forms the cornerstone of English Liberalism.

### INEXPERIENCED BLOGGERS

Of course Browne and his cheerleaders ranging from Mark Littlewood to various inexperienced bloggers love to bandy yah-boo slogans of "we're Liberal and you're not". This is ironic when the governments Browne has held up as examples to follow are the likes of Singapore and China - "authentically liberal" they are not, statist they rather are.

Indeed, his embrace of Chinese statism is at odds with the statement that "the record of the state in

providing services is generally poor". The truth is, of course, that Liberals embrace both economic and social liberalism to various degrees; intervening in markets only when they fail, but not trying to shrink the state regardless of its impacts and for its own sake. The difference - and another that I explore later - is the essence of what differentiates mainstream Liberalism from its libertarian cousin.

Browne's other and more prosaic problem is that it tries to cover far too much ground. While publicised as an attempt to measure Britain's capability to compete in a changing world, it quickly veers off into trying to cover every last bit of political ground and the overarching narrative gets threadbare very quickly.

However, in the interests of consensus, the 'test' posed by the emerging economies framed clumsily in the title is interesting and calls for thought. A 'race', however, implies in a nationalistic fashion that there are winners and losers: this has been widely disputed. And in trying to cover so much territory, it doesn't do justice to a number of important subjects.

Take the first thing this book on which I agreed with the author, strongly as it happens: housing. The globally attractive central London housing market is linked to the increasingly unattainable goal of home ownership for many, and Browne recognises that this may cause generational instability.

While the rediscovery of capital investment is acknowledged, why is there nothing about where the people live who will service the global elite? Who will staff the shops, build the houses and provide the education?

At times it is too easy to mock the author's privileged upbringing and forget that his constituency, containing as it does areas of significant deprivation, would be unlikely to tolerate an MP unwilling to work hard for the interests of those less privileged. He recognises as a pro-European internationalist the dangers of erecting new barriers between people from the west and east of Europe. The economic solution, though, continues the city-centric approach of the Thatcher/Blair/Brown consensus; enabling it is not.

So what were the triggers for this tome? The author has claimed to have been influenced by the 'power cuts and food shortages' of 1970s Britain; at odds with the upbringing described here of a diplomat's son who mixed boarding schools with diplomatic residences, and who was looking forward to his ninth birthday when Margaret Thatcher took office.

His ministerial experience, oddly not dwelt on in detail (perhaps deliberately to avoid criticism), is another. There is a third, however.

Among the most incendiary themes is Browne's misleading call to "rediscover the true meaning of social liberalism". Central to this is the now-familiar Clegg/Reeves attempt to redefine social liberalism



narrowly about social mobility and the consequent denial that tackling inequality is a Liberal goal. Unfortunately for the author, though, from time to time he cannot help himself from making the connection.

Educational outcomes for children from low-income families, he declares, are 'a national scandal'. This would not be disputed by Liberals of any shade. The solution, though - to enable them to attend elite private schools - requires somewhat more than a magic wand, which is the level of detail of the policy solution.

Independent schools get better results therefore they must be more widely adopted, goes the logic. The PISA rates of educational attainment, moreover, show the UK's slide down the international league tables to coincide with the adoption of the author's panacea of parental choice.

There is nothing (on education or anywhere else) on local accountability and decentralisation; nothing on the impacts of climate change; nothing on other traditional Liberal themes such as shifting taxation from earnings to wealth.

This utopianism sits alongside the habitual theme of the book's backer, the market fundamentalist group Reform.

It is no surprise to see throughout the book repeated that group's mantra for companies to make profit from schools; calls to slash spending on welfare still further; and lots of jolly old-fashioned public sector-bashing.

The only surprise is that the NHS is mentioned as barely an afterthought. The instrument may be played by the piper, but we know who is calling the tune.

A curious reference to intellectual property theft as part of China's rapid growth suddenly makes sense in that context (Browne does acknowledge the flaws of China in human rights and other areas). The grotesquely inappropriate timing of publication to cause a distraction before a horrendous set of elections also gains an explanation, if not an excuse.

There are a few areas where the narrative about the 'global race' look somewhat superficial: minister visits foreign country, is impressed, glances through a few briefs and jumps to conclusions.

While there is some brief but refreshing analysis of Britain's antiquated view of its place in the world, if accounts of Jeremy Browne's time at the Home Office, curiously omitted entirely from the book, are to be believed then a cursory glance at detail might be optimistic.

Infrastructure of every variety is unsurprisingly embraced with enthusiasm showing rather more understanding if no real insight; right in many cases including that of the economy, but taking no account of the environmental effects of unfettered aviation - and sweeping under the carpet the omnishambles of Britain's privatised utility network.

The ambitious spending aspiration unfettered by the need for efficiency contrasts with the author's desire to reduce public spending to 35-38% of GDP, as does the criticism of measuring government effectiveness by measuring the amount of money it spends.

There is a less surprising call for top tax rates lower than those of the Coalition, which clashes with the book's frequent calls for deficit reduction. "Let's build a new six-runway Heathrow", does not sit well with the need to build infrastructure to equalise north and south, nor to mitigate the effects of climate change. It

is embraced for its own sake.

## TURBO-THATCHERISM

But the sort of turbo-Thatcherism set out here is not only far removed from Liberal principles: it is also electorally incoherent. Outside of the City and Canary Wharf it has no support, and the demographics of those areas are not those of the seats Liberal Democrat MPs are defending next year.

It would be a recipe for even greater electoral disaster. Analysis of the British Election Study spells out that the electoral 'market' for small-state libertarianism, based on values, is between two and five per cent; that for the progressive liberalism with a strong focus on social liberalism reflects far more accurately the size of the erstwhile Lib Dem vote.

The electoral prospectus set out in the book is not so much a one-way ticket up a cul-de-sac, as off an electoral cliff that turns the Newark fiasco into the national share of the vote. The Clegg/Reeves experiment with the electorate has not succeeded, but despite his partial criticism, Browne does not deal with this. Not a single word is devoted to how his manifesto would or could win votes.

Overall, this is yet another attempt to redefine Liberalism as small-state politics hard to differentiate from libertarian, rather thinly disguised and not particularly focused. I don't for a minute dispute Jeremy's entitlement to set out his views after his departure from Government and am glad he has done so; the premise of the book while flawed is interesting and valid, and it is an attempt to sum up a purer form of what everybody thought (wrongly) the Orange Book was about: pure free-market economic liberalism.

The absence of a comparator from the progressive mainstream of the party since 2007 is something that shouldn't be allowed to continue for too long.

Browne's internationalism is refreshing. Unfortunately, though, the contents don't live up to the billing, and are contradictory, divisive and Manichean without being redeemed by evidence or sufficient depth in analysis or proposed remedies - with only a few exceptions - and no attempt is made to develop the welcome 'forward not back' mindset that Liberals could rally behind.

This is a common thread of the current level of argument by the libertarian rump within the Liberal Democrats, although from time to time social liberals stoop to the same level.

While reviewing this, my good friend Simon Titley suggested a review of one word: "shite". I have tried to be a little more generous.

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Gareth Epps is a member of the Liberator Collective.

Race Plan, by Jeremy Browne, £10, is available from [www.reform.co.uk](http://www.reform.co.uk)

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## NOT FRAUDS, NOT FOCUSED

*Dear Liberator,*

Liberator 366 went behind pallid leadership and scared centrism to find long-term causes for the party's current crisis. Incisive articles by Simon Titley, Mark Smulian and Michael Meadowcroft in particular agreed on the need to clarify what the party stands for (not to be answered by a list of beneficial tinkering). They differ on what has gone wrong with local activism.

Simon rightly stresses that local hard work is not enough, though to describe most Liberal Democrats as "frauds" is inaccurate. The party has indeed suffered some catastrophic collapses which a stronger national identity would mitigate: but in many places, until the last few years, resilience has been remarkable. In Liverpool, Sheffield, Richmond, Bristol, Colchester and Sutton we bounced back from reverses or held seats under pressure.

I believe that was not just through potholes repaired, but also because people did sense some idea of what we stood for. In some such places we've now collapsed, perhaps because, especially in London, what people perceived at the national level contradicted what they thought they'd understood locally.

Let's look at the roots of community politics. It was always more than 'pavement politics'. The idea was not just to listen to local concerns and resolve problems, but to mobilise people to revolutionise society. Local activism would demonstrate to people who thought they were powerless that they could reclaim power. Where the law prevented this, we could link local campaigns to national issues and mobilise to change the law, for example by radical devolution.

At the local level it could work. In Leyton, one council estate had many problems and no tenants' association. We didn't make sure the Focus Team got credit for problems sorted and the council got the blame for the rest. We helped residents set up a vigorous tenants' association and then, as ward councillors, supported it. The tenants were then able to fight

# LETTERS



most of their own battles.

Tackling local problems, though, appealed to some activists willing to toil but uninterested in shifting power. Liberals failed to stress the wider rationale, and bit-by-bit Focuses and other campaigning became more and more about candidates' achievements and public empowerment diminished to signing the odd Focus petition.

We found it demanding to link local issues to national ones and the national political content was often nil. Now, of course, we're urged to remind people that thanks to us their income tax bills are lower or they get help with solar panels. Nothing wrong with that, but it presents no coherent picture.

Mark rightly says that many successful local campaigns were vulnerable because they relied on a small handful of dedicated activists. But why is this?

Voluntary organisations in general are struggling to recruit activists. People flit in and out of online campaigns while others mind their own business. Remarkably, Liberal Democrat membership is increasing, but many new members join for purely national reasons.

More should be done to get new members involved locally. But what are we offering them? Lots of work, not much thought or discussion, and the chance to be a councillor. We've become so preoccupied with casework and winning elections that the reasons why it's worth winning have been taken for granted. New members should come into a local environment of lively discussion about aims and issues.

But in many places we were resilient. Perhaps those were places where our local policies did return power to the people, protected the environment and fought injustice and inequality. Perhaps where we've since

collapsed, people cannot see the same approach in government. Difficult, of course, as a small part of a coalition, but people see what Duncan Smith and Pickles have done and find us silent.

Contrary to what Simon suggests, there is opinion poll evidence that in the Ashdown/Kennedy/Campbell years a distinct profile for Liberal Democrat voters was developing: they were mostly pro-diversity, pro-liberty, pro-redistribution of resources, pro-green and on tax and spend issues, between Labour and Tories.

That's as coherent a profile as Tories or Labour had, quite something since Liberals had long struggled with people's wish for a bullet point identifier like Labour = fairness or = working class.

Those people are still there. It's the party's remarkable achievement since 2010 to have alienated most of them. Alternative groups contain few people indeed.

HQ's current catchphrase is "helping people get on in life" – a slogan that suggests individual material self-interest and no vision for the future. Contrast that with the ringing declarations in the preamble to the party's constitution. In North East Essex at a recent by-election our candidate, running a shoestring campaign, quoted those ringing words in her one leaflet. Several people reacted positively, saying, "We never knew the Liberal Democrats believed that." She did pretty well.

Finally, as we define our identity and as Simon says, recognise to stand up for some people we must alienate others, we should beware of defining ourselves in terms of our target demographic.

It's useful to know some people, defined by age, income and gender, are quite likely to support us, but people do not become

committed supporters because we've offered them tax-friendly policies. The target demographic is useful information but should not define our policies or sense of identity.

Simon Banks  
Chair, north-east Essex  
Liberal Democrats.

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## **NOT SO ORANGE**

*Dear Liberator*

I really am getting weary of the diatribes from my old Rowntree Trust colleague, Trevor Smith, (Even bobbing corks sink eventually, *Liberator* 366).

It is the easiest thing in the world to criticise decisions but political reality requires a far better consideration of the alternatives than Trevor provides. Nor is it politically wise to espouse the 'silver bullet' concept of politics by pinning everything on to the party leader.

I am also disappointed that Trevor Smith has succumbed to the media's caricature of the Orange Book as some sort of coherent body of essays aimed at pulling the Liberal Democrats to the Right.

It was no such thing. As such books usually are, it was in fact a varied set of essays of which only a couple could be held to be embracing economic liberalism.

Others were by colleagues, such as Vince Cable and Steve Webb, who are invariably regarded as on the opposite end of the party to David Laws and Paul Marshall, the book's editors. It has been the success of the latter in promoting their own desired slant on the essays that has managed to get itself embedded in Trevor's and the public mind.

The rival set of essays, *Reinventing the State*, published as a direct reply, actually contained contributions by four Orange Book contributors. Nor should it be assumed that David Laws was predisposed to coalition with the Conservatives. In fact he was the party's staffer who more than anyone skilfully engineered the coalition with Labour in the Scottish parliament in 1999.

Trevor also refers to his prescience in getting the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust to back the Association of Liberal Councillors

(ALC) rather than the main party, as if any arm of the party can flourish without a sound central party.

Certainly the ALC was a great instigator and promoter of campaigning and activism but it is somewhat fanciful to believe that it was a haven of rigorous Liberal philosophy able to underpin the plethora of Focus leaflets to enable councillors to withstand difficult electoral times.

Finally, Trevor calls on "Liberal Democrat activists....to take the necessary and drastic course of action" at the autumn conference.

I feel that such an appeal comes ill from a colleague whose major concentration for 50 years was to climb up the academic ladder when 'activists' were sacrificing time, funds and energy to promote the party. A lost deposit in Lewisham West in 1959 is hardly a qualification for a ringing exhortation to such party colleagues.

Michael Meadowcroft  
Leeds

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## Monday

It is high summer in Rutland. The meadows are alive with hamwees (or are they wheways?), Meadowcroft is patrolling his herbaceous borders lest an insect so much as look at one of his blooms and I hear the sound of music and laughter from one of my coverts. I had been about to send dogs in, assuming the local teenagers were up to no good in there with a transistor radio, but it may just be the Elves of Rockingham Forest and one does not want to fall out with those fellows.

The Middle East is on fire and aeroplanes are shot from the sky over Ukraine, but as I gaze upon this idyllic scene I am reminded of the words of the poet Hardy: "Yet this will go onward the same/ Though Dynasties pass."

## Tuesday

Not liking the sound of this Data Retention and Investigatory Powers Bill - "I am a Liberal and I am against this sort of thing," as my old friend Clarence 'Frogman' Wilcock used to say - I attend a Westminster press conference where Clegg is explaining his support for it. I turn up early to be sure of a good seat, and who should I find arranging the stage set but his special advisers Freddie and Fiona?

They are taking turns with a bicycle pump, attempting to get some air into a large balloon that has had a collection of bristles stuck on it. "Whatever is that, you two?" I ask. "It's an inflatable Julian Huppert," they explain. "Because everyone is being so unfair about Nick and seems to love Julian, we thought we would bring this along so Nick can hide behind it when he makes his case today. But it seems to have a slow puncture."

Just then the pump parts company from the valve in the inflatable Huppert, which proceeds to deflate with an all too familiar sound. "I am afraid you have let Julian down," I observe. "Though, come to think of it, perhaps he has let himself down?"

## Wednesday

One of the things I have acquired in my long experience of business and politics is the ability to spot a wrong 'un. George de Chabris, Allen Stanford, Bernie Madoffwithallyourmoney... I wasn't taken in by any of them. There are more poisonous varieties of wrong 'un, of course, which is why Cyril Smith was one of a number of politicians, such as [names redacted on solicitor's advice], whom I never allowed to visit the Home for Well-Behaved Orphans.

Really, I should have smelt a rat the first time I met him, as he and his mother were huddled around the hearth of their terraced house in Rochdale, burning postal votes to keep warm. This was against any number of electoral laws (not to mention the Clean Air Act), but I had to confess I was impressed that every one I saw had been cast for the opposing candidate.

## Thursday

Little Steel, by contrast, has a lot of explaining to do, as he was informed long ago that Smith was far from being the clean potato. "We were a political party not a detective agency," he has taken to whining about those years before we merged with the SDP Party. I am afraid conscience bids me explain why this is nonsense.

# Lord Bonkers' Diary

In the mid-1970s, when we were at something of a low ebb, I went to Steel and said: "As the politics is not going so well these days, we need a second string to our bow. What about all this crime you read about in the newspapers? We Liberals are intelligent fellows and should be able to help bring the bad hats to book."

And so the Liberal Detective Agency was born. With Alan Beith's sleuthing, Clement Freud's pioneering work in psychological profiling and Nancy Seear's willingness to play bad cop

to David Alton's good cop, we enjoyed no little success. The money the agency made was ploughed back into the party's campaigning, with the result that we survived the 1979 general election in better shape than any commentator had dared predict.

I fear for Steel's reputation when this comes out, and come out it will, as I am in advanced negotiations with an independent moving television production company about bringing the tale to the screen. I only hope he finds his missing locus before it is broadcast.

## Friday

I never liked the sound of this 'Bedroom Tax', not least because I have so many of the things myself. So I was glad to hear Clegg say the other day that no one will be forced to pay it unless they have turned down a move to another house. For myself, though a place with only a hundred bedrooms would be more manageable at my time in life, I cannot see me leaving the Hall - I would miss the lake, the haha and the triumphal monuments to Liberal by-election victories. Besides, I am in advanced negotiations about holding a time trial along the main corridor here when 'Le Grand Départ' comes to Rutland next year.

## Saturday

How charming it must have been to see our own Duncan Hames carry his infant son Andrew through one of the Commons voting lobbies! Let me add at once that reliable observers agree that it was young Andrew who was cooing and not Duncan.

Hearing of this incident put me in mind of some of the characters I encountered during my own time in the House. There was one old Tory who always carried a spaniel under his arm when he passed through to vote, while one of our chaps maintained that he had been granted the Freedom of Westminster and was thus entitled to drive a flock of sheep wherever he chose while in the borough.

The feeling in the Usual Channels was that, while allowing the spaniel to vote could be winked at, insisting that all the sheep were counted was Going A Bit Far. Nevertheless, had this practice not been allowed on one occasion at least, Mr Gladstone's Second Home Rule Bill would not have got as far as it did.

## Sunday

You find me on the terrace again, looking out upon my coverts. If it is the Elves of Rockingham Forest in there, it is high time they met Norman Lamb.

Do I hear you ask why? Because he is the Minister for Elf, of course.

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