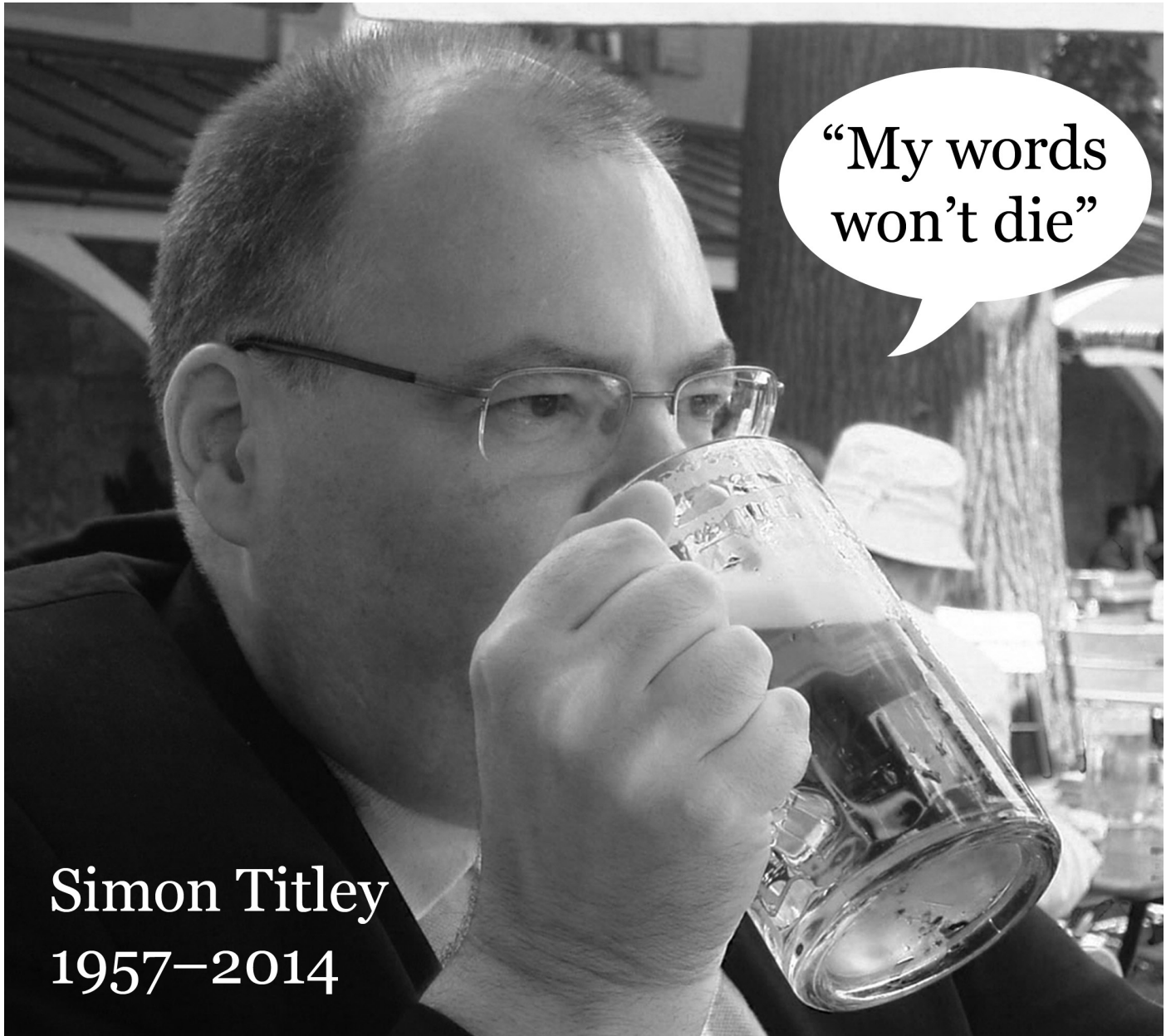


liberator



Simon Titley
1957–2014

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- 🔥 A Coalition opponent four years on – David Rendel
- 🔥 Lib Dem presidential hustings, the candidates' answers

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COMMENTARY

ENGLAND EXPECTS

And so the chickens come home to roost. After decades of politicians ducking the issue of devolution in England, Scotland's referendum has made the issue inescapable.

If Scotland is to have 'devo max', however that concept ends up being defined, the hitherto muted grumbling about English devolution will be heard clearly.

Not least, David Cameron has put the issue firmly in the spotlight because he sees an advantage to the Tories in English matters being decided only by English MPs, the majority of whom are usually Conservatives.

Liberal Democrats have historically treated English devolution as a sort of adventure playground for constitutional reformers, dreaming up schemes of varying degrees of practicality.

This mattered little so long as few in England cared one way or other about devolution or Scottish MPs voting on English affairs.

It does now, and the proponents of the main solutions being canvassed within the party all have some hard thinking to do.

If greater devolved powers go to Scotland, followed maybe by Wales and Northern Ireland, the situation of MPs from those countries voting on English matters will become impossible for any politician from any party to defend, on than on the grounds that sleeping dogs might best be left that way.

Therefore some sort of devolution has to be agreed for England, and - as for Wales and Scotland in 1997 - it needs at least acceptance across parties.

For the same reasons as applied to Scotland and Wales, electoral reform will be essential to break up entrenched power blocks that would otherwise render English devolution unacceptable to supporters of parties that would always find themselves in a minority - think Conservatives in Merseyside or Labour supporters in Surrey.

We then get to the question of devolution to what? Were the UK a union of four evenly sized countries there might be merit in the idea of an English parliament. It's not and there isn't.

An English parliament would barely devolve anything within England, and being naturally assertive of its new status might actually make centralisation worse.

One strand of opinion in the Liberal Democrats wants to divide England into regional assemblies.

The obvious problem with that is that it would require someone centrally drawing lines on a map. And where would those be?

When anyone in England is asked where they come from they name either a historic county or a major city. Absolutely nobody cites a region as their main identity.

There are for example those in Yorkshire who believe the historic county should be the devolved unit; others want it put together with the north west and north east into a region called 'north'. No doubt there are other preferences around.

The further south one goes in England the less sensible the idea of devolution to regions becomes.

Liberal Democrats in Gloucestershire are fond of pointing out that they were put in a south west region yet reside nearer to Scotland than to west Cornwall.

Under Labour, the south east region was a ludicrous cobbling together of everywhere from Oxford to Margate via Brighton, little of which had anything in common economically leave alone a sense of shared identity.

The old East of England region corralled for no particular reason rural Norfolk and places that are in effect London suburbs.

Thus the problem with uniform devolution to regions would be interminable arguments about where their boundaries lie. Anyone who says these are 'obvious' is being very brave.

Current Liberal Democrat policy for 'devolution on demand' makes more sense as it allows devolution to occur from the bottom up, as it should, by areas coming together to take devolved powers from Whitehall and Westminster at their own pace and aligned to their needs.

That allows devolution to bodies that make sense in economic terms at least, based perhaps on travel to work areas around cities.

Some will overlap and some very rural areas might be untidily accommodated, but it does at least go with the grain of the current moves in local government for city regions and combined authorities. In some cases, the historic counties, or combinations of them, might indeed make sense as these units.

The problem with the current party policy is that if some places choose devolution on demand, and others do not, the central government would end up in charge of an area resembling a Swiss cheese.

It may be that central government would have to say it would devolve everywhere, but leave localities to agree their boundaries, intervening only in the event of irresolvable disputes.

Nobody should be rushed into this by Cameron trying to force the pace for his own advantage next May.

There is merit in taking time through some sort of constitutional convention, since whatever is decided needs to command enough support to stick for several decades.

The next Lib Dem general election campaign needs to be clear that it accepts the case for English devolution, clear on its starting points in any negotiations and clear on what it would not accept.

RADICAL BULLETIN

UNIVERSAL SOLDIERS

Why has Nick Clegg been out to nobble the motion on welfare reform due to be moved at conference by Guildford PPC Kelly-Marie Blundell?

After the wording of the motion had been accepted for debate by the Federal Conference Committee and published, there came pressures from Clegg's special advisers to water it down.

It's not as if the motion is hostile; it even hails Universal Credit as "the biggest and most positive development in the welfare system for years", which it might be if the Department for Work & Pensions ever gets the IT to work.

His dreaded Spads (commonly known among disrespectful MPs as 'the Clegg children') tried unsuccessfully to completely rewrite the motion when it was submitted to FCC, as they wanted it to say that Universal Credit was wonderful and should be fully supported.

Universal Credit has been the subject of repeated critical reports from auditors about the money wasted on failed IT systems and the incompetence of those charged with implementing it.

However sound the underlying principle might be, the Spads' eagerness to tie the party to this expensive and unproven albatross says much about their political sense.

Another problem may have been the part of the motion that said: "Benefit sanctions are hitting those in most need of support, with the 14 day rule leaving people penniless and having to visit food banks."

Not quite the image the Coalition wants. Although the Lib Dem MPs lined up behind Andrew George's private member's bill to blunt the harshness of the 'bedroom tax', the party, with a few exceptions, voted like sheep for all Iain Duncan Smith's benefit horrors only a few years ago.

Happily conference should get the chance to vote on an unadulterated motion.

CHASING ITS TAIL

If the English party published the membership of its Regional Parties Committee on the Lib Dem website there would no doubt be a queue of people calling for their resignation after their handling of the Rennard affair.

As was noted in *Liberator* 367, the outcome of this cannot have pleased anyone: the four complainants have felt obliged to leave the party over what they feel were delays in taking them seriously and failure to pursue their cases as they wished; Lord Rennard was suspended for more than a year, for the bulk of which he was refused sight of the evidence about him found in the Webster report; the party has endured dreadful headlines each time the whole thing flared up; and the

RPC has made itself look ridiculous by pursuing an offence of 'criticising party processes'.

Its appointed investigator Chris Willmore fortunately had the good sense not to recommend any further disciplinary action against Rennard for criticism of party processes.

Had she taken the opposite view the entire party from Nick Clegg downwards could have been liable to expulsion, since almost everyone must have criticised a party process at some point.

The party's media handling of the crisis was abysmal throughout, culminating in the BBC being told the outcome of an appeal by Rennard before he or indeed the complainants heard the outcome.

When the Tory MP Nigel Evans was charged with sexual offences - and eventually acquitted - the Conservatives said very little in public.

By contrast, Clegg, party president Tim Farron and others presented the media with a running commentary on the Rennard case.

The root of the problems since the allegations surfaced - there were of course plenty before that - has been that the party had no idea how to deal with the Webster report having commissioned it.

Webster investigated the same matters over which the police had already decided there was no case to answer, so it should have been less than a surprise that he should arrive at the view that no action could be taken against Rennard.

The party though did not publish the report - even though it would surely have been forced to, had Rennard taken legal action - and instead issued merely a summary.

This meant that neither Rennard, nor the complainants, nor anyone else could see the strength of the evidence behind Webster's conclusions.

Nor was it ever made clear who authorised publication of the summary.

This put everyone in an impossible position. The complainants were declared 'credible' but by implication their evidence (which no one could see) had been deemed not strong enough for action against Rennard.

Rennard was left in the position unknown to English law of being found 'probably a bit guilty', while Webster, even if he wished to, could not explain what lay behind his suggestion that Rennard should apologise to the complainants because his own evidence remained secret.

An apology was given once Rennard was, months later, given sight of the full Webster report.

If anything like this happens again, complainants must be taken seriously from the outset, their claims investigated and upheld or dismissed, and the party should not again tie itself up in a process without having thought through the likely outcomes.

BENDING THE RULES

Party president Tim Farron's report to conference boasts that the Federal Executive has "agreed that half of the elected positions to federal committees must be filled by women".

It may have done. Whether it has the power to do so, and whether this move is open to legal challenge, are questions now being debated.

Changing the quotas for elections to party committees would normally require a constitutional amendment, but there hasn't been one and nor is any tabled for Glasgow.

The FE is relying on emergency powers it was given to sort out the mess when the old gender 'thirds' rule was found to be unlawful.

It is to say the least not clear whether those powers allowed the FE to dream up any rule it fancied, let alone one going beyond the old system.

And surely it's bad practice to hurry something this important through with minimal debate at the fag end of a meeting too?

DON'T ALL RUSH

Liberator 367 highlighted concerns about the numbers of Liberal Democrat parliamentary candidates in place.

The Federal Executive is understood to have been told not to worry its little head about this when the subject was raised, and it was told that selections are at about the same rate as in the last parliament.

Selections are a state party matter and English chair Peter Ellis told those present that all was well with 169 PPCs in place.

Only 364 to go then by next May. Recollections suggest that things were going rather faster in 2009-10.

Part of the problem is that the candidate approval and selection systems have become top-heavy and bureaucratic in recent years, albeit from laudable motives.

Various measures were put in place to ensure that candidates were well prepared and trained, and to improve diversity.

The English party, though, applies these requirements to all constituencies, which means that some total no-hope seat that only wants a paper candidate must go through the same hoops as a target seat.

Thus, for example, a prominent councillor who is willing to be a name on the ballot paper in a hopeless seat is still expected to go through the full palaver of training.

Even if they were willing to do this, the scarcity of people to run assessment days, or act as returning officers, is delaying the entire process.

Another awkward matter may arise over the party's diminished likely vote share in May 2015.

Someone who was a paper candidate in the 2001 general election approached Liberator to recall that he was expected to pay his own £500 deposit.

In those days even the most hopeless seat could scrape over the 5% threshold, as our informant narrowly did.

So who or what will pay deposits this time? It's unfair to expect individual candidates to, especially when they are doing the party a favour by standing in such

places, and it's pointless to expect local parties that may barely exist to stump up the dosh. Will it be paid centrally?

A CORNER TURNED

Here's a mathematical puzzle for readers.

Complete this series: 80,071; 82,455; 101,768; 101,091; 72,868; 60,357; 65,861....?

Who knows? The row of figures is the number of ballot papers issued in all-member election for the Lib Dem president every time the post has been contested since the 1988 merger.

Reports to Conference this year makes much of membership now being "more than 44,000" against 42,501 in 2013, though buried in the reports is a statement that as at 31 December 2013 membership stood at 43,451.

A welcome turning of the corner, but rather a long way to go.

MORE JUNKETS

The Mitcham and Morden Commemorative Gold Toilet, awarded for the worst conference motion submitted each year, is in an innovation going this autumn to the continuing Liberal party, whose assembly took place in Exmouth in early September.

Its motion on Iraq and Syria was one contender, as it consisted solely of a reprint of an entire magazine article by party president Steve Radford.

The toilet though goes to a motion of jaw-dropping pointlessness.

It read: "Given that the Commonwealth has lost its mission and the European Union is headed towards a single country called Europe, this Liberal Assembly calls for the formation of a World Commonwealth of Democracies, with appropriate democratic and human rights qualifications, to sit alongside the United Nations." There was no explanation given of what this body would do.

THE WORLD ON ITS AXIS

As the Chinese and Taiwanese navies squared up to each other in 1958, a debate began at that year's Liberal Assembly on international affairs.

The party president Sir Arthur Comyns Carr, who chaired it, famously expressed the hope that nothing said that day in Torquay "will in any way exacerbate the situation in the Formosa straits".

A similar delusion about the party importance on the international stage appeared to grip David Laws when he postponed the launch of the Lib Dems pre-manifesto "because of the international situation" chiefly in Iraq and Ukraine.

He must have been cut off. Surely he meant, "because of the international situation we might not get any media coverage"?

NOBODY TO SEE HERE, MOVE ALONG

Right-wingers around Jeremy Browne MP would drive the Liberal Democrats into the wilderness by chasing an imaginary segment of voters who are both socially and economically liberal. They simply don't exist, explains David Howarth

In his book *Race Plan* Jeremy Browne, the Liberal Democrat MP for Taunton, argues that the Liberal Democrats should adopt a form of right-wing libertarianism in which support for personal freedom, civil liberties and internationalism is combined with tax cuts for the better off and free markets.

One of his arguments for going down that route is that it will fill a gap in the political market, especially among young people. "A new generation – both economically and socially liberal – is looking for inspiration," Browne wrote in the *Spectator*.

Just at the time when economic libertarianism has been tested to destruction and when simple-minded acceptance of its nostrums has plunged economics as a discipline into crisis, it seems bizarre to present it as the newly discovered key to a shiny future.

But what I want to do here is examine his political argument. Is there really an untapped mass vote for the combination of economic libertarianism and cultural liberalism? Is it true that the future is orange?

The place to look for an answer is in the enormous dataset being compiled by the British Election Study (BES), an academic research project led by researchers

in the Universities of Manchester, Nottingham and Oxford. The first wave of the 2015 BES interviewed over 20,000 voters in the spring of 2014. That makes its sample at least 10 times bigger than ordinary opinion polls and allows researchers to look for relationships and correlations in a much finer grained way than usual.

ATTITUDES TO IMMIGRATION

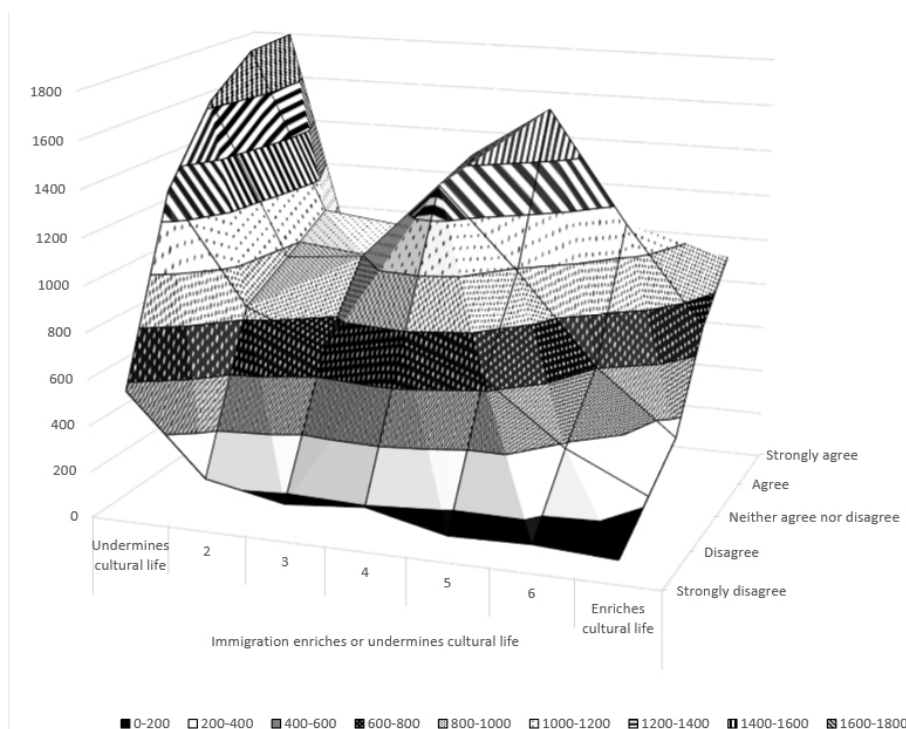
What does the BES tell us about Jeremy Browne's proposition that there is an unfilled political space on the liberal-minded free market right? One measure of liberal-mindedness, and one with very high political salience at the moment, is one's attitude to immigration.

The BES asked, for example, whether, on a seven point scale, voters thought that immigration had 'enriched' or 'undermined' cultural life. On the free market, the BES asked several relevant questions, including whether, on a five point scale, voters thought that the government should redistribute income from the rich to the poor, whether privatisation had gone too far and whether cuts in public spending had gone too far. Of those, given that Jeremy Browne

himself supports tax cuts for the better off, the most appropriate question to use is the one about redistribution.

We can put the two dimensions together and look at how many voters fall into each of the possible combinations of attitudes. The result is in figure 1. The electorate contains two very distinct peaks or poles. One stretches in economic attitudes from the centre to the far left, but is very anti-immigration. The other, slightly smaller, is moderately liberal-minded and specifically centre-left in terms of redistribution.

We can filter the data to look, for example, at English voters alone or at men and women separately. Doing so produces only minor changes in shape (the liberal-minded centre-left in England and among women tends to be slightly more centrist and less left). But if we filter for



government should redistribute

income and education levels we start to see real social divisions associated with the differences in attitudes. Education levels are particularly decisive, with the anti-immigration pole disappearing almost completely among those with university degrees.

We can also look separately at those who say that there is a more than 50-50 chance they would ever vote for particular parties, an exercise that reveals spectacular differences between the parties.

Potential Conservative voters are concentrated on the anti-immigration economic centre-right but the Conservatives have a surprisingly broad appeal to the centre on both dimensions. UKIP is almost entirely defined by being anti-immigration, stretching from the centre right to the far left in economic terms.

Potential Labour voters look like the electorate as a whole, with the same two peaks, a result that explains Labour's long term problems on immigration (and civil liberties). It must constantly attempt to satisfy the incompatible expectations of two socially different constituencies. It also explains Labour's constant return to economic policy when asked about immigration. There is far more chance of satisfying both parts of its coalition if it talks about economics than if it talks about immigration.

Potential Liberal Democrats, in contrast, are concentrated around the liberal-minded centre-left, any 2010 anti-immigration Lib Dem voters having been long lost to UKIP or Labour.

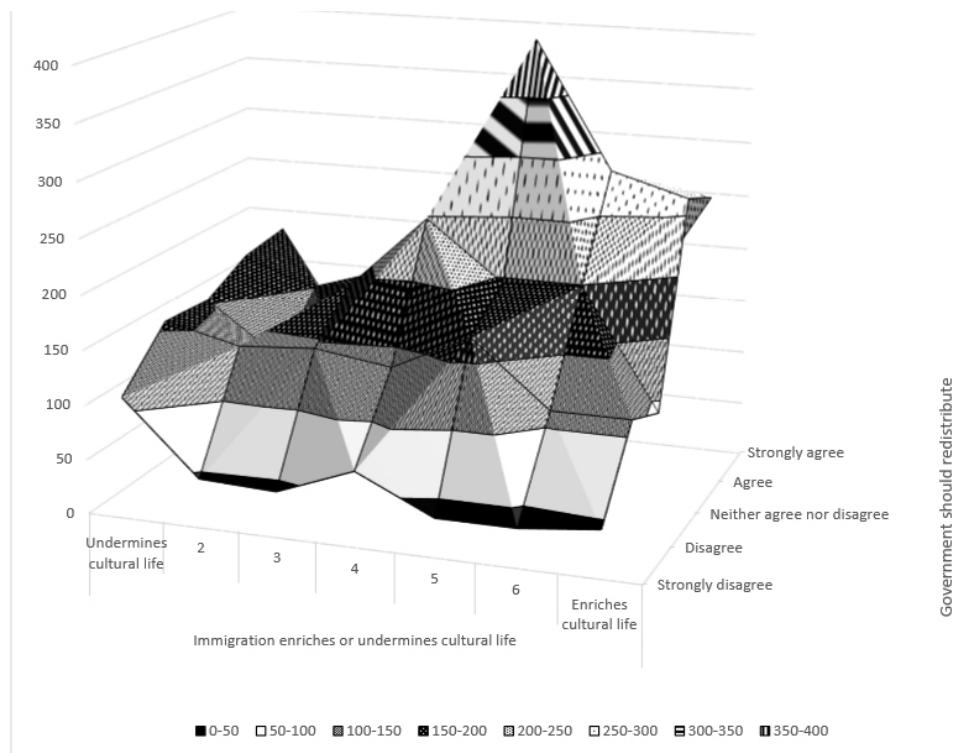
But whether we look at voters as a whole or just potential Liberal Democrat voters, one fact stands out. There are very few voters in the quadrant of those who are both liberal-minded and opposed to redistribution. Nearly ten times more voters sit in the liberal-minded centre-left than on the liberal-minded economic libertarian wing.

True, the Liberal Democrats are competing for those centre-left voters with Labour (and currently not doing a particularly good job of it), but even if one looks at all the voters in and around the Jeremy Browne quadrant – that is all of those who are quite or strongly against redistribution and quite or strongly in favour of immigration – they come to a mere 5.2% of the electorate.

NO UNTAPPED RESERVE

That is no vast untapped reserve of unrepresented voters, only an electoral desert (or a 'jesert', as it should be called). The reason no party is currently competing for those voters is simple – there just aren't very many of them, and certainly not enough to sustain a whole party under first past the post.

Many of those on the 'right' of the Liberal Democrats might counter that, unlike Jeremy Browne, they are not against redistribution. But the prospects of a party advocating, for example, free market reforms



of public services combined with personal and cultural liberalism are if anything even worse. If one repeats the analysis using support or opposition to privatisation, the number of voters in the 'jesert' (the 'clesert?') goes down to 2.3%.

So what about the future? Are young people different? Figure 2 repeats the analysis for all voters aged 30 or under.

It is indeed true that young voters are different. As a group they are considerably more liberal-minded than the electorate as a whole, massively rejecting the idea that immigration has undermined cultural life. The enormous peak of anti-immigration voters almost completely disappears. But in terms of economic attitudes they are still overwhelmingly centre-left, with a sizeable chunk on the far-left. Very few are both economically and socially liberal.

Jeremy Browne's electoral Promised Land does not exist now, and it will not come into existence in the near future. All he is offering is decades of wandering in the wilderness.

David Howarth is a reader in private law at the University of Cambridge and was Liberal Democrat MP for Cambridge 2005-10.

Race Plan was reviewed in *Liberator* 367.

WAS THE LONE VOICE RIGHT?

David Rendel's was the only vote against forming the coalition when the Federal Executive decided. Five years on, does he stick by his decision?

Nearly five years ago, mine was the lonely hand that went up to vote against the coalition agreement. As I said in my speech to that fateful joint meeting of the Parliamentary Party and the Federal Executive, I dearly hoped then, as I still hope today, that my decision was wrong. But it will probably take another decade or so before we really know whether it has all been worth it.

What is certain is that politics is still bedevilled by short-term thinking. Of course it is natural for elected politicians, with their careers at stake, to think only in electoral cycles. But all too often what is in the best interests of the electorate in the short term is damaging to the country in the longer term. The jury is still out on whether the coalition agreement is a case in point.

We were told then that there was no real alternative to joining in the coalition. The financial situation demanded a government with a secure majority to take the difficult decisions over government cutbacks, which were the only way out of the economic downturn.

Moreover the alternative was a short-term minority Conservative government, followed by another general election in which the Conservatives would gain a massive majority. That would lead to at least five years and perhaps a decade or more of abhorrent right-wing government.

The second of these assertions was probably correct, but open to the counter-argument that we may well not avoid that alternative anyway. The possibility of the next government being an extremist Conservative-Ukip coalition is an appalling spectre as the coalition government reaches its last half-year in office.

The first assertion deserves further consideration (which I shall give it later), but was always a lot more questionable.

In any case both assertions dealt only with how to tackle the problems of the next five years or so.

The elephant in the room was, and still is, "Why has Britain been so badly governed for so long?" This long-term problem was scarcely touched on in the coalition agreement. The ill-starred proposals for a directly elected House of Lords and a referendum on AV came nowhere near to an adequate response to the weaknesses in our national governance structure.

POOR UNDERSTANDING

Now of course there are some who say that the poor understanding of political issues among the electorate at large means that democracy as a structure of government is bound to fail, and that good government is only ever possible in a benign dictatorship. But I believe that politics is the means we have to make

sure that all human beings are treated by others, and in turn treat others, fairly and equally. I also suspect that most Liberator readers share that belief, and join me in thinking that a democratic system is more likely to produce a fair society than any other form of government.

But a proper democracy depends on a system of election which produces a government which is properly representative of the electorate. In this sense Britain, while claiming to be the mother of democracies, has never been a democracy itself. It is ironic that Germany - probably the best-governed country in Europe since 1945 - introduced a proportional system of election after the Second World War mainly at the insistence of the British.

In my speech five years ago I made it clear that what prevented me supporting the coalition agreement was the absence of any agreement to change to a proportional system of election for Westminster.

Without that it seemed to me that any benefits the coalition might bring in the next five years would probably be reversed by the election of a majority government of either the Conservative or Labour parties at the proposed 2015 general election.

I admitted, and was pleased to admit, that the coalition would undoubtedly put in place a number of Liberal measures for which we had fought for years, and that it would be able to veto a number of unacceptable Conservative proposals.

But I did not, and still do not, believe that five years of partial power, with the likelihood of our legislation being reversed thereafter, was worth passing up the opportunity of making proportional representation a redline issue without which we would never agree on a coalition.

It was never likely that either of the two major parties would agree to legislate for PR at the first coalition negotiations. They have both become too used to single-party control of government, and would almost certainly have been constrained by their members to try minority government first.

But if we had forced the Conservatives into a minority government in 2010, (and even if that had led to a period of majority Conservative government thereafter), whenever a second coalition negotiation took place we would have been in a much better position to say "don't even pick up the telephone, unless you are offering PR". If the numbers were then such that a secure coalition with either the Conservatives or Labour was a mathematical possibility, I believe either or even both would rapidly have accepted our price. As it is, we may well still have to wait for the coalition negotiations after the next

one before we can make our country a true democracy.

LOST OPPORTUNITY

For these reasons I believe it was not worth losing our first opportunity to make PR a redline issue just to avoid (perhaps for as little as five years) a short-term minority Conservative government followed by the likelihood of a period of majority Conservative rule.

Even so the first assertion mentioned above could still be valid. Perhaps we simply had to put the long-term interests of good governance on one side in order to push through the austerity programme, which was needed if the country was to be saved from economic collapse. Or to put it another way, was 'Plan A' the only option?

Of course 'Plan A' was not in our manifesto. Our policy going into the last election was much closer to the policies which Gordon Brown had been pursuing in his last year of office, and which seemed to have begun to produce an economic recovery. But in the immediate aftermath of the election we changed our policy and came out in favour of George Osborne's much stricter 'Plan A'. Was this a genuine conversion (perhaps under the influence of the Governor of the Bank of England) or was it simply a redline issue for the Conservatives? We may never really know.

But in any case the motivation is not particularly significant. 'Plan A' was duly put into action, and within a fairly short space of time could be seen to have failed. The still young recovery was brought to an end, and two and a half years of stagnation began. The cancellation of vast swathes of Labour's public investment programme - a vital part of Osborne's attempt to cut the deficit - promptly and inevitably caused a collapse in confidence in the private sector. The extent of this collapse was then exacerbated by the rapidly increasing problems in the eurozone with which it coincided.

It is to the great credit of our party, and our party's parliamentary leadership, that we then began to push the coalition towards a renewed public investment programme. Huge public infrastructure investments began to be announced, particularly in transport and education. The fact that much of this was very long term, and will not be implemented until after the next election, did not matter. It had an immediate affect on the private sector which itself started to invest - the classic Keynesian response.

Sadly, our party has failed even to claim, far less to be given, the credit for bringing about this policy change. For reasons I have never understood, we continue to play Osborne's game of pretending that it is 'Plan A' that has worked, when there is scarcely an economist to be found who thinks that the current economic policy is the 'Plan A' with which George Osborne started off in 2010.

Are we frightened to admit that the original austerity programme was unnecessary, at least as

“Are we still so concerned to justify the decision to go into coalition that we cannot let go of the idea that ‘Plan A’ was the only way out of recession?”

far as cutbacks in public sector capital investment were involved? Are we still so concerned to justify the decision to go into coalition that we cannot let go of the idea that 'Plan A' was the only way out of recession?

Whatever the reason, two things seem to me clear. The first is that, because 'Plan A' did not work and had to be radically amended in order to restart the recovery, it was not the only, or even the best option. The second is that as a party we are missing out on a wonderful opportunity to point out that it was only due to our party's pressure to

restart public sector investment that the recovery did eventually restart.

So was I right or was I wrong? Of the two assertions which backed the argument that we had to go into coalition the first (that 'Plan A' was the only economic option) was clearly wrong. The second (that we would avoid another government with a Conservative overall majority, while implementing some at least of our own ideas) has yet to be fully tested.

The results of the next two or three general elections will provide that test. If we do go back to a one-party majority government based on a minority of votes, it is likely that most, if not all, the short-term gains we have made will be reversed.

If by chance (and given our current electoral system it will be a matter of chance) we continue to hold the balance of power until we are finally able to turn our country into a democracy, then, and then only, I will have been proved wrong. We must all fervently hope that the latter comes to pass.

David Rendel was Liberal Democrat MP for Newbury 1993-2005 and is the prospective parliamentary candidate for Somerton and Frome.

WHAT IF THE WORST HAPPENS?

Tony Greaves suggests how the Liberal Democrats could start to rebuild themselves if next May's results are as bad as predicted

Let's assume that the opinion polls are right and the Liberal Democrats lose half our Westminster seats next May. That the lost deposits, at a threshold of only 5%, may rival those in the infamous 1950 election. That the state of the Liberal Democrat organisation in the country is not a bad dream. That it's true that we have already lost half our councillors since 2010, even swept away completely in some places. And that the pre-manifesto is an accurate forerunner to the election platform itself.

Of course things may be different. The polls that are showing seven or eight percent may start to rise (though every time we think they are doing so, they go on to drop even further). The most ruthless targeting strategy ever may save the day in seats, though not in votes. Our organisation in the regions may rejuvenate. The growing number of moribund local parties and dead constituencies (hidden from view as they get tagged onto to neighbouring seats which still have a bit of life in them) may get an influx of enthusiastic young members once the election comes round. We may get a manifesto that provides a coherent and exciting vision of radical Liberalism. And the outcome may be what the leadership seeks against all the evidence – another balance of power parliament with Liberal Democrats in coalition with whoever the numbers indicate.

Just to set out such an optimistic view shows how hopeless it really is. But it might happen. There will still be pressing questions about the coalition negotiations, and people at the top of the party may be thinking about them. Generals too often go into battle fighting the last war and I see no evidence that they have learned the lessons of the last round.

So perhaps we will just repeat the mistakes of last time. There will also be pressing questions of how to prevent five more coalition years from completing the destruction of the party as a countrywide campaigning movement. A new marriage with the most rightwing Tory party in modern times will finish off a lot of people who are hanging on as they count down to the end of the present nightmare. A coalition with Labour will do nothing to resuscitate the party in Labour areas and is likely to result in another mass slaughter of councillors, this time against the Tories. No wonder so many Liberal Democrats at all levels of the party are secretly hoping and praying for an overall majority next May.

ONE MORE HEAVE

The party leadership, with its manifesto slogan "a record of action, a promise of more", seems to want to fight the election to keep the balance of power. Liberals long ago tried this gambit (Jeremy Thorpe infamously with his call for "one more heave" and David Steel during the Alliance).

But Liberals long ago realised that you can't do that, because no-one can actually vote for a balanced parliament. You can campaign for votes for what you stand for and voters can vote for what they would like. But gaining the balance of power under first past the post is a statistical fluke, no more and no less. The more seats you win, the more likely it becomes, but you cannot ask people to vote for it.

I can hope that I am wrong in all these assumptions. Be that as it may, we should be thinking hard about what to do if the worst happens. So what would it mean? Let's assume that the new parliament has between 20 and 25 Liberal Democrat MPs, perhaps a few more. Either Labour or the Tories have an overall majority so we are back in opposition for five years. There will be great disappointment in high places as former ministers (at least those who have scraped back in) come to terms with the lack of power and influence.

We will be told by the rest of the world that we are out of the loop, irrelevant as ever, stuck in the shadows of the system where we belong, deprived of publicity and left to our own devices. There may of course be a leadership election to liven things up a little if Nick Clegg seeks alternative employment, which will certainly be available. David Laws may try to complete the right-wing neo-liberal policy coup that he and others have been trying on for so long, with safe seaters Tim Farron and Alistair Carmichael challenging for the party mainstream.

The House of Lords group will be a huge stranded bastion, 110 or more of us. Jeremy Thorpe used to joke that the Lords are "living proof of life after death"; but frankly we'll not be much use for resurrecting the rest of the party.

All the government-employed party staff will go (the notorious special advisers or Spads, press officers etc). There will be meltdown in the party's finances and a clear out of staff at party HQ. The restoration of Short money (parliamentary funding for opposition parties) will cushion this but the allocations will be based on the votes at the election and all those lost deposits will not help. And Short money is for policy work and parliamentary press officers, not campaigning. Add to this the likely effect of a string of really bad constituency results. More local parties will to all intents close down and their few remaining activists

will give up. Any temporary membership boost during the election itself will soon be swallowed up as older members of many years standing decide to call it a day.

The Liberal Democrats will have to rebuild and it will be from a low base. Those areas that still have councillors will find it easier to hold seats and start to regain some of the lost ground. Some may experience a huge sigh of relief. But to what purpose will they rebuild?

In other areas the campaigning base has already gone and more will disappear. We will be back to the later 1970s when outside a few places of strength local Liberal campaigners were isolated lone rangers and small hunting groups, only held together by the networking and ethos from the Association of Liberal Councillors (ALC) from its fiercely independent base in the Pennines.

EFFECTIVELY MORIBUND

There are now real difficulties with recreating a campaigning base in the large areas that are derelict or effectively moribund – where local parties would not recognise a campaign if it hit them in the face. And to what end? What are the reasons for a potential local activist to decide to devote the next decade or two of their life to building a Liberal campaign in their community? And who will provide them with the support, inspiration, community of like-minded and like-activated Liberals? As in the 1970s, party HQ has no clue about such things, and in any case the ‘campaigns’ staff will be cut to less than a skeleton as the funds dry up.

ALDC, which once called itself the Councillors’ and Campaigners’ Association, has long ago abandoned campaigning, whether on or off the Council. Apart from doing things more efficiently and cheaply than other parties (and in some places helping to get an MP elected) it has long since lost any clear idea of why we bother to get Councillors elected.

Michael Meadowcroft, in a letter in *Liberator* 367, claimed this was always the case. While admitting that ALC was “a great instigator and promoter of a campaigning and activism” (something sadly lacking now) “it is somewhat fanciful to believe it was a haven of rigorous Liberal philosophy”.

Well perhaps “rigorous” is the wrong word to use but the fact is that 35 years ago a lot of our local activists knew why they were doing it. They were Liberals who had taken to local activism, working out what they stood for, basing their campaigning style and actions on what they believed, not just fighting elections by numbers. When they got on the Council they campaigned to change the way the Council worked, to make it more Liberal in style and policies and in particular the way it related to and involved its residents.

“Generals too often go into battle fighting the last war and I see no evidence that they have learned the lessons of the last round”

Maggie Clay, David Vasmer, Adrian Sanders and others churned out reams of help and advice aimed at turning local communities into more Liberal places, not just getting people elected. After the merger of the Liberal party and the SDP, when the new party’s poll ratings were where they are now, Bill le Breton’s grass-roots based People First campaigns helped save the party from oblivion. Where has all that kind of support gone?

Who will pick up this mantle now? To ALDC and the people sat behind the closed doors in Great George Street, the word campaigning means no

more than fighting elections. For the old community politics campaigners, campaigning to achieve things and change society came first; elections followed from that as a crucial part of the process but not the most important one.

And then there is ‘policy’. We are to fight an election partly on our record in the Coalition. Whatever you think about it (I am more positive that you might expect, perhaps because I’ve been close enough to see much of the work that has gone on by both ministers and backbenchers, and indeed helped to achieve some of the minor successes) it is hardly the basis for rebuilding the philosophical base of the party, by which I mean “why people will join and give up half their lives in the cause”. The rest of our offer will be lists of good ideas, useful proposals, sensible suggestions, with more than a few of them there with an eye to short-term populist press releases. Taken as a whole they just do not add up to a coherent Liberal bag of beans of any use for rebuilding after a deluge.

There is a growing agenda of major issues that a radical/ progressive/ social Liberal party will need to tackle, and a lot of work being done that we need to engage with. Inequality and growing poverty. Rebuilding democracy, locally, regionally and not least in the elitist and fetid hothouse of our national parliament and our broken down system of government. Rebuilding the countervailing and mediating bodies that protect citizens from oppression. The grip of the self-serving elites, political and financial and economic, and the overwhelming power of the multi-national corporations and freewheeling ultra-rich capitalists. And so much more. It helps not that the party’s policy-making structures are bust, churning out ever more unreadable and unread policy papers while the party leadership makes up instant ‘policy’ on every possible thing in response to 24-hour news and the internet.

If all this seems unbearably gloomy, I think we need to start to think about it all. Where will we be after May next year? What can be done about it? And who will do it? If we fail our party will be gone from us forever.

Tony Greaves is a Liberal Democrat peer and deputy leader of Pendle Borough Council, and was organising secretary of ALC from 1977-85.

FRAGILE OR FAILING

Can Liberal Democrats incorporate the failure or weakening of states into their political planning, asks Ruth Coleman Taylor

During the last government, Gordon Brown expanded Britain's borrowing in the expectation that next year's profit would pay for last year's debt.

He made the fatal error of assuming that the future would be like the past and that he could rely on the stability and the predictability of the financial system. Britain's financial collapse created the opportunity for the Coalition, during which the Liberal Democrats have been working hard to transform our state in a Liberal direction. Our policies in Government and our developing manifesto are based on a powerful state that can continue to deliver our objectives.

Have we considered that we may be making a similar error in assuming that we can rely on the stability and the predictability of the state?

Many political analysts believe that the present-day state and the state-based international order are in a condition of profound transformation.

Since the mid-twentieth century, when the international organisations that dominate our international system first came into being, there has been a growth in sharing of sovereignty, much of which Liberals have supported. We have welcomed coordination of economic and social policy (in the European Union), common ground rules for international commerce (World Trade Organisation) and the power of international intervention into states to protect vulnerable populations (United Nations) or the rights of vulnerable individuals (European Court of Human Rights).

During recent decades, many states have devolved central power to regional and local government and sold off or otherwise outsourced functions to an array of private, local or voluntary organisations.

Information technology has transformed trading so that it increasingly takes place in a new and unregulated space, the transnational domain, where some 80% of transactions now take place. This in turn limits the state's capacity to raise funds by taxation of business activities. In effect, this loss of functionality has hollowed out the state; there is less of it, with power over less and less.

USE OF FORCE

When the modern British state was created at the end of the 17th century, it rested on control of the legal system, foreign policy and the use of force, and on a system of financial regulation and taxation which helped to provide the resources for the state to carry out its legitimate social purposes.

Many of these tools of governance are now shared with others or can be modified through intervention by others. This is undoubtedly necessary as part of the evolution towards worldwide democracy, but it means that the state we are trying to change politically is also changing under our eyes due to other pressures, policies and practices.

The fall of the Soviet Union not only enabled many long-suppressed states to regain their independence, it also ushered in an era of widespread conflict. In the decade following the collapse, although there was a reduction in conflict between states, nearly one-third of states experienced sub-state armed conflict such as civil war, which in many places lasted for most of the decade. We are still living with the consequences.

This descent into chaos is attributed by Realist thinkers to the end of the Cold War, the bi-polar balanced world which provided, they say, the longest period of peace in world history. States are now engaged in a struggle to achieve a new balance of power and a new means of restraint on the USA, the most powerful present-day state. Given that the USA is responsible for over 40% of the world's military expenditure, well above the level of any other state or group of states, the primary means at our disposal is, in my view, to develop and strengthen joint working at the international level. This in turn implies that states will need to share more, not less, power and makes the future of the state even less predictable.

If the chaos of the 1990s disturbs you, you had best stay away from the theory of the clash of civilisations.

This also focuses on the problem of power and security after the decline of the long dominance of American and European cultures in the world, during the annexation of distant countries for their raw materials via colonisation and latterly the Cold War.

The supposed universal norms of culture and values were actually, this theory tells us, western culture and values. Their apparent universality was based on the exercise of power, not on agreement. The old certainties are fragmenting as long-suppressed cultures are re-emerging and people are re-discovering their history and identity. Cultural boundaries are not coterminous with current state boundaries. If, as this theory suggests, the future political boundaries will align with ethnic/ religious/ cultural differences, then the authority of the existing states will be progressively undermined and the continued existence of states in their present form is far from certain.

For the last decade or so, the US-based Fund for Peace has published two fascinating analyses of how states are performing, the Failed States Index and the Fragile States Index.

These are based on published information about problems within states such as demographic pressures, sharp economic decline or violation of human rights. Of the 178 states listed, most of the early names are former colonies, the first EU country appears well after 100 and the last few are almost always the four Scandinavian states plus Switzerland. Finland, currently, is the only 'very sustainable state'. (Britain stands at 161 in the latest FSI list, two places better than the USA).

The problem with failing states is that they tend to fail on several fronts at once: if they cannot prevent

atrocities on their territory, it is highly likely that they also cannot prevent people trafficking, terrorism or health pandemics, all of which impact on other states. And other states can manipulate vulnerable states into failing.

The present fashion for ivory among newly rich Chinese people is promoting poaching of elephants and ivory smuggling in many African countries, which funds terrorism and organised crime, corrupts government officials and imposes unsustainable costs on countries with very limited incomes. Even the relatively wealthy countries such as Namibia and South Africa can only keep the poaching in check at great and increasing cost.

MYTHICAL PAST

States are at risk and failure is contagious. Is this part of anyone's calculations in our current political scene? UKIP's response to the complex modern world is to run away. It promises a return to a mythical past where Britain is charge and everything is all right. It won't happen, but that narrative is supported by a number of national media whose owners oppose aspects of the modern state like democracy, regulation of the press, taxation and membership of the EU.

What about the Greens? Lots of their ideas seem attractive but there is confusion about how the small-scale, minimum harm and local can harmonise with international trade and cooperation. Turning your back on the international is another version of running away from reality.

Euro-sceptic Tories seem to think that there is a magic place where Britain leaves the EU and continues

“The state we are trying to change politically is also changing under our eyes”

to get everything it wants in terms of prices, concessions and financial support: fact or fantasy? Who will win the battle for ideas in the Conservative party?

Quite a number of Lib Dems would like the Labour Party to be the proper radical partner for the future. Their history of suspect town and city governance carries a serious warning for any future partners.

Which brings us back to the Liberal Democrats: can we

incorporate the potential failure of states into our political planning?

For Liberals, the primary units in the political system are not states or culturally defined civilisations but people: people who construct politics from their concerns and through campaigns and interest groups. Liberalism utilises discussion, negotiation, surveys and sampling in order to identify the opportunities for cooperation.

It is a highly pragmatic approach, rooted in reality, which facilitates common action by individuals and organisations within a locality, region or state and also, perhaps on different issues, by individuals and organisations in different states. Over the years, Liberalism has proved its adaptability, managing change in different places and different circumstances.

Best of all, Liberalism is committed to a bottom-up approach which is probably the only means of sustaining and re-inventing democratic governance in an unpredictable and uncertain world.

Ruth Coleman Taylor is a former Liberal Democrat parliamentary candidate and former chair of the National League of Young Liberals

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TO FIGHT OR NOT?

The Iraq war has complicated how and when intervention should tackle place under the ‘Responsibility to Protect’, says Simon Hebditch

Most of us have been looking on in horror as the latest eruptions of violence have played out in Iraq and Syria. Of course, IS has to be condemned and stopped. The question is how can that be done while we hold on to a liberal view of international relations?

For those living in the relative comfort of the West it is soul destroying to see what is being unleashed in the Middle East and, of course, our inability to respond in any sensible way.

These issues are not easy. That is why so many of us often end up not knowing how best to react. Now the Lib Dems have started talking about “statutory deradicalisation” – a somewhat scary concept which contains as many threats to our civil liberties as attempts to reduce the numbers of young Muslim people signing up to the IS agenda.

My particular concern at the moment relates to the concept of liberal interventionism and whether there are occasions when we should be prepared to intervene militarily either to protect populations from massacre or to end the barbaric rule of a tyrant.

We can see the chaos and suffering that can be brought about because of an international intervention in a country. The Iraq war launched in 2003 was a disaster and could not be justified in terms of the claims made by Western politicians led by George W Bush and Tony Blair.

But other situations have been less easy to call. At the time when Gaddafi’s forces were driving for Benghazi and it was likely that a massacre would result, a good case for intervention at that point could be made. But what has happened since? Now, Libya is riven into different militia-run satrapies. So, was the intervention justifiable at the time or should we have sat on our hands and watched to see if the worst came to pass?

Going back, the slaughter in Rwanda took place under the nose of a UN force which received orders not to intervene. How have we been able to live with ourselves knowing that at least something could have been done to attempt to mitigate the worst excesses?

As good Liberal Democrats we like to point to the role of the United Nations – the acceptable face of that wondrous although imprecise concept of the ‘international community’.

It is certainly true that the UN should be radically reformed to enable genuinely agreed international interventions to take place when necessary. Such reforms would include abolition of the individual vetoes wielded by the five permanent members of the Security Council, a re-structuring of that council to ensure that world regions were adequately represented and the establishment of sufficient permanent UN forces, which would have the authority to act on the agreement of the Security Council.

In this context, the concept of the ‘responsibility to protect’, under which intervention within a sovereign state can be justified needs to be clear and unequivocal.

The protection of Benghazi would be one such example and, more recently, the advance of IS in Iraq and Syria. To take action or not is a judgement to be made which must include assessment of the likelihood of success, the best intelligence concerning the people under attack or imminent threat and the possibility or otherwise of engaging the aggressors in a real dialogue.

The Middle East is only one example – although it may be the most difficult at the moment.

But what about Russia and Ukraine and the real possibility that we will witness a resurgence of the Cold War? Undoubtedly, President Putin is testing the West’s resolve and he is trying to recreate a system of buffer states between Russia and the NATO alliance. Apart from giving support to Russian speakers in Ukraine, he is also keen to ensure that the NATO umbrella doesn’t expand any further. Whether we like it or not, Ukraine and the Baltic states have to take account of broad Russian interests in its sphere of influence.

Such a sphere is not the preserve of Putin. The United States has regularly intervened in countries which it deems come within its sphere of influence. We only have to see what happened in Cuba, Chile, Guatemala and other countries in Latin America to witness the fact that the USA has long considered South America and the Caribbean to be within its sphere of influence. This is a huge issue – what is the realistic relationship between the desire of a nation to follow its own policies on one hand and the need to also reflect the interests of the relevant regional power on the other?

For Lib Dems there is a special requirement to decide where the party stands on these broader issues as well as how the party reacts to the crises that come along. We need a thought-out international strategy, which can be used as a benchmark for dealing with such crises. We cannot just have a knee jerk reaction each time a major problem arises.

Simon Hebditch is a founder of Liberal Left

ALDC - FRIEND OR FOE?

ALDC is focussed on hyperactive nerds, not real-life councillors, says Gwyneth Deakins

Why do I so often receive an email or literature from the Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors (ALDC) with a sinking heart or even, on a bad day, with a snarl? After all, ALDC exists to support Lib Dem councillors like me and has an excellent track record.

I believe there are three main reasons for my reaction.

The first, and most important, is the relentless stress placed in all ALDC communications on the mechanics of campaigning, at the expense of anything else. The 'numbers game' is presented as the Holy Grail, the elixir of success, the guarantee of electoral triumph.

Yes, if you don't work you don't (usually) win, but as the last council elections demonstrated, you can do all the door knocking and voter analysis in the world and still get hammered if the force is not with you. Having detailed voter data seems to have become an end in itself, particularly when allied to the Connect system, which did not cover itself in glory last May.

But whatever level of excellence is achieved in this process, it can only make a marginal difference in an election. Admittedly that is important in a tight contest, but it is irrelevant if the broad mass of voters hate your party.

It especially annoys me when ALDC's propaganda seeks to imply that a candidate has won an election because of the number of leaflets delivered, the number of doors knocked on and the brilliant targeting of voters - then, when you examine the background, it becomes clear they succeeded through being well known locally, or because the opposition was useless or there was a high-profile local issue motivating voters to support a 'protest' campaigner - sometimes all three. It would be much more interesting to find out about someone who got elected despite lacking any of these advantages.

So where is the exhortation us to ask why we are doing all this work? ALDC encourages us to have some serious issue to discuss when we knock on doors, not just asking about voting intentions. (Really? No kidding?) But that's it.

I am reminded of the late great Simon Titley, who pointed out that too often this type of activity 'takes the politics out of politics'. Mere mechanistic activity without soul or purpose is rightly doomed to failure. This is illustrated by other parties who try to imitate our approach without basing it on genuinely held localist political views and real campaigning integrity. The voters soon see through them.

The result of the process-driven approach was apparent to me when I visited the ALDC stall at conference a few years ago and looked at the 'award-winning' Focus leaflets. Indeed, the artwork was splendid and the photos wonderful, but I was horrified to see that they featured campaigns against measures which any reasonable council, including no doubt many Lib Dem controlled ones, were taking at the time for

very good reasons. If we are rewarding such behaviour we should rightly be criticised for being opportunistic, short-sighted and inconsistent. We need to have a bit less of the 'what' and 'how' and a bit more of the 'why'.

My second gripe is that the ALDC approach fails to recognise the 'emotional intelligence' factor in successfully winning and keeping a seat. We all know the 'incumbency' factor. It's partly simply name recognition, but that is founded upon personal contacts, casework assiduously done, campaigns on local issues and just being seen around the place. The world of ALDC does not seem to have a place for the personal aspect. Among all the guidance, how much effort is devoted to 'how to deal with difficult constituency cases', 'how to get on with people', 'how to be a good ward councillor'?

And finally - ALDC, don't depress me. Many Lib Dem local parties have few active members struggling to keep up with the latest developments in IT, struggling to run around as many doors as they used to and not possessing large amounts of money. Not everyone is Sutton or Portsmouth. Where is the guidance on what can be done by half a dozen people aged 55 or more with about £200 in the bank?

Because that is the reality for a lot of local parties. I get the impression that the ALDC guidance is written by and for youngish fit male IT nerds. In the real world most of us have constant limitations. Sometimes we need to have a social life or go on holiday. Avoiding burnout is critical, but the world of ALDC does not seem to encompass guidance on that.

I often feel overwhelmed by our inadequacy in the face of the constant exhortations towards unachievable objectives. For example, after fighting a tough election campaign in May this year, after not having a proper holiday for a year and being generally frazzled, what is the first thing I got from ALDC afterwards - a cheerful missive telling us to use August to start campaigning.

So when I get communications from ALDC instead of feeling supported and nurtured, I am far more likely to think 'Oh *** off' and press the delete button.

Gwyneth Deakins is serving her second term as a Liberal Democrat councillor in Redbridge.

IT'S A FOUR HORSE RACE

Liberator has put questions to all four candidates for the Liberal Democrat presidency

The Liberal Democrat presidency is a strange job, part figurehead, part party bureaucrat part – at least in theory – speaker of truth unto power on behalf of the party at large to its leadership.

So far, only parliamentarians, or former ones, have held the post and the demands it makes on the holder's time and money rule out most people from even standing.

That makes this year's contest refreshing, not only is the field all-female (by chance rather than anyone setting out to bring this about) but also there is no obvious front runner, and there are two non-parliamentarians in contention.

The president is chosen by a postal ballot of all the members, the only post apart from leader to which this applies.

Turnouts have usually been low with contests rather obviously turning on name recognition.

Whoever wins this time could find themselves in a pivotal position as a new coalition or 'confidence and supply' deal is done after the general election, and will certainly have a key role in that campaign.

So this contest matters. Liberator, as usual, makes no recommendation. Read and make up your mind.

Questions to all candidates:

What are you most and least proud of in the party's record in the Coalition?

Liz Lynne

Apart from having helped to turn the economy around, I am most proud of the fact that we have taken people on low income out of tax altogether.

I am least proud of the bedroom tax. Although it is a good idea to encourage people who are living in accommodation that is too big for them to move to a smaller property, if one is available, the idea that you can force people to move because otherwise they won't be able to live is something I can't support. It wouldn't have been quite so bad if it hadn't been made retrospective.

Sal Brinton

We should all be proud of the achievement four of the key promises in the 2010 Manifesto: raising the personal tax allowance to £10,000 pa; creating the pupil premium to provide real support for the most disadvantaged pupils in school; introducing the triple lock on current pensions and introducing shared parental leave.

The other parties declared that the personal tax allowance was impossible to do, the Tories jumped on our pupil premium bandwagon

at the last minute, Labour let down pensioners badly with very low increases – we forget that at our peril – and finally we were told shared parental leave was a fantasy. All these policies are at the heart of what we stand for – supporting the most disadvantaged in our communities, and seeking equality for parents.

I am least proud of supporting some of the welfare reforms, of which two stand out for me. Firstly, the arrangements for the work capability assessment and the personal independence payments system. The delivery of the process by ATOS has been a complete disaster, and not in keeping with the principles that were first proposed. Secondly, the bedroom tax should never have been allowed to proceed if alternative accommodation could not be provided. Both of these need reforming in the next parliament.

Linda Jack

I am proudest of the work done by Norman Lamb and Lynne Featherstone – both have demonstrated the real difference having Lib Dems in government can make – both driven by our party's values and evidence rather than ambition and dogma, which often characterises the behaviour of the other parties. I am least proud of the failure by our leadership to acknowledge the impact coalition

policies have had on the poorest and most vulnerable.

In some cases we have been seen not just that to have endorsed such policies but to have done so enthusiastically. Our leadership could have been clearer, when decisions were a compromise, about why – particularly in cases where decisions were taken outside the coalition agreement.

Daisy Cooper

The Citizens UK 'thank you' presentation at the 2012 Lib Dem Conference moved me to tears: a simple testimony from a 12 year old boy about how ending child detention had changed his and others' lives, left me bursting with pride.

In cold contrast, we got it very wrong on the bedroom tax. There were warning signs about its potential impact, both from within the party and from outside. I'm pleased we've changed our position, but this tax has already brought harm to vulnerable individuals and has damaged our 'caring credentials'.

As president I would make the strongest representations to the leader and the parliamentary team on issues like this that matter so much to the membership and threaten our core values and credibility.

From where do you think the party draws its core vote, and where should it look to increase this?

Sal Brinton

The core vote does not come from the left/right spectrum, which is always cited by the media (and is very frustrating). Our core vote believe in liberty, tolerance and fairness, empowering individuals so that they have the opportunity to do the best that they can and want to do, while ensuring that the state provides a safety net for those who cannot. We need to reinforce this message, particularly the helping those at risk, because too many people don't see the distinction between Liberal Democrat policy and coalition government policy.

Linda Jack

Anyone who heard David Howarth's excellent presentation to the Social Liberal Forum conference will be in no doubt where our core vote sits, and where it doesn't. As his research makes clear, our core vote sits firmly in the centre left and any attempt to both attract back our erstwhile support and increase it must take account of that. So it is essential that we return to our radical progressive roots in order to rebuild our party.

Daisy Cooper

The answer to this can be found in David Howarth's analysis of the first 2014 wave of the 2015 British Election Study, which shows that those who are most likely to vote for us but who are not voting for us now, favour redistribution of income (by more than 2 to 1), greater environmental protection (by 3 to 1), and oppose (by 8 to 1) further privatisation of public services.

Liz Lynne

It is difficult to say who our core vote is as I think it varies widely depending which area you are living in.

A map of the West Midlands (in the regional party's August 2014 strategy document) shows that our membership is spread across the region with pockets of



concentration where we have held-seats or have strong councillors. Our core vote is similarly spread and I think that's a fair sample of the country.

I would like to think our core voters are people who believe in a caring society, anti-discrimination, environmentally conscious, pro-EU, non-racist and not opposed to immigration for the sake of it.

Unfortunately having been around canvassing in many different regions and finding that many of what I thought was our core vote saying they were going to vote Ukip, I am not sure anymore.

I still believe the key to success is to involve people in local campaigns and that is why although generic literature has its place, campaigning on important local issues pays dividends.

So many electors see politicians as being out of touch with real life. That is why UKIP was so successful. Many people couldn't care less about politics but do care about the community they live in. We tend to secure a higher vote when we combine a strong parliamentary campaign with efforts of highly regarded councillors.

How do you intend to help re-build the local government activist base following the damage of recent years?

Linda Jack

I have committed to renewing the hopes and self-belief of the members restoring the national fortunes of the party, and respecting the sovereign power of members over leadership.

When we are winning we are on a roll, we have a clear vision and we can see it being fulfilled – you only have to look at tennis to see that.

Success breeds success. The counter is that defeat can undermine people's motivation, hope and sense of purpose – the mantra changes from 'yes we can' to 'what's the point?'

So for me the first task is to reignite that unique vision we all share, as beautifully expressed in the preamble to our constitution. The second is to rebuild from the grassroots up. If you'll forgive another tennis analogy – to get your champions you don't start with an elite, you start at the

grassroots. That's why I want the party to invest in community politics for the 21st Century.

Daisy Cooper

We must start by re-asserting our commitment to local government in its own right, not just as a stepping stone for winning Parliamentary seats. In the next few months, strategic seats should be supported to provide campaigning experience as an incentive to volunteers to travel from across the region. This would mobilise volunteer support for winnable seats while also providing skills that activists can take back to fight and win their own local elections in 2015 and beyond. The voice of councillors must be institutionalised in party structures. As an ALDC mentor and management committee member, I know that ALDC training and mentoring is a 'lifeline' to many of our councillors and campaigners: I would continue to advocate for greater investment in this.

Liz Lynne

Although targeting our key general election seats is necessary, we shouldn't forget our local government base. For a start we mustn't lose the expertise of former councillors. We must make sure that even if they don't want to stand again themselves that they be encouraged to act as mentors for younger people who might want to stand. That is why I am setting up a Network of Experience to keep people on board. It is the president's job also to get around to as many constituencies as possible to recognise the work that people are putting in on the ground.

Sal Brinton

What I can do as president is to work with ALDC, the state and regional parties to support our grassroots campaigners in the 650 local parties to stand and be elected to councils, through visits, training and support. I particularly want to see groups of parties working together to make this happen: in the East of England we have had county co-ordinating committees for two decades which really helps small local parties to learn and work with their stronger parties nearby, sharing training, action days printing etc. The expertise of our current and past councillors



is invaluable, and we have to ask for their help. We have built the local government base in the past through our commitment to our local communities and working all the year round. I believe we can do it again.

The Federal Executive is supposedly in charge of strategy but shows little sign of carrying out this task. How would you make the FE relevant?

Daisy Cooper

There is a complete mismatch between the FE's mandate to "direct coordinate and implement" the work of the federal party, and its almost non-existent levers for doing so. I have a clear agenda for reform. There is currently no party strategy against which FE can monitor progress, but there should be.

FE appoints the chief executive, but does not have the power to manage her/ his performance - it should. There are no criteria against which FE members are elected. We should consider introducing portfolios so

candidates could run for election for one or more portfolios - such as membership, campaigns or governance - so they can demonstrate their suitability for scrutinising these areas.

And then there is the governance tension between the FE and the English Party: the latter is responsible for managing finances, mediating in disputes, determining grants to party associations and borrowing money, yet members expect FE - through its elected members - to be accountable for these vital decisions.

Responsibilities, powers and accountability must be aligned if our party bodies are to be effective.

Liz Lynne

The talent, experience and commitment of the individual members of the Federal Executive is not in question and I believe they are aptly suited to being the driving force of the party. However, unlike the federal policy and conference committees, which have well-defined responsibilities, FE needs to provide an all-encompassing management.

I would therefore like to see the FE in consultation with the party as a whole take a more pro-active role in deciding on strategy. It would be useful for instance if individual FE reps took on the responsibility for liaising with the different departments at HQ.

There needs to be a more hands on approach and less rubber-stamping of decisions made elsewhere.

Regarding campaign strategy, at the moment it seems as if FE is expected to agree to decisions that have already been taken. The president and the FE should operate more like the chairman and board of a company deciding on the overall direction and then

tasking the chief executive to put into action what has been decided. There also needs to be more transparency.

Sal Brinton

Under Ros Scott's Presidency, the FE asked for more regular information so that they could monitor what was happening in HQ. This was an important step forward, but isn't the same as developing and approving the strategy of the party. I want to see three-year strategic plans, which are discussed in detail at a state/ regional level too, and which are then used to develop the action plan that is delivered by staff and elected committees on behalf of the FE, who monitor progress regularly. This is best done by having a firm work plan, and holding those responsible to account.

Linda Jack

We have an FE that is brimming with talent – I know many of the members and I also hear their frustration about the current state of affairs. I had a national strategic role for the Financial Services Authority so have a particular approach, which I believe would work for us – but first and foremost – I come back to the vision thing. What is our vision? Are we all custodians of that vision? How does that determine our mission – and how do we fulfil our mission strategically?

If elected I would do carry out a thorough review of our internal structures including FE, I am particularly keen that FE and FPC should have at least one joint meeting a year in order to recognise the vital link between strategy and policy. I would expect this to lead to a more strategic and effective role for FE, with an agenda that deals with strategy and a process that ensures FE does its job – directing party executive officers regarding strategy, rather than the party officers seeing FE as

merely a rubber stamp.

The presidency has three functions that do not necessarily sit well together – representing the party to the leadership, acting as a figurehead at functions, and chairing the Federal Executive. Which of these will you be best at, and which worst?

Liz Lynne

Having been an elected parliamentarian for nearly 18 years I would be capable of fulfilling all three roles equally well. I would have no problem whatsoever at communicating the views of the party to the leadership. I am very used to taking on the public role with extensive media experience. As far as chairing the FE is concerned I was vice-chair of the powerful Employment and Social Affairs Committee in the European Parliament and chaired it 60% of the time.

Sal Brinton

While it may appear that these

three don't sit well together, for me they do. Over the last few years I have represented members views including tackling difficult issues, to the leadership (whether the leader, the president or the chief executive), so becoming president would be a formal extension of this role.

I have chaired both party committees and outside bodies for over the last two decades, and am used to working with members with differing views. I think I would find being a figurehead the hardest of the three, but it becomes easier if you believe, as I do, that the president represents all members and must do the best for the party as a whole.

Linda Jack

I have spent my life representing others so I believe that is something I do – and do effectively. Acting as a 'figurehead' at functions is something I am uncomfortable doing unless I feel I am achieving something rather than just turning up. So, if such functions were an opportunity to shout about who we are and what we stand for, to rally the troops and bring others on board – I would relish that.

Daisy Cooper

I have a strong track record in all three, but more importantly, the president should know when to



Liz Lynne

prioritise each function. As president during the election campaign, I would prioritise the role of figurehead: striving to inspire members, donors and the public to back us at the next election. In the immediate aftermath of the election, the president may need to make strong representations to the leadership and potentially a coalition negotiating team. Throughout, an effective president would know not only how to chair the FE, but how to deploy it to advance the party. I have a strong track record of making representations to the leadership, as a parliamentary candidate and as a think-tank director, I have been a figurehead; and as a results-driven chairperson, I am accustomed to focusing on getting decisions made and implementing agreed action effectively.



Personal questions

Linda Jack

You are chair of Liberal Left – a legitimate but partisan faction. How could you fulfil the presidential role of representing the party’s membership?

This is a fair point and one I have taken on board by standing down as chair of Liberal Left. I am very clear, whoever I represent I do so to the best of my ability, always remembering (unless I am doing so in a personal capacity) that it is not my views that matter but the views of those I have the privilege to speak for, it’s a point of principle for me.

As well as my experience of representing others I am also an advocate for NYAS and as such have a responsibility to represent the voice of children and young people, regardless of my personal views. I would take the same approach in representing the party. Over the last four years I have

often been invited to take part in national panels and have always been able to defend party policy, the one exception being on Trident. Let’s be honest, over the past four years the party has got it right, it has been the leadership that has all too often ignored the democratic will of the party – something that has got us in to a number of avoidable messes for example NHS reorganisation, secret courts, the snoopers’ charter, the bedroom tax.

Daisy Cooper

You make much of ‘community politics’, in your plans. What do you understand by the term?

It’s our answer to the ‘UKIP problem’. Many people feel – and in many respects are - powerless to effect change in their everyday lives. So it’s no surprise that UKIP with its empty promise to ‘take back power’ from Europe and ‘give people control’ over who comes into the country, is so appealing. It’s a powerful and emotional argument. But theirs is a false promise, ours is not.

Community politics is an ideology: a belief that the political system should be designed to enable individual citizens to take and use power, giving them influence over

the decisions that affect their lives.

In policy terms, it means we should radically shift power away from central to local government. It requires effective regulation to break up the concentration of power whether in the energy market, the press, or in the political system itself.

And it means giving workers greater ownership rights at work, so they can achieve fair wages and fair practices. Giving individuals real power and control will help us win hearts and minds – it’s also how we’ll transform our society.

Liz Lynne

You strongly opposed Lib-Labbery in the mid-1990s. What would be your attitude to any potential coalition with Labour next year?

I opposed any pre election pact with Labour in the 1990s because I knew that it would have killed the party off completely. That is indeed what I believe Tony Blair and Peter Mandelson wanted to happen.

I have always been opposed to pre-election pacts but a coalition agreement after the election with either of the other two parties is a different matter.

It depends of course on the

arithmetic again, whether we can achieve enough of our manifesto commitments but above all it has to be based on whether it is what the vast majority of the party wants.

Sal Brinton

Nick Clegg has appointed you to the team that will negotiate any merger. Is this not a fundamental conflict of interest with the president's role, given you would be seeking to represent the party's view on a decision you had helped to negotiate?

If elected president, I would resign from the coalition negotiation team. I had already told Nick Clegg this would be an issue so he and the negotiation team are aware of my position.

Biographies

Sal Brinton

Sal Brinton joined the Liberals in 1974. Thousands of leaflets later, she was elected in 1993 to Cambridgeshire County Council where she was group leader. She has stood for parliament, including for Watford in 2005 and 2010. She has been elected on to Federal Policy and Conference Committees and on the interim peers list, joining the Lords in 2011. Over the last 20 years she has trained women candidates, and is now working to get more BAME and disabled candidates into parliament. Professionally, Sal was a floor manager at the BBC, worked in higher education, and is a trustee of Unicef UK.

Daisy Cooper

Daisy Cooper launched her bid to be party president with the backing of Catherine Bearder, the party's only MEP, and Norman Baker MP, who has been a minister throughout the coalition. As a 2010 parliamentary candidate Daisy secured an 8% swing against a 1% national average, and led Suffolk Coastal to jointly win the Penhaligon Prize for engaging members. Following this, Daisy was elected by the membership to the Federal Executive and ALDC management committee. Daisy works for Hacked Off which campaigns for a free and accountable press, having worked in international development for 10 years including as a director of a human rights thinktank.

Linda Jack

Linda Jack joined the army aged 17 and served as an intelligence analyst. She went on to teach, and work in the youth service. She was also a Unison branch secretary.

In 2004 she became youth policy adviser at the Financial Services Authority, responsible for the UK wide strategy to help vulnerable young people manage their money more effectively.

She is now a foster carer and an independent consultant.

Linda has been a local councillor, local party chair and a Westminster and European Parliamentary candidate and member of FPC and FCC. She is a member of the Diversity Engagement Group and two parliamentary policy committees.

Liz Lynne

Liz Lynne went to her first Liberal meeting aged 11 but didn't get heavily involved in the Liberal Party until the 1970s in the Paddington (now Westminster North) constituency, where she stood for council.

She fought Harwich for the Liberal/SDP Alliance in 1987, taking the party from third to second place.

In 1989 she was selected for Rochdale and held it for the Liberal Democrats from 1992 until the new Labour landslide in 1997

Liz won a West Midlands European Parliament seat in 1999 and was re-elected in 2004 and 2009. She stood down in 2012.

She is a vice-president of Liberal Democrat Women.

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CHASING ITS TAIL

A crisis of governance in the Liberal Democrats has left the party with no-one accountable for its strategy, incoherent management and an obsession with centralised metrics, says Gordon Lishman

There is a crisis of governance in the Liberal Democrats. What's the problem? Here are some examples.

The Liberal Democrats Federal Executive (FE) has not had a full debate on key issues of strategy with open options and the expectation of decision-making for some years.

A senior party strategist asked where strategy is decided; after 18 months, no-one has given them an answer.

In the early days of the party, the FE discussed and decided budgetary priorities and then considered proposals based on their priorities. Now, the budget emerges from somewhere in the system and we are told we can make changes only if we can make a specific proposal to replace an item with a saving.

The 'Wheelhouse', responsible for general election planning and delivery, contains senior members of the federal and English Parties with a remit to report and to take the necessary decisions to enable implementation.

No proper reports have been received by the strategic and finance bodies of those parties; no proposals on resources, priorities and management have been received or decided.

Chairs of major committees are expected to attend FE meetings; with the exception of the Federal Finance and Administration Committee chair, none do unless there is a particular issue such as the future of the Spring Conference.

The president is a member of the policy and conference committees. The state parties and the regional parties in England are key elements in the delivery of a coherent party strategy. There is no discernible sign of a coherent approach to managing the whole party; each part is left to follow its own course.

There has been no serious debate or attempt at decision-making on the party's need to renew and rebuild after the next general election – particularly at the crucial level of local leadership.

Some years ago, the FE delegated responsibility for audit and risk management to the company that is now Liberal Democrats Ltd. In the years since, I know of no formal report to the FE on audit, risk management policy, disaster recovery or crisis management systems.

RADICAL CENTRE

What is our basic political message? Are we a party of the 'radical centre', to use a popular oxymoron (perhaps we are) or, more recently, "a liberal party of the centre ground" or a split-the-difference party (not, as I understand it) or a distinctive liberal party (with

distinctiveness defined on a long line from, say, Jeremy Browne via Nick Clegg to John Pugh or Alan Beith)?

In any case, what on earth do those phrases really mean, either to us or the public? Are we a party of protest (probably not), a party of the establishment (yes and no) or a party of change (changing what)?

How far are we defined by being in government ("the achievements of the coalition"); how far by policies for the next manifesto and parliament ("looking forward not back"); how far by the "needs of the 21st century"; how far by a distinctive philosophy?

Which are we talking about to our members and the public? Are we still about a stronger economy, a fairer society and 'opportunity for all' or is there a new definition?

How did we move in the European Parliament election from 'the party of in it to fix it' via 'the party of in and jobs' to 'the party of just IN' and why did no-one appear to see the drift and change it?

Of course we need to re-appraise and develop our messages – but it would be good to reach some answers and tell the world. In this morass of phrase-making, what is the distinctive purpose and message of the Liberal Democrats? Who proposes and who decides?

Communication with members is cloth-eared in tone, style and content and it puts up backs. The underlying attitude does not sound as if respects members as equals. It does not help us to recruit, motivate and enable the local leaders, who will be the foundation of a strong, confident Party from local roots and shared values.

I could go on (and on....) with other examples of this crisis of party governance. It has developed gradually over the last decade for a variety of reasons. They include electing presidents with little experience of governance and their own political agenda (for eight of the last 10 years, the president has had leadership aspirations).

It's partly because leaders, present and past, are the sort of people who instinctively move into a vacuum of responsibility and decision-making to get things done by setting up an inquiry or a review; taking immediate, public decisions in areas which are party responsibilities; deciding on messaging, positioning, slogans and manifesto policies; or deciding the allocation of party resources on the basis of rigid performance indicators.

Some time ago, the FE decided that its core function was to be a scrutiny committee with reference to local government models. They were wrong!

Of course, an element of scrutiny is needed, but the FE is a decision-making body. In any comparison with local government, it is the political executive.

When finances were tight, its individual members signed a paper annually to guarantee the Party's overdraft.

None of this shambles amounts to a conspiracy – indeed, I might welcome one as a sign of political competence and a target for my concerns. Instead, there has been a slow drift towards supine irrelevance at the heart of the party's machinery.

The most graphic example of incoherence was the 'structure chart' supplied to Helena Morrissey and reproduced in her report. (It also contained a passing account of the end of the 'Rennard strategy' and the dissatisfaction that led to the dropping of that strategy and its author with no reference to any party body). The chart is a mess of boxes with party bodies, people, outside bodies and others, joined by a tangle of connecting lines with random arrows and no idea of constitutional responsibilities or of management and governance structure.

The FE is not in conventional terms the board of the party, because it is too big and meets too infrequently. When there was such an informal body in the early Ashdown era, its deliberations and outputs were given force through the decisions of the FE and other bodies. Of course, a strong, democratic leader focused on the party is a major advantage in those circumstances and we now have a leader with a side-job as deputy prime minister! After 2015, we shall have a bigger challenge than in 1987 when we focused on building a new party through to a 'development election'. At least, we then had the apathetic goodwill of most of the electorate rather than their outright hostility.

It is neither possible nor desirable to try to separate the need for governance and management reform from the actual strategy the party needs. My own views on both are increasingly clear.

The first priority is a president who will see as her first task the core responsibility for ensuring that governance and management systems work effectively. That's not just staff management: it is the coherent management of the party and its component parts. That isn't a matter of manipulating the structure to get the passive consent of members and bodies for a package that a particular group in the party wants to see. It is about ensuring that the party is managed coherently, in line with agreed policies and priorities, and, most importantly, on behalf of all members with their active participation.

Secondly, party committees, particularly the FE, need to understand, accept and carry out their core responsibilities: governing as well as scrutinising; working together rather than in separate silos; holding managers to account; and, crucially, taking decisions openly and accountably.

The party needs a central management group, properly accountable, to manage debates, decisions and agenda in a coherent way. Over the years, there have been various attempts to create such core groups (the Ashdown 'board' and the short-lived 'senior

“None of this shambles amounts to a conspiracy – indeed, I might welcome one as a sign of political competence”

officers group'), but I can't discern one now. It is needed; the president should lead it; and it should be fully accountable to the FE with recommendations to other bodies.

LOCAL DE-SKILLING

Linked to the need to rebuild the party, there is the problem of progressive de-skilling of local parties and local leadership.

There are several factors at work, starting with the loss of a generation of leading

local councillors who have lost control of councils and in many cases their seats in the last four years. Most are not going to start again from scratch. The Obama campaign experience (a useful reference point, but not a blue-print), Connect, Nation Builder and sophisticated polling have focused on technical fixes which are defined and led by techies from the centre.

The Wheelhouse emphasis on metrics strengthens this: new, young organisers, under pressure from managers to deliver numbers, are caught between these demands and local people many of whom have made a considerable success of doing things their way.

I do not know where the next generation of leaders is going to come from, but they cannot and will not be compliant volunteers following instructions from the centre. They need to understand and take control of the tools of campaigning and use them to build resilient, self-confident local parties with distinctive local roots.

There is also a lesson from earlier crises: it takes a long-time to build a national party of leaders, activists and members. The later we leave it, the longer it will take.

The conventional wisdom is that we now need a "laser-like focus" on holding the maximum number of seats. I am not convinced that necessary priority precludes intelligent thought, active preparation and a key role for state and regional parties and the Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors in beginning at least to maintain what we have outside our bridgeheads.

I hope that these thoughts might offer a starting point for debate and action. More than aught else, we need debate, challenge, openness, accountability and clarity of decision-making, based on respect and support for all our members.

The Federal Executive is responsible for "directing, co-ordinating and implementing the work of the Federal Party" – Constitution

Gordon Lishman is a member of both federal and English Liberal Democrat bodies responsible for strategic and financial governance. He is happy to elaborate, argue and change his mind via gordon@lishman.co.uk.

GOLD IN THE GREEN

Green growth should be at the centre of a general election campaign that needs all the appealing ideas it can get, says Neil Stockley

These are tough times for Liberal Democrats. Our poll ratings are in the dirt, our council base slashed and our European election results were a disaster. We hear all sorts of ideas – good, bad, and ugly – about the way forward.

A common theme is that we will need a radical, innovative and distinctively liberal manifesto for 2015.

I don't think anyone seriously disagrees with that. But people need to be clearer what that all means. And I am surprised at how little attention has been paid to the role that our environmental commitments could play. Right across the party spectrum, there has long been a tendency to treat our environmental commitments as a side show to the 'big debates': how to keep the economy growing, how to make Britain fairer; how to safeguard civil liberties and personal freedoms.

There is a lot of complacency as well. Too often people whisper, "we've got enough green policy" or "we're the greenest, so why worry too much?"

It's time to get real. If it is to mean anything at all, 21st century liberalism needs the physical and biological environment to be in good health. The economy will not be stronger when Britain is exposed to external price shocks, especially for fossil fuels and minerals.

A 'fairer society' will be more elusive than ever when prices for energy, transport and food keep rising and resources become scarcer, hitting poorer people hardest. And if the climate keeps on changing, a hotter world will be more at risk from conflict and insecurity.

It will be much less congenial to civil liberties, human rights and the rule of law. And the environmental challenges, especially those of climate change and limits on natural resources, are more urgent than most people realise.

GREEN SOLUTIONS NEGLECTED

Many Liberal Democrats buy these arguments, but still don't see the environment as a big winner on the doorstep. As a result, the party's campaigns have tended to neglect our green solutions. Yes, the polls show that voters are much more concerned with issues like the economy, jobs and immigration than 'green issues'. But they also tell us that those voters who lean towards the Liberal Democrats make the environment a bigger priority. They also want to see more policies to promote clean energy. After four tough years of coalition, we must distinguish ourselves from the Tories, most of whom are anything but green.

To be true to our liberal ideals, we need to make green growth one of our core aims. The party can then have a message on economic and social policy that is more distinctive – and more credible – than it has been for many years.

Green growth is where the economy grows while

ensuring that natural assets continue to provide the resources and environmental services upon which our well-being is based. Green growth invests in taking carbon out of the economy and delivering greater prosperity at the same time. In September 2014, a major new study by Cambridge Econometrics examined what would happen if the Government stuck to its current carbon budgets.

It found that the economy would grow by a net 1.1% by 2030, with real household incomes boosted by £565 a year. There could as many as 190,000 additional jobs. Such would be the benefits of lower energy bills, improved vehicle efficiency and enhanced energy security.

British businesses would win from the measures and changes required by a low-carbon transition, such as the development, manufacture and installation of low-carbon technologies in the power sector; the manufacture of low-carbon vehicles and components; and the manufacture and installation of energy-efficiency measures in the home. The study shows that, with lower oil and gas imports, the UK would have more energy security.

Liberal Democrats have a good story to tell here. In the 1990s, we were the first party to take seriously the threats from a warming planet. We pioneered innovative policies to promote renewable electricity and energy efficiency – the most effective ways to tackle climate change. Since 2010, Liberal Democrat ministers have put in place the architecture for green growth. Bold new emissions targets for the mid-2020s have been set, strengthening the policy framework for cutting carbon.

Renewables now account for 15% of UK electricity generation, three times the level under Labour. Ed Davey has driven through radical reforms to the electricity market, to give investors in low carbon energy, including renewables, the confidence they need.

The Green Investment Bank is up and running. The Green Deal has been created, to enable consumers to pay for energy-saving measures in their homes by saving on household power bills. Liberal Democrat ministers have tightened building regulations to boost energy efficiency. There has been new investment in the railways on a scale not seen since Victorian times.

The record is by no means perfect. Despite being under Liberal Democrat leadership, BIS has not always been an effective champion of the low carbon environmental goods and services sector. The party has made not shown the same leadership on the 'natural environment' as it has in energy and transport.

Still, we should be very proud of what our ministers have achieved, often in the face of staunch Tory opposition.

In the run-up to the general election, Liberal Democrats have the opportunity to set out our own strategy for green growth.

The pre-manifesto, *A Stronger Economy and a Fairer Society*, is very encouraging. There are proposals to complete some unfinished business from this term in office. Setting a 2030 decarbonisation target for electricity, with an indicative target of 60% of electricity generation from renewable sources by 2030. Stopping the use of unabated coal to generate electricity. Expanding the Green Investment Bank's role and powers.

The pre-manifesto contains welcome (if somewhat vague) commitments to boost renewable heating, increase research and development in low carbon industries and electrify main rail lines. Crucially, our Nature Act would set binding targets for biodiversity, clear air, clean water and access to green space.

Refreshingly, the pre-manifesto follows our commitment to a zero carbon Britain through to one its logical conclusions by opposing any expansion of Heathrow, Stansted or Gatwick and any new airport in the Thames Estuary.

But we still need to do more, to get the policies right for the final manifesto. First, we need to promote a step change in energy savings by households, which account for around a quarter of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions. Second, we need to renew the Liberal Democrats' commitment to eradicating fuel poverty, which blights the millions of households across the UK. These two problems are closely linked: over half of all British homes are not properly insulated. One of the most cost effective ways to reduce emissions is to make Britain's housing stock more energy efficient. This makes sense: the cheapest way of saving carbon is to not use energy in the first place.

There is another reason action is needed on domestic energy efficiency. Household energy bills are going up, a trend that looks set to continue. Fossil fuel costs remain volatile and the transition to a low carbon energy system will be very expensive. Savings from energy efficiency measures will be needed to offset the expected hikes in power bills – and help to prevent fuel poverty getting even worse.

BLOCKED BY OSBORNE

The Green Deal has been a disappointment, but then George Osborne's Treasury blocked any serious incentives to take up the finance options available. So has the Eco Subsidy for energy efficiency measures in low-income homes and areas, which has now been significantly scaled back. As a result, new insulations are well down and thousands of jobs are being lost in the sector.

The pre-manifesto proposes to build on the Green Deal with a national programme to raise the energy efficiency standards of all Britain's households, cutting people's council tax bills by £100 a year if they take part. It also promises that all new homes will be zero carbon by 2016, with new energy efficiency standards for private rented homes, and to take action on fuel poverty.

This is all welcome, but the final manifesto needs to be more ambitious. Existing party policy, passed last year, is to turn the Green Deal into a comprehensive national programme to raise the energy efficiency standards of all Britain's households to the EnerPHit

standards by 2050. We should build on this with firm targets – for example, to retrofit one million homes a year. But households suffering from fuel poverty should always be the priority.

In parallel, we could provide free insulation to low-income households living in poorly insulated properties. In areas and neighbourhoods suffering from fuel poverty, we should build partnerships between local authorities and energy efficiency providers, to bring millions of homes up to at least Energy Performance Certificates Band C over the next twenty years. In line with existing policy, revenues from the EU Emissions Trading System and the Carbon Price Floor could be used to pay for these programmes.

We could also do with a change of mindset, and treat such retrofit programmes as a national infrastructure priority. Last month, the International Energy Agency – no bunch of green flakes – criticised businesses and policymakers for consistently and significantly undervaluing the benefits associated with energy efficiency.

The IEA called for a greater focus on delivering the 'hidden fuel' and argued that energy efficiency policies should be assessed in terms of their health and productivity benefits, as well as energy savings. The "multiple benefits" described by the IEA included expanding access to energy infrastructure, higher economic growth, lower energy bills, less local air and water pollution, and better climate resilience.

Finally, we need to put green growth at the heart of our campaign messages, in a way that the party's environmental policies haven't been in the past.

Our record of action and, if we get it right, our promise of more, can make our green solutions more relevant to voters and give us a new definition in the economic debate.

Liberal Democrats need to tell clear and credible stories that show voters how they can be better off financially, have more opportunities and enjoy higher standards with green growth. When it comes down to it, there is no alternative.

Neil Stockley is a former Liberal Democrat director policy.

WHEN TRANQUILITY IS TREASON

“We can conquer unemployment” should be the Lib Dem battle cry. Instead the party is preparing a timid and dull manifesto for next year and will suffer the consequences, says Bill le Breton

A good friend recently reminded me of a Paddy Ashdown story from his Diaries. In the early days of his leadership with both party finances and electoral worries crashing in on him, he recalls sitting on top of London's number 159 bus nursing the prospect that he might be the last leader of a party with a history stretching back to Palmerston, and a political philosophy dating from the English Civil War; that he might be ‘the last of the line’.

Ashdown had the advantage of being an instinctive campaigner, whose rise in the Liberal Party had stemmed from his affinity with its active, radical, campaigning community. He was steeped in community action, having been for a period unemployed before joining Dorset County Council's youth service, working on initiatives to help the young unemployed - the big issue of the early 1980s which could strike down an ex-marine, ex-diplomat, ex-defence industry worker as easily as it struck down the unskilled 16-year-old. He became the PPC in Yeovil when the Liberal Party was in third place. And he created waves among his colleagues the moment he entered parliament.

Now in 2014 a new leader faces a similar crisis. The polls place the party with a support level of 7-8%. Within the party the spirit is low. A run of recent manifesto announcements have failed to lift the hearts of activists and failed to connect with the electorate.

They are worthy, they are safe, they are extensions of existing achievements; they justify what has been achieved. They ignite no fire in the belly. There was apparently a ‘summer campaign’ but it has elicited none of the fight-back that the ALDC People First campaigns achieved in 1989, which enabled Ashdown to lead our counterattack.

The Coalition is not receiving credit for an apparent economic recovery after the longest slump in history. A failure of wages to increase in real terms is blamed. The leader of the opposition campaigns on the cost of living front. While to the right, the flag of xenophobia has been raised by UKIP, which stormed to success in the European elections. There is a sense of a shifting of tectonic plates of party politics not seen for 100 years.

In a recent YouGov briefing Peter Kellner has suggested that, if the proportion of their votes comes from the Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats in the ratio of 6:2:2, UKIP could deprive the Tories of sufficient seats to produce a Labour majority rather than another balanced Parliament.

However difficult the task may be for an incoming

Labour government to tackle spending, taxation and borrowing figures, it will feel that, with its hands on the levers of power, it could win again in 2020.

As for the Conservative Party, it has been struggling for many years to ‘represent’ two very different temperaments or even ‘classes’: those keen to hold on and those feeling ‘left behind’.

TORY DIVIDE

Presently these very different perspectives centre on Europe and immigration, but there are echoes here of the Tory divide between Peel (Cameron) and Disraeli (Johnson) over the Corn Laws. Who can deny the potential for a similar split should the chance of an in/out EU referendum vanish from the next Parliament?

Conservative Europhobes in opposition may easily convince themselves that they, like Farage and UKIP, could drive a full-on anti-EU/immigration bandwagon to victory in 2020. The rapid rise of the Labour Party in the early 20th century indicates what can happen when a large swathe of the ‘unrepresented’ feels it has at last found a party to represent it. The ultimate effect of UKIP could be to provide the anvil on which the Tory Party smashes itself in two, with the Tory Europhobes joining forces with UKIP to form a Conservative Independence Party

And what of the Liberal Democrats?

Unless we find a campaign capable of reversing the present decline, we shall have allowed our party to become so weak as a political force that it may not survive as an independent party. It is Nick Clegg's turn to be sitting on the top deck of the 159 pondering whether he is the last of the line.

Another friend has commented to me: “If he left this autumn he would leave with a good story to tell for the future - as the first Lib Dem leader in Government at Westminster for 80 years, but who relinquished that power when he sensed it was in the best interests of the party. That would give him a more impressive legacy, both in the party and the country, than taking the party to maybe its worst vote share in 45 years and being removed from office by the electorate.”

But I have come to see that Clegg may have another vision, that of the progenitor along with Cameron of a new political vehicle for the Whig ideology; tolerant socially, managerial economically; individualism with a conscience - a party for a latter-day Lord John Russell, or a John Locke; a haven for a Cameron and a Gove, and a Laws and a Hames.

Despite the relatively recent tactics of differentiation,

the present leadership appears ideologically to be on a similar page to the prime minister, especially if Cameron were left sometime in the next parliament without his europhobes. A recent Private Eye had a front page cartoon of the two Coalition leaders with Cameron saying (prophetically?) "I can't work with the Tories". Clegg is silent, but his 'bubble' could well have echoed, "And I can't work with the Liberal Democrats".

Can we see Liberal Democrat former frontbenchers in the next Parliament willingly kicking their heels, back down past the gangway, now that they have tasted higher things?

If we don't campaign boldly here's the prospect: some may grasp the hand of Cameron to form The Liberal Conservatives in Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition; others may seek whatever patronage they can from Labour, and a few will stick it out in what might look strikingly similar to the existence of Michael Meadowcroft's continuing Liberal Party of 1989.

Such a scenario threatens to be the end of the radical tradition not only within the Liberal Party. The tradition that fought for and won repeal of the Corn Laws and cheap bread, free education, pensions for the elderly, the abolition of sweat-shop wages, labour exchanges, National Insurance, a free Health Service and which supported the liberating social reforms of the 1960s.

The late great Simon Titley once urged us to: "Let the Tories, Labour and UKIP fight over the 'drawbridge up' vote; we have no business competing on that crowded territory. Our job is to rally the growing number of tolerant, educated and cosmopolitan Britons – people who have nowhere else to turn if we let them down by being too timid or defeatist to be true to our values."

I mentioned earlier the timidity of the draft manifesto which lacks even one big idea. I mentioned a young Ashdown campaigning alongside the unemployed of 1980s' Yeovil. I mentioned the tradition – the heritage – of campaigning on the biggest issues of the day against the establishment of the day

Since November 2011, unemployment has fallen from a total of 2.66m, with those in receipt of job seekers' allowance numbering 1.59m, to 2.08m or 6.4% in June 2014 and those in receipt of JSA to 1.01m in July 2014. But already the timid are raising the fear of inflation and campaigning for an end to economic stimulus. But surely these levels of unemployment and underemployment remain unacceptable to Liberals, especially when so much work needs to be done.

“Can we see Liberal Democrat former front benchers in the next Parliament willingly kicking their heels, back down past the gangway, now that they have tasted higher things?”

GREAT RADICAL

When that great radical, Beveridge, was looking at the issue, he believed unemployment should not be allowed to rise above 3%, the level of frictional unemployment. He began his thinking at a time when politicians had, like our own, accepted their impotence to deliver full employment.

Indeed, Lloyd George, influenced by Keynes and Beveridge, saw it as essential, first, to believe that the problem is really capable of solution. In the words of the truly radical 1929 Liberal manifesto: "The determination to succeed is half the battle. One of the most disturbing features of the present situation is that,

as a result of years of Tory ineffectiveness (described as 'tranquillity'), the nation is in danger of losing confidence in its ability to win through its present difficulties. In face of such immense suffering and waste, tranquillity is treason."

Governments of all colours since 1979 have tolerated high levels of unemployment in pursuit of their own measure of tranquillity. If, as seems probable, the relationship between wage inflation and unemployment has changed back to that which it was in the days of Beveridge why shouldn't we once again target full employment?

What a campaign that would be; up-lifting, transforming, life-enhancing; centred on education, training, housing and the environment; a campaign worthy of our tradition and our heritage.

1929 Manifesto expressed it like this, "If the nation entrusts the Liberal Party at the next General Election with the responsibilities of Government, we are ready with schemes of work which we can put immediately into operation, work of a kind which is not merely useful in itself but essential to the well-being of the nation."

Has the present Leadership the imagination and the stomach for such a manifesto? No. It must be, as it ever was, the radicals in the party who provide this vision and the necessary confidence, energy and determination. Unless it does so, the Party will face a bleak future in the next Parliament.

It is never the wrong time to campaign on the right thing. In 1929 The Liberal Party entitled their manifesto "We Can Conquer Unemployment!" We should do the same.

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

A TAX RISE THAT COULD BE A WINNER

Nobody knows what national insurance is for now, so why not call it an 'NHS tax' and earmark it for health, wonders John Bryant

The National Health Service will be a key issue at the next general election, and I for one am not certain the Liberal Democrats will have something memorable to say about its future, given that we were brow-beaten into accepting a reorganisation which was expressly vetoed in the Coalition Agreement.

What the NHS does not need is another government vowing to reorganise it yet again, a trap the Labour Party is prone to falling into having reorganised the NHS twice during the Brown and Blair years.

Tidying up the worst excesses of the Coalition's reforms is the more sensible way forward.

Taking a close look at the rules about tendering for contracts, including making it easier for not-for-profit companies and genuine mutuals to compete on a level playing field alongside the multi-nationals is one area that should be tightened.

This can be done by including a higher weighted quality score in the contract letting criteria (compared to price), coupled with the need for local knowledge by contracted staff. This would give local organisations a fighting chance to secure primary and community care contracts.

Reforming the membership and accountability of the clinical commissioning groups would also go some way to bringing about the reforms that the Liberal Democrats actually wanted to pursue in its 2010 manifesto.

For those who can remember, we were arguing for the democratisation of primary care trusts at that time, so they could become more openly accountable at a local level. While the Coalition's reforms did strengthen the role of health scrutiny committees (after a lot of lobbying by Liberal Democrat councillors) the new commissioning bodies only involved democracy in the way the medical professionals who led them were appointed by their fellow professionals. No member of the public was allowed to vote for the people who would commission services on their behalf.

SHUNNING DEMOCRACY

Health and wellbeing boards established by councils also shunned the democratic principle, because the majority of their members are appointed officials.

Even the councillor membership on these boards does not need to follow the proportionality rules that are in place for other council committees. (And surprisingly these reforms were voted for by Liberal Democrat MPs - the clue for them should have been in the party's name.)

The Coalition has often claimed that NHS spending has been ring-fenced against the general cuts hitting

other parts of government. While in theory this is correct, David Cameron in particular has been more than economical with the truth. The kind of price inflation that has affected health is way above that affecting other services.

The aging population provides a regular and persistent challenge to the extent that services should be provided. Add to this the spiralling costs of new treatments, which patients (and their families) expect to receive, and the need to exponentially grow the NHS budget just to stand still is a truth which politicians shy away from admitting.

During the Coalition years there has been an expectation by government that all trusts should achieve regular efficiency savings to close the gap between their funding and their increasing cost base. There are of course some savings to be made. Merging back office functions by hospitals is one that is being pursued regularly across the country. Trying to drive down the spending on drugs by seeking generic equivalents is also tried across the service.

What is less regularly noted by the general public is that some commissioning groups are now listing minor operations that will no longer be funded routinely, putting in place a kind of exceptions panel to review cases before they are approved for funding.

In my own case, I have undergone minor surgical procedures within Camden, which I know now would not be available.

One was a 'knee washout' which is a procedure to assess the development of arthritis in the knee. The surgery involves placing a tiny camera to view the damage behind the patella while washing out any debris that has accumulated. While essentially an investigative procedure it has the beneficial effect, as in my case, to reduce the amount of pain caused by the condition. This procedure is now judged to be of little value to most patients by Camden Clinical Commissioning Group.

Another procedure that has been listed for no funding is the removal of skin tags, which if in the wrong places can be quite painful. Presumably there is an expectation that patients can pay themselves for such minor surgery.

But there is going to be a limit on how many savings can be achieved in this way and some savings are 'one-offs' which cannot be made in subsequent years.

Open-ended commitments to spend on the NHS cannot and will not be offered by the three main parties at the next election, so do we simply roll over and presume that the creeping increase in competitive tendering for NHS contracts will be the only way to keep NHS spending within sensible limits?

Do we accept the inevitability that a large chunk

of our NHS will be delivered by multi-national corporations whose first duty is to their shareholders rather than the patients they are contracted to serve?

I have already suggested that the tendering rules could be tightened to give alternative providers a better chance to compete on quality grounds, but despite the best efforts of commissioning groups and trusts to do this, and to secure further efficiency savings, there is still going to be a funding gap.

TAX EVASION

The spin-doctors in all three major parties have told their party leaders that cutting taxes is a vote winner and putting up taxes is vote loser. The Liberal Democrats, by concentrating their tax cutting agenda on increasing the tax allowance to help the low paid (although all middle income earners do well out of it too) does have a more credible approach. Our attempts to tackle tax evasion have also been honourable although the Coalition's performance is still not good enough in the public's eyes when high street names are found to be paying next to no tax at all.

One of the parties needs to challenge the tax cutting agenda head on and realise that there is still a possibility of attracting votes through increasing taxes on ordinary people, as long as it is on things that the voting public values.

Twice in living memory tax rises have been proposed that did not have such negative effects in the public's mind. Remember the penny on income tax to pay for improvements in education? It remained for some years the party's most memorable and favoured policy after Paddy Ashdown declared it.

And who can remember Gordon Brown's increase in National Insurance to pay for extra NHS spending? It did not backfire on him as a chancellor, even though other decisions he made (for example the 75p increase in pensions one year) clearly did.

I no longer believe that most voters even know what NI contributions are supposed to be for. They will probably still cite the link with pension eligibility

“One of the parties needs to challenge the tax cutting agenda head on and realise that there is still a possibility of attracting votes through increasing taxes on ordinary people, as long as it is on things that the voting public values”

as pension reform has been in the news recently, but its original purpose was to insure individuals against a range of threats to their well-being - including unemployment and poor health.

I think there is a growing need to rename National Insurance as the NHS Tax. Such hypothecation will provide individuals with a better-understood deduction on their payslip, and one that they will not mind so much in paying.

One of the highlights of the opening ceremony for the 2012 Olympics was the celebration of the NHS. Critics of its inclusion in the ceremony were pounced upon with particular venom.

So any future politician declaring that to maintain standards in the NHS would require an extra penny or two on the NHS tax would not be roundly criticised by the general public in the way increasing taxes for any other purpose

would.

It is about time one of the parties made this a central plank in its general election programme, and that party could be the Liberal Democrats. It makes sense, it will make funding the NHS in future years more achievable, and heaven forbid, it might even make the Liberal Democrats more electable.

John Bryant (as William Tranby) is a member of the Liberator Collective and was chair of Camden's health scrutiny committee 2008-14.

OBITUARY: SIMON TITLEY

A stalwart of *Liberator* for 30 years, Simon Titley died on 31 August of a brain tumour. His writing both in *Liberator* and elsewhere helped explain liberal ideas with compelling clarity, but he was also a gourmet, satirist, producer of the *Liberal Revue* and had an equal love for heavyweight political ideas and scatological humour. Roger Hayes pays tribute

It was only in mid-June that I wrote a living obituary for Simon, when we first heard of his brain tumour. And now in that twinkling of an eye he is gone. Fortunately I have 35 years of memories of Simon, although I think I shall always remain hungry for more.

I first met Simon in the late 1970s but really got to know him during the first few months of 1980 when we spent time together at the Southend East by-election.

We have been friends ever since. I well remember some of Simon's wisest words shared in Tomassi's restaurant and ice cream parlour – "save room on the main course, you'll want two puddings." I was from the Isle of Wight at that time and was familiar with Minghella's Italian ice cream, so understood immediately the truth and importance of Simon's words.

'You'll want two puddings' was a bit of a metaphor for life with Simon. Thoughtful, reflective, intelligent – Simon was a serious, cerebral man. A nimble, rational mind capable of great ideas and creative ways to describe them – Simon was both a good speaker and a compelling writer.

But, when it came to the finer things of life, where possible, Simon wanted the best and preferably in double helpings. And not just in terms of food and drink, Simon wanted the best for our party and its policies. He was constantly frustrated by the party hierarchy's inability to see or think clearly and strategically preferring, as it so often has, to chase the possibility of short-term gain before establishing its long-term purpose.

One of his great legacies is the wealth of writing, over many years, that he leaves behind and the party leadership past, present and future would do well to regularly re-read it.

Simon was born in Lincoln on the morning of Monday 27 May 1957. His unpretentious beginnings helped shape his politics and what became a very finely honed sense of justice.

Hazel and Geoff were young parents: his father wasn't called up to do his National Service until Simon was a year old; so for a few years of Simon's early life Hazel was a one parent family receiving just £3 a week from the government while his father served in the far east.

When Geoff returned from Malaya he joined the police and Hazel taught maths at the Girls Grammar school. Eleven days before Simon's fifth birthday his brother Jim was born.

Simon's academic career began in 1962 when he went to Monks Road Infant School, and he loved it. He of course passed his 11+ and followed in his father's footsteps to the Lincoln City School. It will surprise you to learn that Simon hated sport and craft subjects but he did well academically.

He had intended to read Geography at Keele University but thanks to Sue Younger he very quickly became involved in student politics and instead graduated in international relations in 1979. It is often said that a 2:2 degree is the drinker's 2:1 – Simon's 2:1 was undoubtedly the political activist's first.

He became national chair of the Union of Liberal Students (ULS) and represented it on the British Youth Council. He participated in several delegations to places such as Lebanon just after the civil war and to Palestine, where what he saw made him a lifelong anti-Zionist.

Simon loved to travel – for work, for pleasure and for politics. His enquiring mind and search for new gastronomic experiences were the perfect combination for the traveller and Simon would sometimes combine these interests with a third – his love of good music, and in particular the blues.

Simon went to work for the Liberal Party as a researcher straight from university in the good old days when LPO (the Liberal Party Organisation) was based on the second floor of the National Liberal Club.

Long before the club was refurbished an elastic group of us – sometimes a handful, sometimes as many as 20 – would meet around the blue gingham tablecloth in a corner that became known as 'The Table'. Many a laugh was had and many a plot was hatched around The Table, including the start of the *Liberal Revue*, which Simon produced.

Some of our number won seats in parliament; some are now in the House of Lords; others made successful businesses; and some, too many, like Simon, are dead before their time.

At 25 he was adopted as Liberal candidate for Grantham and Sleaford and he stood against Douglas Hogg at the 1983 general election. He never had any illusions about winning, but he did raise the Liberal vote

from a poor third to second place.

During the 1992 general election Simon was on Des Wilson's national campaign team and helped organise the leader's tour and rallies. It was yet another false dawn in terms of results, but I remember being stuck in a blizzard with Simon and Paddy and the press pack in Aberdeen and travelling on a train with Ludovic Kennedy to a rally in Penzance.

As a result of his sterling efforts and bright ideas on that campaign, Des recommended him for a job with public relations company, Burson Marsteller. Simon was a natural. He provided top flight clients with sharp insight and focused campaigns that avoided all the PR newspeak and bullshit so rampant at the time. He was picked out for the company's European office in Brussels and moved there in 1997.

He loved Brussels and got to know it very well. Later he went freelance and worked for the diamond merchants of Antwerp and the European Beer Brewers Federation among others.

Simon was a polymath. His knowledge and expertise spanned a significant number of different subjects. As well as a prolific writer and blogger he was a keen

reader. He devoured books on cookery and transport, military history and rock music. He was just at home discussing the social development theories of Richard Florida as he was explaining post-Soviet politics in the Silk Road states. He deeply appreciated the musical genius of John Martyn and revelled in the silly double-entendres of 1960s British comedy.

From his decades of contributions to *Liberator* and the *Liberal Revue*, to his well-argued critiques of the party, Simon loved to prick the balloon of pomposity and tweak the trousers of mediocrity. He had a very simple belief that almost everything could and should be better than it was and could often see how that might be achieved. The untimely death of such a good mind is nothing short of a bloody tragedy.

There are things in this world that wouldn't exist, or would be much diminished, if it had not been for Simon Titley. So many of us are the richer for having known him: we have enjoyed his company and his cooking; his wit and his wisdom; his interests and his intellect; his laughter and his lists. He was the best of chums and the dearest of friends.

'We'll not see his like again' is an over-used phrase. Sadly, in Simon's case, this time it happens to be true.

Roger Hayes is a former Liberal Democrat leader of Kingston-upon-Thames Council and parliamentary candidate.

Liberator's website is being revamped and it is intended that a selection of Simon Titley's writing will appear there



TRIBUTES TO SIMON TITLEY

Simon had a rare gift for friendship; we were friends since I signed him up to the party at a dingy Freshers' Fair at Keele in 1975. His first campaigns included supporting me in a student union election, and our shared political history helped forge a long lasting bond - because of who he was.

Fiercely intelligent, sharply observant and uncompromising about his commitments he was also loyal, thoughtful, unselfish, gentle and extremely good company. His generous help in the Teignbridge constituency in 2005 and 2014 both helped the campaigns in what he did and how he inspired others.

The last few months of his life were special to us. When Simon asked if he could stay for a couple of weeks while he found a new flat we were delighted, and we had some great times – and some great meals! He stayed for three months and made many new friendships here in Teignmouth. There were surprises: books started arriving before he did; his copious luggage contained the barest minimum of clothing and the maximum books. Everything deserved serious attention especially cooking, which required planning and lists and was always mouth watering when served.

He threw himself into his final campaign - to re-elect Graham Watson – making 537 phone calls, delivering over 2,000 leaflets, folding many more – while devoting himself also to Liberator. If we had another few like him, Graham would still be our MEP.

Simon's formidable will, intellect and personal integrity made him a great ally, but first, foremost and above all a marvellous friend.

Sue Younger-Ross - former chair,
National League of Young Liberals

The first time I met Simon I inadvertently nearly poisoned him with a cheese roll that proved to have been marinated in petrol fumes. It was start of a long friendship.

Simon had contributed to Liberator from the late 1970s but became fully involved around 1985 when he found a book review had been insensitively edited to make room for a picture of a cat.

Fond as he was of cats, Simon decided the only way to prevent such future vandalism was to join the collective.

From then on he, without imposing himself, provided much of Liberator's political direction and its most telling analysis of events.

One key theme was the Liberal Democrats failure to build a core vote, preferring an ultimately self-defeating strategy that pretended 'we can win everywhere'. Heeding his advice would be a good tribute.

Simon was noted for his love of fine food, wine and beer. He was deeply serious about politics, yet a satirist of great ability and the driving force behind establishing the Liberal Revue, which entertained conference goers on and off for 24 years.

He had a vast collection of erudite books on politics and economics, yet his favourite entertainment was the innuendo-strewn 1960s comedy show Round the Horne.

Simon leaves a huge gap not only in his family and friends' lives but also in the party's resources for thinking about its future.

Whatever political issues arise in future I'm sure I, and many others, will wonder what Simon would have thought and be the poorer for not knowing.

Mark Smulian – Liberator Collective

When I discovered that a rock festival featuring Jimi

Hendrix, Cream and Pink Floyd had been held at the Tulip Bulb Auction Hall, Spalding, in 1967, there was only one person I wanted to tell.

Simon Titley would have loved the Lincolnshire connection with the summer of love and, when he laughed, he would be laughing with the incongruity of such an event, not at it. But Simon was already too ill.

As far as Liberator ever had an ideological centre, Simon provided it. His favourite theme was that the party had to build a core vote of people who were instinctively liberal on social issues.

This made him impatient with both those who would reduce Liberalism to a question of free-market economics and also with those who believed that the answer was for us to work even harder to exploit local grievances.

As he would say, that fact that we have to work so hard to remind people that they voted for us last time round, is not a cause for pride but a sign of weakness.

I saw Simon in hospital in Lincoln a few weeks ago, but I shall remember the last time I met him in his pomp. We met in Melton Mowbray in October of last year and then had lunch. Going through my photos from the day, I found that - quite unexpectedly - I had a couple of him that I took at the table. This is how I shall remember him.

Jonathan Calder – Liberator Collective

I drove to work the day I heard you were dead, and no one knew.

The Pancake Parlour was still open 24 hours and the queue at the petrol pump was as long as ever. No flags at half mast. Nothing on the news.

At the office, though, the internet was full of you. An outpouring of grief around the world that would have embarrassed you intensely. Your old secretary told me that they still had the giant gorilla you turned up with on her doorstep when her son was born.

Again and again, the same thought surfaced in a hundred different ways: "feel empty", "a huge hole", "just so very, very sad".

The first time we met you were re-interviewing me because I had been turned down as a candidate, as 'policy lite'. You grinned and told me it was a standard put-off to everyone, first time round. We chatted about how my views on the economy stood in stark contrast to the official party line. When I said: "Well, it's what I think anyway, and I can't change it just to fit in", you chortled, and said, "you'll do".

You fitted in. Fitted into the Simon shape we all had in our souls, but were unaware of, till we met you. You filled a hole we didn't know we had. Yeah, you were smart as an unexpected bolt of lightning in a still, dark sky. But most of all, you were just Simon. An example to us all. Our friend.

Steve Yolland – former Liberal candidate now resident in
Melbourne

Simon will be remembered as an acute and brilliant political observer and activist, but he was also (and not many people know this) a theatrical impresario of some note.

For many years, the highlight of any Liberal assembly or Lib Dem conference was the Liberal Revue. Simon was the driving force behind this, making it happen, corralling not only great sketch writing, but also performances from a collection of mildly gifted but hopelessly unprofessional cast members. He honed the drivel, ignored the complaints, and, despite an almost total absence of lines adequately learnt, produced dazzling revues.

These were performed in some of Britain's most prestigious theatrical venues - the Dome in Brighton, the Theatre Royal in Harrogate, the Pavilion in Bournemouth, and that gym near Torquay, which stank of feet.

Simon's talents for writing, talent spotting, directing, getting the tickets printed, the microphones hired, the after show food and drink organisation kept the revue going, despite threats of litigation and the absence of funds. Too shy to perform himself, the role of Svengali meets Cecil B de Mille behind the scenes suited him very well, and he loved it. And we loved him for doing it.

Wendy Kyrle-Pope - Liberator Collective

Simon really was a force of nature. If Conrad Russell's ferocious intellect was powered by nicotine, Simon ran off fine food and drink. His promotion of the principles of the 'Grande Bouffe' meal at every conference was a key part of my development when I joined the Collective.

But what I shall miss most is the robust advice, delivered invariably from instinctive radical Liberal principles. His ability to identify and roundly trash incoherent argument was admired by many, including at one time Nick Clegg.

Sadly that advice wasn't listened to at the critical time; had it been, the Liberal Democrats wouldn't have been in their current state.

Gareth Epps - Liberator Collective

Simon had joined Burson Marsteller in London and I got hired shortly. Later I brought Simon to Brussels where he settled down and enjoyed the continental life. We had been friends since Young Liberal days and would end up talking about how on earth we ended up where we were. Usually that included reminding ourselves that lack of electoral success that meant the PR industry was full of Liberals who would otherwise have been in parliament.

Our experience in Liberal campaigning taught us how to move opinion, be afraid of nothing, have opinions about lots of things and be able to set something up from scratch with a handful of resources.

Simon made a huge impact on all who met him. He was a fabulous mentor and friend and was loved by especially those junior staff he took under his wing.

Simon's absolute belief in fairness and integrity, to be honest, probably hindered his career, as he never put up with corporate bullshit.

A famous occasion arose when Simon took overseas colleagues to dinner in Brussels. By 11am no one was in the office. Around 12 a very sheepish troop arrived, Simon clutching a \$14,000 expense claim that was made to 'go away'. Simon had introduced them to the delights of Belgian beer. I will say no more.

Innuendo was never far from Simon's sense of humour. I forever blush when I recall introducing Simon as one of our biggest tools! Simon and I collapsed in tears of laughter in front of a rather bemused client.

Allan Biggar - former work colleague
and Liberal party area agent.

I first met Simon in 1976 at a West Midlands Young Liberal Movement conference at Keele University, where he was studying international relations and where I had bought a contingent from Solihull Young Liberals.

We subsequently worked together at Liberal Party headquarters, then based at the National Liberal Club, and subsequently on Liberator and the Liberal Revue.

No doubt many of the tributes here will focus on Simon's incisive political analysis across a wide range of political and non-political issues but I shall remember his outstanding organisational skills and attention to detail in the many social gatherings he organised for us (I often wonder if Richard Briers' character Martin

in Ever Decreasing Circles was based on Simon), his skill in marshalling a set of under-rehearsed amateur performers into something vaguely professional and entertaining and the unusual and entertaining websites he introduced to me. Two of my particular favourites are: www.nicecupofteaandasaditdown.com and www.cakewrecks.com

I, along with his family and Liberal family, will miss him.

Catherine Furlong - Liberator Collective

"Keep it in it will get laughs", something Simon would say during the many rehearsals for the Liberal Revue. There are many aspects of Simon's contribution to Liberalism and the party that I could recall but it is the Liberal Revue that I best remember him for.

Simon was the Revue's producer from the first Bournemouth show in 1984 onwards via the Brighton Dome; the Theatre Royal Harrogate, to the last one in Bournemouth in 2008. Simon organised every last detail from the very beginning of show until the cast party. His sheer force of personality built the Revue in the must-see event of the party conference. He wasn't though, just a producer out to entertain conference punters he was an astute politician who would hit political targets and get laughs. Being involved in the show was like nothing else. In the late 1980s I auditioned for the part of Neil Kinnock. When I finished Simon howled with laughter and said he wanted Kinnock, not General Zia of Pakistan.

The Revue was political satire at its very best. It often said that Liberals are good at laughing at themselves, which just as well.

Simon Titley over the years produced the material for laughter and much needed satire to puncture the pompous, the illiberal and the plain daft. Educating Liberals to enjoy their politics. For this the party owes him an enormous debt of gratitude.

Peter Johnson - Liberator Collective

Simon and I became friends through the Sunday Trading campaign and at a PR company we both worked at.

We had great fun exchanging silly jokes and innuendos - mostly revolving around Carry On Films, as that was how the situations we often found ourselves in felt like - PR in those days was a lot less professional than it is today!

Simon always sent me hilarious birthday cards. The comments inside are best kept secret, but they always made me laugh.

I recall a weekend when I went to visit him at his home in Brussels some time ago. He thought it was hilarious I kept my foreign money in the plastic envelope the bank had given me. I thought it was equally hilarious that he clanked as he walked due to the very large coin dispenser he kept in his pocket to keep all his change separate. Seeing the shopkeepers and barmen's faces when he got it out to pay was worthy of a comedy sketch.

When I returned home Simon sent me 50 plastic envelopes with a note saying; "For your foreign trips in the future. I will miss his birthday card this year.

Nicole Lander - former work colleague

WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

Simon Titley wrote this article in *Liberator* 339 in June 2010, just after the Coalition formed. We reproduce it here as a tribute and an example of his political knowledge and insights

“Go back to your constituencies and prepare for government.” How they laughed. But 29 years after David Steel’s famous declaration, the Liberal Democrats suddenly find themselves in government. Whether they prepared for it is another matter.

The party seems surprised to find itself in coalition but it was bound to happen sooner or later. The combined Conservative-plus-Labour share of the vote has been declining steadily, from a post-war peak of 97% in 1951 to a post-war low of 65% this year. Even with first-past-the-post, hung parliaments are increasingly likely. With proportional representation, they are inevitable.

Coalitions have been the norm in Scotland and Wales since devolution, while hung councils have been commonplace since the 1980s. As a result, during the past 25 years, literally thousands of Lib Dems have served in coalitions of one kind or another. The media don’t get this; they depicted the Lib Dems as ‘political virgins’ ill-prepared for coalition and none realised the significance of Andrew Stunell’s place in the Lib Dem negotiating team.

I have little sympathy with party members who regard coalition with the Tories as some sort of ‘sell out’. Such objections might have been valid if the parliamentary arithmetic had been different, if there were a better alternative realistically available, or if the party’s negotiators had come away with a poor deal. But it wasn’t, there isn’t and they didn’t. You can’t object to coalitions if you believe in PR. You can’t object to compromises if you accept coalitions.

Likewise, I have little sympathy for any Lib Dem voters who feel cheated. As Armando Iannucci put it (15 May), “I get frustrated when Liberal Democrat voters shout that they never voted for Cameron. No, they didn’t. But they knew there’d most probably be a hung parliament. What on earth were they expecting? A coalition with Esther Rantzen? Some would argue they were doing it expecting a pact with Labour, but alas, democracy doesn’t yet provide us with a system where we can vote for one party while influencing how many people vote for another.”

Most Lib Dem members are ‘critical friends’ of the coalition, at least for now. They are naturally queasy about collaborating with the old enemy but nevertheless gratified to see many of their policies included in the coalition agreement and the Queen’s Speech.

The success of the Lib Dem negotiators demonstrates the robustness of the party’s democratic processes and demolishes several right-wing myths. The ‘triple lock’ (the policy governing deals with other parties, passed at the 1998 spring conference) came in for a lot of mockery from the media and disdain from party right-wingers. When this policy was rediscovered earlier this

year, it was depicted as an encumbrance on the leader and evidence that the party wasn’t serious, since the ‘beards and sandals’ had the power to block the good governance of the country.

In the event, the triple lock proved a considerable asset. Throughout the negotiations, the Lib Dems’ MPs and Federal Executive were kept informed at regular meetings. This in turn enabled assurances to be fed down to party activists. Since both the parliamentary party and the FE voted by more than the required 75%, the special conference on 16 May was not strictly necessary but it ensured the buy-in of party members (the only pity is that the media were excluded). In contrast, senior figures in both the Conservative and Labour parties complained of their exclusion from the process.

The success of the negotiations also demonstrated the robustness of the Lib Dems’ policy and policy-making machinery. These provided the party’s negotiators with a strong bargaining position and a need to hold a line on certain issues, whereas the Tory negotiators could pretty much give up anything they liked.

There have been suggestions from the Lib Dem right-wing that the coalition renders the party’s democratic policy-making redundant, because the conference cannot mandate the government and might embarrass it. But this is a coalition, not a merger, and the party is not the same thing as the government. The negotiations demonstrate the need for the Lib Dems to maintain democratic policy-making to ensure the party’s strength and independence at the next election.

But don’t assume the coalition is mainly the product of Lib Dem negotiating skills. Look at it from the Tories’ point of view. As the largest party, they could have formed a minority government, with or without a ‘confidence and supply’ agreement with the Lib Dems. Then, with the power to decide the timing of the next general election, they could have called a second election in the autumn. They have plenty of money left in their war chest and would probably have won an overall majority. What’s not to like?

The Tories paradoxically opted for a coalition because of David Cameron’s overriding desire to rebrand his party. A deal with the Lib Dems enabled him to pull off what he had been unable to achieve in over four years of leadership – the detoxifying of the Tory brand and the marginalisation of his party’s right-wing.

Cameron’s strategy is a mixed blessing for the Lib Dems. It has given them a role in government for the first time in 65 years. By rolling over and accepting more negotiating demands than the Lib Dems had any right to expect, Cameron has ensured that the Lib Dems have a powerful incentive to make the coalition work. Yet this situation will make it harder for the Lib Dems to retain their distinctiveness and more likely that, by the time of the next election, voters will

wonder what the Lib Dems are for.

That election is five years away, assuming the fixed-term parliament can be made to stick. A lot can change in that time. Speculation about how the coalition might come unstuck has focused on the main areas of policy difference such as fiscal policy, electoral reform and Europe. Yet these seem to be the flashpoints more for Tory dissent – there is far more disgruntlement in the Tory backwoods and backbenches than there is among the Lib Dems.

Lib Dem disillusionment is more likely to arise from experience on the doorsteps. In England (unlike Scotland and Wales), the Lib Dems have no experience of campaigning while in government. Local Focus teams who have relied on a vocabulary of opposition will find themselves bereft. The scale of the cuts means that Lib Dem activists are likely to experience popular anger, which could translate into poor results in next May's elections.

Recall what Mervyn King, Governor of the Bank of England, said before this year's election; that whoever won would be out of power for a whole generation because of how tough the fiscal austerity will have to be. This is obviously the crude calculation behind the Labour Party's embrace of opposition.

IDEOLOGICAL WEAKNESSES

The three greatest weaknesses of the coalition are not policy splits but ideological similarities. Each is the product of a stunted concept of empowering the individual, which typifies the economism shared by the Tories and the Orange Book tendency in the Liberal Democrats.

The first weakness is a refusal to accept that neoliberal economic ideology, which has dominated political thinking for the past thirty years, is now a busted flush (as I explained in *Liberator* 338). An insistence on keeping the neoliberal show on the road will lead to a succession of worse and worse crises but there is no appetite within the coalition for radically refashioning the economy along more socially just and sustainable lines, just a belief that a bit of regulatory tinkering will restore business as usual.

The second weakness is the constitutional reform agenda. It is the greatest Lib Dem achievement of the coalition negotiations and contains many things Liberals can cheer. But it emphasises the value of legal, formal freedoms while overlooking real, felt freedom. It seems more concerned with procedures than outcomes. There seems no linkage to an idea of social justice or a realisation that constitutional rights are more difficult to exploit for people lacking economic or social power.

The third weakness is the assumption that Lib Dem 'community politics' and the Tory 'Big Society' are the same thing. A quick comparison of *The Theory and Practice of Community Politics* with Phillip Blond's *Red Tory* would soon disabuse anyone of that notion. Blond is strongly anti-liberal. He believes liberalism is essentially anti-social, dislikes the idea of individual autonomy and concludes that "a vision of the good life cannot come from liberal principles."

Blond's 'Big Society' is rooted in nostalgia for an idealised, pre-industrial, rural community, when most British people live in cities. And just as the Lib Dems have tended to reduce 'community politics' to election techniques, so the Tories will soon reduce the 'Big

Society' to a means of saving money by dumping social services on the voluntary sector.

CAMPAIGN FAILURE

The coalition is so momentous that it has obscured the failure of the Lib Dem election campaign. The party is in government despite its campaign rather than because of it. The centrally-run campaign was fundamentally misconceived. There was no synergy between the centrally-run 'air war' and the 'ground war' being fought in target constituencies. Cowley Street instructed local parties to play down the local elections and had no concept of running integrated campaigns.

When the 'surge' came following the first TV debate, the party failed to capitalise on it. Instead, Cowley Street decided to put all its eggs in the 'Cleggmania' basket. The level of stupidity can be gauged by the fact that, the day after the first TV debate, Vince Cable was unceremoniously dumped. All his joint appearances with Clegg were cancelled and his picture was removed from the party's website homepage.

As Lib Dem opinion poll ratings soared, one cheerleader for the right-wing cabal running the campaign wrote on Facebook: "So... 26-34% in the polls, almost all the boost down to media skills and leadership not leaflets and target seats... I've got to ask... anyone missing Rennard...?" The complete collapse of the 'surge' to 23% on polling day, just 1% more than the party won in 2005, suggests there was no basis for such conceit.

Cowley Street assumed the second and third debates would automatically lead to further gains in support. It focused the 'air war' on Clegg's personality and did nothing to develop the party's messages. The 'ground war' was just as bad. Local parties were relying on cliché-laden leaflets with little to say beyond the usual bar charts and negative messages. And after the surge, the target seat strategy was effectively abandoned and a dozen seats were lost by fewer than 900 votes.

What the campaign revealed above all was the Lib Dems' long-standing failure to consolidate a core vote. The mantra "we can win everywhere" symbolises a reluctance to enthuse the party's natural base and an overriding fear of causing offence. No wonder Lib Dem support in this election was unusually soft. An eve-of-election opinion poll conducted by Ipsos MORI showed that, whereas 28% of Labour voters and 17% of Conservatives said they might change their mind, 40% of Lib Dems said they might. And they did.

What will be the fate of this coalition? It will end in tears – political projects always do. In the meantime, the Lib Dems should exploit the situation for all it's worth and not feel inhibited about maintaining and developing an independent identity. The party should shun any grandiose idea of a 'centre-right realignment' or, worse, a coupon election. Instead, they will need an exit strategy.

However the coalition ends, it will likely be due to what Harold Macmillan most feared: "Events, dear boy, events."

The Snowden Files: The Inside Story of the World's Most Wanted Man

by Luke Harding
Guardian Books, 2014
£12.99.

For the last year it has been impossible to pick up a newspaper, look at news online, or listen to most news broadcasts without Edward Snowden's revelations being relevant. Now the DRIP legislation (Data Retention and Investigatory Powers Bill) in the UK Parliament has brought it to the fore again.

This is a good book. It reads quite like a thriller. I bought the Guardian book as I'd not read any of the background on Edward Snowden before and thought I ought to know some of it.

Harding's book answers a lot of questions and convinces me that Snowden was genuine in wanting to expose breaches of the US constitution by mass surveillance, thought that going to reputable journalists was the only practical way to expose the breaches of privacy without being ignored or jailed in the US, and sincerely believed that he had taken sufficient security steps so that no one would be put at risk by his revelations.

The younger Snowden comes across as an immature, right wing young man with little worldly knowledge. He can't be blamed for that and is clearly bright, in fact highly intelligent – and though there are large gaps in the narrative, an influential year in Japan just glossed over (and what has happened to his girlfriend in Hawaii) – he becomes an idealist.

I'd been puzzled as to who Glenn Greenwald, the journalist who broke the story was. If he was such a successful journalist for the Guardian why had I never heard of him? I'd never realised that it was Guardian America that broke the story and that Greenwald was an American living in Brazil. Harding shares the credit around with others. The book is quite well indexed.

Nevertheless there are major gaps in plausibility. Why Hong Kong? (Snowden travels from Hawaii to Hong Kong to make his revelations). Why does he end up in Russia? The (now civil) libertarian Snowden must be sick to the core to find himself



REVIEWS

stranded in Putin's increasingly brutal elected dictatorship in Russia – where every two steps of forward progress are followed by some three steps back.

The book suggests that his route to asylum in Ecuador (assisted by Julian Assange and Sarah Harrison of WikiLeaks) had to go through Russia and that he was stranded in Russia by the US government blocking onward travel. Obama should have some backbone. He should invite Snowden back under amnesty to help solve the legitimacy and security problems. Or else another government with backbone – Angela Merkel's Germany – should do it.

Some criticism of the authorities is unfair on secrecy. I want some secret intelligence to stay secret; I want government advice to stay confidential while necessary for quality of debate at high level; I don't want everything public and on trial.

And Liberty – please. Greenwald's partner, David Miranda, was stopped under anti-terrorist legislation. Invasion of liberty – don't be stupid. His partner had just helped leak a load of secret information including some from the UK and he flies into Heathrow with material for Greenwald. Have these guys never watched a single spy movie. What did they expect to happen?

The Guardian is to be commended for its work in bringing Edward Snowden's revelations to light. It is quality important journalism of the highest standard.

Kiron Reid

**Against the Tide
by Dick Taverne
Biteback 2014 £19.99**

"A curious mule-like constitutional creature that boasts neither pride

in ancestry nor hope of posterity"; was Dick Taverne referring to Liberal Democrats?

I'll leave that teaser open for you to read in the book. Dick Taverne's place in history will invariably stand on his sensational by-election victory in Lincoln in 1973. Despite being a member of the Liberal Democrats since merger and on their benches in the Lords, neither they, nor the Liberal party feature in the index. Anecdotes are however, inevitable. Taverne's first electoral contest was against Jeremy Thorpe for the presidency of the Oxford Union, which Jeremy won, of course, with his usual mastery of campaigning.

Taverne also encountered the then Liberal MP Dingle Foot at Oxford, though in passing; he would go on to act as a junior in Foot's (by then a Labour MP) chambers.

As a QC, Foot had defended practically every leading African nationalist, and went on to defend their opponents after independence. *Liyanage & others vs. The Queen* (1965) is of most interest as Taverne thinks it may be the only case where an Act of a Commonwealth Parliament has been declared illegal. Notably, so far as I too am aware, Sri Lanka has not taken a case to the Privy Council since.

Taverne was elected to Parliament at the 1962 Lincoln by-election. This wasn't particularly remarkable but it was of concern to the Conservatives; Patrick Furnell contested the by-election in the Liberal interest and the Tory vote fell dramatically, a harbinger of Orpington later that year. Furnell pretty much held his vote in the 1964 general election, but Liberals did not contest Lincoln in 1966 or 1970. When Taverne resigned to fight the by-election in 1973, the local party supported him.

The following extract from

Radical Bulletin (December 1972) explains some of this”

“For some days after the Sutton and Cheam by-election there were rumours in the papers that the Liberal Party was going to fight Lincoln. Many active Liberals were worried about these rumours, since they believed that victory for Dick Taverne would be a victory for our own ideas about the future of Europe - and one in the eye for the more unpleasant parts of the Labour Party. Now the Parliamentary Party has decided that Lincoln will not be fought. The right decision. But who took it - and with what legitimacy? And who spread all the rumours about irresistible pressure from grass roots to fight Lincoln? And why?”

If RB was behind Taverne that would reinforce my feeling that most of the party was too. Taverne himself writes that Liberals were particularly prominent on polling day.

With Labour in office, Dick Taverne served under Roy Jenkins at the Home Office and then the Treasury, and much of this section is a eulogy of Jenkins’ work, of which it is well worth refreshing our memory. The flipside of this coin is the struggles within the Labour party, which were probably little understood by Liberals at the time and of course, erupted in the 1973 by-election, and ultimately in the SDP.

Taverne stood as SDP candidate in the 1982 Peckham by-election. My experience of the SDP had not been good, but I went along out of respect for the stand Taverne had taken. The experience was, again, not good, with Liberals out on the doorstep and Soggs hogging the bar. I understand a huge amount of casework was generated in the campaign, but not followed up afterwards, which, if it had been, might have terminated the career of the appalling Harriet Harman.

I don’t know how much of this was down to Taverne and I suspect rather that it was SDP organisation. The agent, who lived in my then Focus delivery round in Bromley-by-Bow, joined the Liberal party shortly afterwards. Taverne polled respectably – just over 30% and it would have been a good base to build on, especially when Simon Hughes won neighbouring Bermondsey the following year. These memoirs make only passing

reference to it as Taverne, necessarily, moved on to other things after losing Lincoln in the second 1974 general election – never underestimate the Labour party’s ability to fight back.

Taverne’s work outside of Parliament may actually be his greatest legacy – through the Institute for Fiscal Studies and Sense About Science (though I would ask him to have a more open mind on holistic therapies there – big western science isn’t the only one); the Lords is probably the best place to use his cumulative experience.

Stewart Rayment

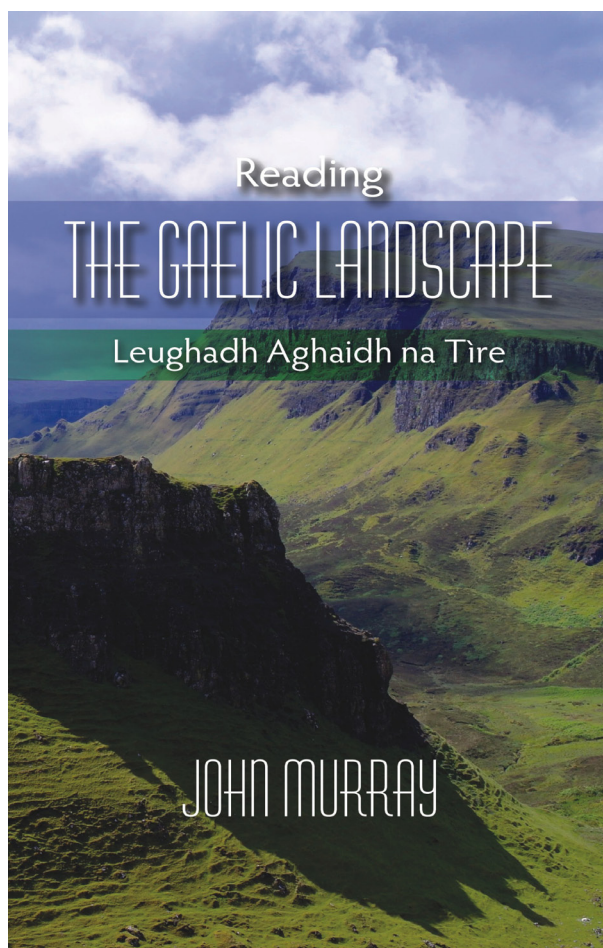
Syria: From the Great War to Civil War

by John McHugo
Saqi Books 2014.

This book follows on just a year after John McHugo’s Concise History of the Arabs, which is a great help to anybody trying to understand the historical background to northern Arabia – the Levant.

In this book the author homes in on Syria to explain the background to the current civil war. He starts with Greater Syria - the Ottoman province - and shows how France and Britain took advantage of the Ottoman decline to carve up Syria to suit their own agenda. The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 led to the artificial divide between Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan. Then later the division of Palestine to create a Jewish state happened in such a chaotic way as to leave decades of misery and distrust and rankles especially in Syria because of the annexation of the Golan Heights in 1967.

The French mal-administered Syria – of that there is no doubt. The author shows how decisions made by democratic governments in Paris to suit their own interests undermined all chances of creating any kind of democracy in Syria.



The chaos they left behind after World War II paved the way for a dictator to emerge in the form of Hafez Al Assad.

McHugo gives some sympathetic treatment to the modernising of the country that took place under the rule of Hafez – particularly the education reforms, the improvements to the economy and his genuine, but rebuffed, attempts to reach peace with an uninterested Israel. Although a socialist, he did continue the traditional patronage system with his own kind of corruption. He did his best to keep a lid on sectarianism and himself in power by deploying the notorious brutality of the secret police. Steadily his family and their cronies lost touch with the resentment that this was generating across the country. This has left a particularly nasty legacy that undoubtedly did much to provoke the present civil war.

Basher Al Assad comes across as a man too young for power and rather out of his depth as he struggles from one crisis to another – not really in control of his own government, but at the same time quite happy to continue the brutal practices of his father’s regime.

The author reflects on the current civil war and, although he went to

press in April 2014, he accurately predicted the emergence of ISIS as a regional power force. To those who are now suggesting that boundaries should be redrawn to reflect the new realities (separate states for Sunnis, Shias and Kurds etc.), he warns that this could only come about with western interference and that could cause even more problems.

John Kell

Is China Buying the World?

by Peter Nolan
Polity 2012 £14.99

This is a useful little book; not only for its assessment of China, but also for its résumé of the globalised West and indeed worth a look for that alone.

Nolan concludes that China is not buying the world. Large western corporations may be viewed more in that light. I would argue that China is however positioning itself, particularly in Africa with its aid programmes, and that in terms of resource scarcity these favours will inevitably be called in.

The wake-up call is that large corporations are no longer closely associated with a particular country and that there “is little incentive for a global company to contribute to a national industrial policy”. The value of this book is as much a look at ourselves as its insight on China.

Stewart Rayment

Into the Whirlwind by Eugenia Ginzburg Persephone 2014 £12.00

I don't know why I read socialist reality; each page, each paragraph gets worse and worse as an account of human suffering and man's inhumanity to man. Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, first as a radio broadcast, introduced me to the genre.

I'm probably not alone among Liberals in not drifting into a socialist camp on account of such books. At the time, Young Communist and Young Liberal branches could be quite close – Vietnam and Apartheid being uniting issues; sex, drugs & rock'n'roll aside. This would persist,

particularly in student politics, throughout the 1970s and probably accounts for the number of Commies who joined the SDP, though typically not the Liberal Democrats. Invariably middle class, the mothers of some of these zealots must have been something like Yevgenia Ginzburg before her fall.

The fallen Ginzburg meets Social Revolutionaries and Mensheviks, some of whom are pleased to see Bolsheviks on the receiving end. Ginzburg herself thinks that her fall is a mistake and never admits to Trotskyism (who would?). Some of her fellow Bolshies can't bring themselves to believe that Stalin is behind all this (and thus remain a Fifth Column in the camps). Ginzburg is a bit savvier than this, but hasn't renounced Bolshevism – at least not by the end of this book. Stalin's personal complicity has been known at least since Khrushchev's speech to the 20th Party Congress, and in trumps since the fall of the Soviet system. Ginzburg's memoirs were only published in samizdat form inside Russia before then however.

So this is what Marxist socialism really is. Within this inevitably grim subject matter we experience extraordinary gestures of humanity and the strength of poetry. One wonders how much the latter enabled the prodigious feat of memory that Ginzburg achieved. A great book, and as usual, beautifully presented by Persephone.

Stewart Rayment

Pybrac by Pierre Louÿs Wakefield Press, USA 2014

The sixteenth century jurist and poet Guy du Faur, Seigneur de Pibrac isn't someone whose name readily rolls off an English



tongue, but his quatrains were once commonplace in French moral education. Little surprise then, that someone like Pierre Louÿs would parody them, still less, since the blurb praises them as “may well be the filthiest collection of poetry ever published”, that they appeared after his death.

Louÿs, whose name should be better known, brought us, among others *Les Chansons de Bilitis* and ‘Concha Perez’, respectively immortalised by Geraldine Farrer, Marlene Dietrich, Brigitte Bardot and Carole Bouquet/Ángelina Moline... yes, I suppose a bucket of water would come in handy...

This Wakefield edition combines the French side-by-side with an elegant translation by Geoffrey Longnecker (which he says was compiled in much the same way as Louÿs built up his collection – most of which remains unpublished, possibly lost). As a bonus, the book is illustrated with drawings by the heroic Czech surrealist Toyen, like most of the ladies associated with that movement, only now coming into their own.

Stewart Rayment

**Reading the Gaelic
Landscape, Leughadh
Aghaidh na Tìre
by John Murray/ Iain
Moireach
Whittle Publishing
2014 £16.99**

Sometime last Autumn there was some ribaldry about the possible British descent of Lord Bonkers; it is well known that the founder of the line came over with the Conqueror and the name is derived from the Norman French 'bon coer' – anglicised into Bonkers over the centuries (the bastard line Goodheart splitting off somewhere along the way).

I suggested a possible Irish line from 'Buinn na coir', which I purported meant at bottom, good, or ultimately decent or something like that, which would similarly anglicise into Bonkers.

Bonkers, my source told me, is 'glan às a' chiall' – I'm at a loss to translate it. His lordship did not

enter into the debate. If I had John Murray's book to hand at the time my task would have been easier, possibly even accurate.

Murray's book is of the toponymy of the Scottish Gàidhealtachd – basically the Highlands and Islands, so central to the survival of the British Liberal party. It follows that the names have a deep meaning, though understanding of this is now largely lost as Gaelic is only spoken by some 60,000 people in Scotland, most of whom live on islands where Norse place names predominate.

Murray writes of the campaigns against Gaelic, of the class prejudices of cartographers, or the inter-relativity of Gaelic culture in Ireland and Scotland (one might also add Scots culture) all of which makes exciting reading, before delving into the culture of the tongue.

The starting point for the book however is the hill-walker or skier and these are the people who will derive most from the book. One of the joys of party conferences is

getting out of the train a modest distance from one's destination and crossing the last leg through hill and vale. Not so easy with Glasgow from the south, but I pour over my map... drop my bags and take the train on to Ardlui – that's Àird Laoigh, cross Loch Lomond - Loch Laomainn and walk down the east side (the West Highland Way) to Milngavie on the north side of Glasgow. That's about 40 miles I'd guess, so two days, or maybe pick up a bus at the bottom of the loch.

If your imagination isn't fired by the prospect read John Buchan's *Huntingtower* and embrace the spirit. Dickson McCunn would have been a good Liberal, after all. How much more you'll get from the walk with Murray's book in your pocket.

Stewart Rayment

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Monday

I am delighted to read that the Welsh Liberal Democrats are proposing to abolish the trolls on the Severn Bridge. For many years I have been urging just this move upon them, but without any joy. "The time is not right," said Mike German. "There are other priorities," said Kirsty Williams. "Wibble, wibble: are both those feet mine?" said Lembit Opik.

It is certainly good news for travellers to and from the Principality. For myself, whenever obliged to cross the Severn, I obtained three billy goats from Chepstow Goats ("No ifs, no butts, good service") and was able to ward the trolls off; others, perhaps less well prepared, have had less happy experiences.

Incidentally, I was once unable to obtain any billy goats when returning from giving a speech in Ystradgynlais and decided to improvise by summoning Nanny. I don't know what she did to the trolls, but she certainly terrified me.

Tuesday

Whilst I attribute my rude health to my annual bathe in the spring that bursts from the hillside above the former headquarters of the Association of Liberal Councillors in Hebden Bridge, and admit that a certain cordial sold to me (at no small cost) by the Elves of Rockingham Forest has done no harm, I like to visit the Westminster gymnasium from time to time to keep in trim.

Who should I meet there this morning but our own Danny Alexander? He is not wearing glasses and his hair is now a rich chestnut. He nods to me whilst attempting to clean and jerk a particularly heavy set of barbells (not to be confused with the fist, which are, in my experience, far lighter). Fortunately I am able to steady the First Secretary to the Treasury before he does himself a serious mischief. I must admit he looks better for the face lift – or is it just the effect of vitamin pills?

Wednesday

The tang of autumn is in the air and the leaves (or so my private polling informs me) are turning. It is time to think of winter and how I shall heat the Hall. At one time I would simply have ordered so many sacks of nutty slack from my own mines in the North of Rutland, but Ed Davey gave me a disapproving look last time I mentioned them.

So I have decided to use oil instead. I had assumed that, when I asked for quotes that from my own rigs on Rutland Water would come in as the cheapest, but it turned out that a fellow from down Kent way put in the juiciest tender. I phoned the manager of Chevening Oil to give him the good news and have a chat, but he was distinctly cagey about where he sourced the stuff. Still, I placed an order that will fill the tanks here in my cellars.

Afterwards, I wrote a note of advice to Clegg about the importance of keeping warm in winter. I could not help noticing last year that he had a distinctly blue tinge to his face and a permanent drip at the end of his nose.

Thursday

I have never been a great lover of school dinners – I date the beginning of my long career in public service to my time on the Escape Committee at prep school – so when I heard about Clegg's new policy I was less than impressed. I am, however, at a loss to know how to intervene as the man simply won't listen to me on the

Lord Bonkers' Diary

subject. Still pondering, I take myself off to give the prizes at the annual Well-Behaved Orphans' quiz. There are no shocks and the bookies' favourite – a bright little nine-year-old – wins by several lengths and secures the traditional bag of toffees.

Friday

If I say it myself, I have something of a brainwave over breakfast and ring Matron at the Bonkers Home for Well-Behaved Orphans as soon as I have dealt with the eggs and b. Sure enough, the victor in yesterday's quiz is

soon announced. I hand him read a few thoughts I have jotted down on the subject of school meals and then dial a number and handed him the telephone. "It's the Deputy Prime Minister, young man", I explain. "I am sure he would like to speak to you." You probably heard what ensued. After the lad's sterling performance, I felt it only right to stretch his prize to a second bag of toffees.

Saturday

Who among us failed to rejoice when the Iron Curtain was lifted? I shall never forget the day I heard my old friend Mstislav Rostropovich playing Bach amid the ruins of the Berlin Wall – even if he did not wholly appreciate it when I accompanied him on the kazoo. It would be dishonest, however, to pretend that the integration of the Eastern European economies into those of the West was without its difficulties. Here in Rutland, for instance, we have had to cope with East Rutland (or the "Democratic Republic of Rutland" as it had the immortal rind to call itself), an unlovely tract of land whose economy relied entirely upon the export of pork scratchings – though I will admit that they were splendidly hairy ones. Wages there were far lower, its currency was not worth the paper it was written on and we had to shell out a fortune to bring the two halves of the county together. On the positive side, the plumbing here at the Hall has never been in a better condition and Rutland now regularly finishes in the upper reaches of the Chess Olympiad.

Sunday

When we Liberal Democrats do abolish the trolls on the Severn Bridge, I anticipate that many of my readers will visit that delightful part of the world. There is, however, one phenomenon that occurs there of which you should beware.

I came across it myself years ago when I visited a hostelry in a Gloucestershire village. There I was enjoying a party of Pardoe's Old and Fruity vintage scrumpy when a fellow in an anorak sat down next to me. His opening gambit was: "We came third in this ward at the by-election, but if we get the same swing at the next District elections we will move into second place in three more wards." He then went on to describe how he divided up the delivery rounds, the problems he was having with his offset litho and...

Well, by then I had fallen fast asleep. When I awoke I opened a speculative eye and found the fellow had gone. "I am afraid you have met the Severn Bore," said the barman.

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