

liberator



- 🔦 Scotland still heads for the exit – Wendy Kyrle-Pope
- 🔦 Look beyond the Coalition – Iain Brodie-Browne
- 🔦 From fracking to foreign policy – David Thorpe

SUBSCRIBE!

Liberator magazine is published six/seven times per year. Subscribe for only £25 (£30 overseas) per year.

You can subscribe or renew online using PayPal at our website: www.liberator.org.uk

Or send a cheque (UK banks only), payable to "Liberator Publications", together with your name and full postal address, to:

Liberator Publications
Flat 1, 24 Alexandra Grove
London N4 2LF
England

THE LIBERATOR COLLECTIVE

Jonathan Calder, Richard Clein, Howard Cohen, Gareth Epps, Catherine Furlong, David Grace, Peter Johnson, Wendy Kyrle-Pope, Tim McNally, George Potter, Stewart Rayment, Kiron Reid, Harriet Sherlock, Mark Smulian, William Tranby, Claire Wiggins, Nick Winch

Liberator is printed by Lithosphere
Studio 1, 146 Seven Sisters Road, LONDON N7 7PL

LIBERATOR

🕒 was founded in 1970 and is produced by a voluntary editorial collective

🕒 acts as a forum for debate among radical liberals in all parties and none

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

We reserve the right to shorten, alter or omit any material.

DATA PROTECTION

Liberator is registered under the Data Protection Act and subscribes to the data protection principles therein.

YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS BY EMAIL

We accept your Liberator contributions by email to collective@liberator.org.uk

Please read our copy deadlines and style guidelines on the liberator website. Photos and adverts as JPG only.

INTERNET

Email: collective@liberator.org.uk
Website: <http://www.liberator.org.uk>

Blog: <http://liberator-magazine.blogspot.co.uk>
Facebook group: <http://www.facebook.com/groups/6806343091>
Twitter: [@Liberator_mag](https://twitter.com/Liberator_mag)

COMMENTARY.....3

RADICAL BULLETIN4..6

BEADS WITHOUT STRING7
Liberal Democrat general election messages have turned out to be tactics, not strategy, says George Potter

A PAUSE ON THE ROAD TO INDEPENDENCE 8..9
Wendy Kyrle-Pope campaigned for a 'no' vote in the Scottish referendum, but thinks the issue will soon be back, ~with a majority for independence likely

RADICAL LIBERALISM BEYOND THE COALITION..... 10..11
Iain Brodie Browne finds hope for social liberal action to combat disadvantage beyond the coalition in a new book from a group of Scottish Liberal Democrats

WHEN THE VALUES VANISHED..... 12..13
People who adhere to ethical values in the Middle East tend to end up powerless and oppressed. How can a region of autocrats change, asks our Mohammed Nosseir

GOODBYE TO OIL, AND OIL STATES..... 14..15
Fracking may seem to have little connection with the Middle East, but as the USA's shale frees it from dependence on oil, so may its interest wane in the region, says David Thorpe

CAPITAL CASE 16
Devolution is needed right under the government's nose in London, says Ruth Dombey

GET RID OF EXPERTS 17
Liberal Democrat policy-making is in hock to vested interests, evidence-supported but not evidence-based, says Stan Collins

NOW FOR THE BULLIES..... 18
Same sex marriage has been achieved and the next step should be ending bullying in schools based on sexual orientation, says Mathew Hulbert

LETTERS 19

REVIEWS.....20..23

LORD BONKERS' DIARY24

Cover illustration:

Christy Lawrance, House of Parliament
picture: Maurice via Wikimedia Commons,
Loch Ness monster picture: Juliatenney via Flickr

COMMENTARY

CIRCLING THE WAGONS

The shape of the Liberal Democrat general election campaign is becoming evident, and it's a survival exercise.

'Key messages' have been sent to party members from on high and the most fundamental of these sits in the middle – we won't cut as much as the Tories but we'll be more financially responsible than Labour.

This at least has the merit of being fairly readily grasped but, as George Potter points out in this issue, it fails to challenge the Tories' economic illiteracy and it fails to challenge Labour on its record of talking soft but cutting harshly.

It strands the Liberal Democrats somewhere in the middle – “vote for us because we aren't as nasty as the Tories and we're not as irresponsible with other people's money as Labour”.

The other 'overall winners' messages sent round in policy terms are a curious mixture.

“Balance the budget by 2018, protecting the economic recovery and bringing down Britain's debt”, sounds OK but why 2018, unless this is an extension of the previous logic to show the Lib Dems would cut slower than the Tories but not as slow as Labour?

Next comes a promise to cut income tax by £400 for low and middle earners. Increasing personal allowances has certainly been a popular policy and one that the Lib Dems have more less managed to hang on to ownership of, despite Tory attempts seize it.

But this does nothing for those too poor to pay tax. There may be a pragmatic assumption that most people in that category either don't vote or support Labour, but it's hardly the mark of a party concerned about the most vulnerable.

The guarantee to put mental health on the same footing as physical health for NHS care and waiting times is thoroughly welcome and quite brave, given this is not an area noted for attracting popular support.

It's the sort of bold policy there should be more of if the party is not to spend its time stuck in the middle being defined by those around it.

Similar praise is deserved for promising to ensure that every child is taught by a qualified teacher and that, in effect, education spending is ringfenced, though that may have some consequential unpleasant impact on spending areas that are not ringfenced that is not explained.

This though in itself does nothing to sort out Michael Gove's mess of academies and free schools run by groups ranging from the virtuous to the corrupt, and all totally out of control except for a hopelessly inadequate Whitehall oversight.

The fifth policy “bring back proper border checks so we know who's coming in and leaving the UK” sounds like a dog-whistle to potential defectors to Ukip.

If the Border Force can't process people into the country in any reasonable time, how could it process them out of it? This policy is perhaps a roundabout way of trying to reduce demand for holiday air travel.

Whatever the merits of these key messages, it is also pretty clear that they are only really intended for use in about 60-70 seats – those held plus a handful that might plausibly be gained.

After five years of coalition government few could reasonably argue against a strategy that approaches the next general election like a giant collection of by-elections.

The Lib Dems have to concentrate resources on those seats that might be won in enough numbers to give them a negotiating position if there is another hung parliament, or enough MPs to be credible if there isn't.

Even so, the reported scarcity of candidates in the rest of the country is alarming and, combined with the pressure on activists elsewhere to go to target seats, will mean that little campaigning will take place in most constituencies.

This will self-evidently lead to the atrophy of the party in those places – since having neglected to build a core vote, Lib Dem support depends on labour-intensive activity by the party to remind people why they voted for it in the first place, and without that supporters soon drift away.

The number of Lib Dem MPs in the next parliament could be disappointing (if good compared with the pre-1997 era), but the state of the party outside those constituencies could be frankly awful and any future recovery will depend on resources going into such areas.

At the moment non-target seats are being told to help target ones, and otherwise left to their own devices.

That is understandable when the focus is on survival, but in the long-term it is unwise. At the very least the party should ensure that every seat has a candidate – whether or not all the convoluted bureaucratic hoops of the approval and selection process have been gone through – and places that still have councillors should be encouraged to do some work on their own patch to safeguard their future.

Even if the party ends up with about 40 seats (which is where some sensible predictions put it) it will still want a forty-first one day.

LIBERATOR WEBSITE

We have had some technical trouble with our website being hijacked. Normal service should resume soon but meanwhile you can find us at:

www.liberatormagazine.org.uk

and contact us at:
collective@liberatormagazine.org.uk

RADICAL BULLETIN

CONFEDERACY OF DUNCES

With a general election looming, it was little short of scandalous that the Lib Dem conference in Glasgow had to waste two hours sorting out the Federal Executive's cock-ups.

Whoever succeeds Tim Farron as party president will need to get a grip on this body, but the Glasgow fiascos add compelling evidence for the view that chairing the FE does not naturally sit with the rest of the president's job and should be removed from it.

Its first disaster concerned a motion to introduce one member, one vote for conference voting and for federal committee elections.

The amateurish farrago presented by the FE contained, among much else, incomplete accompanying amendments that would have rendered the party constitution nonsense; the presumably accidental abolition of the requirement for those calling for a special conference to come from 20 different local parties - thus making it possible for one local party on its own to call a special conference; and a new duty on the party to send all consultation papers to every member without a thought for the cost involved or even a requirement for members to notify a functioning email address.

References would have remained in standing orders to conference representatives despite other amendments abolishing them, and whichever genius drafted this also forgot to amend the committee election regulations, which would have continued to refer to voting by the present system.

A successful amendment means that OMOV cannot take effect until a proper set of amendments has been presented and agreed upon.

OMOV was at least a cock-up. The FE's other star turn on the agenda looked rather like conspiracy.

Not even in the darkest days of the post-merger period did the FE manage to get itself formally censured by the conference, but it achieved this over its cack-handed attempt to change gender quotas by subterfuge.

The problem goes back to legal advice that the Equality Act made unlawful the old system of at least one third of federal committee members being women and one third men.

Until the situation was resolved the FE was given power to impose a gender quota in the short term should the Equality Act be amended too near a conference for a new constitutional amendment to be submitted.

Instead, it received fresh legal advice that gender quotas for committee elections were permissible.

Having received this fresh advice, the FE sat on its collective arse for months before panicking two days before the deadline for constitutional amendments for Glasgow and arbitrarily deciding in the dying

few minutes of a meeting it would reserve half of all committee places for women. Those present say Farron allowed minimal discussion.

This was plainly outside the FE's powers, since it is for conference – not it – to amend the constitution and decide how committees should be elected.

Those who spoke in support of the FE in the Glasgow debate were all supporters of gender quotas who seemed unable to grasp that the issue at hand was not about the proportion of women on committees but conference asserting its rights against an attempt by the FE to usurp them.

People who wanted quotas for ethnic minorities, for those who identify neither as men nor women, for people with disabilities and even - in the case of one brave person - on grounds of class, all questioned why there should be quotas imposed without a conference vote for one under-represented group, but not others.

Conference restored the old thirds rule and the whole mess will come back to another conference to be unravelled.

It is no wonder that several FE members described it to *Liberator* as "the worst-run committee I have ever sat on".

AND THEN THERE WERE THREE

Sal Brinton, Daisy Cooper and Liz Lynne are now left to contest the Lib Dem presidency, the fourth declared candidate, Linda Jack, having dropped out as she could not gather the required 200 signatures from conference representatives.

Each made hustings statements in *Liberator* 368, and it will be interesting to see where what would have been Jack's vote goes.

Her failure to secure enough support does not say much for the powers of organisation of Liberal Left, of which she is chair.

But it is also not wholly her, or their, fault. Representatives stayed away in droves from Glasgow – a venue distant from the main concentrations of party members and one that is consequently expensive for many to reach.

With so few representatives for candidates' canvassers to choose among, a further complication was caused by the presence of substitutes who had badges identical to those of actual representatives.

Substitutes cannot sign nomination papers but with many of them and, presumably, their canvassers unaware of this, any signatures they did give would have been disallowed.

With the coming of one member one vote and the disappearance of 'conference representative' status, how will presidential nominations be handled in future? This was among many loose ends left by the OMOV motion fiasco.

Nick Clegg is, of course, entirely neutral in public

over who should be president. Which must be why he was heard to lobby for Brinton at the Yorkshire region dinner.

DOING THE MATHS

A knife-edge vote at the Federal Policy Committee was all that saved the ring fencing of assorted budgets in the pre-manifesto document put to the Glasgow conference.

Chair Duncan Hames did not pick up that this vote might be close and so no effective lobbying was done in favour of retaining ring fences for the NHS, education (not just the schools budget) and international aid.

Those opposed to them argued that with a deficit still to be tackled and few tax rises identified, a collection of ring fences would mean deep cuts elsewhere. In the end there was one vote in it.

BROWNE OFF

A number of MPs have raised eyebrows by leaving it a bit late to announce that they are standing down, and Jeremy Browne certainly caused some surprise by waiting until mid-October to reveal that he will not fight Taunton again.

This should perhaps not have come as such a shock – Browne's fear was not that he'd lose but that he'd probably win.

That would have left him facing five years as a backbencher – even if the party is in government again – since with even Nick Clegg having sacked him as a minister no-one to the left of Clegg (which is most people) as a future leader would be likely to employ him.

Browne's Race Plan book had its points but essentially revealed him to hold economic views so far to the right as to lack any significant group of supporters in the party and – as David Howarth showed in *Liberator* 368 – he was proposing that the party should pitch for the support of a group of 'small state' voters that barely exists.

No doubt he will be able to put his ministerial experience to good use elsewhere.

The freezing state of Browne's once-warm relations with Clegg was perhaps shown by a Tweet in which Browne said David Cameron was the first party leader to express regret at his departure.

A QUESTION OF CREDIBILITY

For the first time since the sudden surge of support in 1974 caught the Liberal party unawares, there may not be a full slate of candidates next May (*Liberator* 368).

The supine and complacent English Liberal Democrats are still insisting that the full bureaucratic rigmarole is gone through to adopt candidates in even the most hopeless and derelict seats, and proposes to do nothing to change this until at least February.

These processes were adopted for sound reasons – to ensure that candidates were competent and would not be embarrassments, and to promote diversity.

But with, according to some estimates, 300-odd seats still without candidates, the situation has become pressing especially as no-one is being killed in the rush of approved candidates to find seats.

The seats in question are not remotely winnable, and simply need to have a candidate at all, with their gender or ethnicity being a second order issue.

To the despair of those close to the general election campaign, the English party is still insisting on full candidate approval, formal adoption processes (even though it has too few returning officers to conduct these in any reasonable time) and training for local party executives in candidate selection (even in places too weak to have a functioning executive).

In past general elections, operations were launched six months or so beforehand to find willing sacrificial lambs and 'parachute' them into constituencies that ask for nothing more than a name on the ballot paper.

The English party's obsession with bureaucratic processes will surely be blamed if the party is made to look ridiculous by failing to field a full slate next May.

In other signs of trouble for the English party, Eastern region's conference debated an attempt to break away and declare itself a state party, although this was defeated.

But the north west and south central regions are both thought to be considering similar moves, such is the frustration with the small circle running England.

UN-FREE FORM JAZZ

Once again the European Azerbaijan Society hosted a jazz evening at the Lib Dem conference, and in a higher profile way than in the past.

This may be why the event finally attracted some objectors, with Liberal Youth member Sophie Bridger attacking the event on Lib Dem Voice and calling for a protest if it is repeated.

It is not just Liberal Youth that is concerned about this odious dictatorship.

Jordi Xucla, president of ALDE, the European Parliament liberal grouping, has said it was "with a lot of concern that we receive reports from NGOs and human rights defenders about regress on freedoms in Azerbaijan".

The International Federation of Liberal and Radical Youth gave an award this year to the Sing for Democracy campaign, which was held when Azerbaijan hosted the Eurovision Song Contest.

This was done, as IFLRY put it, "to draw attention to the deplorable state of human rights in the country.

"The authoritarian rule has continued for decades without much international attention or pressure. During the campaign, young Azerbaijanis emphasized the many political prosecutions in the country, as well as structural breaches of press freedom and property rights."

OFF SCREEN ROLE

It's important for leading politicians to master the art of being fluent and convincing on television, or at least to come over as vaguely normal.

Despite years of practice, Danny Alexander just cannot do it. Every time he appears on television a scraping sound can be heard through the land as Liberal Democrats wheel out their sofas to hide behind them.

He is simply, utterly, irredeemably, awful on television – like a wooden rabbit caught in headlights able only to keep repeating lines in a bid to bore interviewers into submission.

Nor does his career early in this parliament as George Osborne's media human shield help.

So why on earth does Nick Clegg want Alexander – rather than the fluent and still popular Vince Cable

– to debate with Osborne when potential chancellors clash on television at the coming election?

An admittedly unscientific poll on Lib Dem Voice showed a two-to-one preference for Cable in this role, and no wonder.

The only rational answer is that Clegg considers Cable suspiciously left wing and still a potential rival.

Those are not grounds enough for silencing one of the party's few major assets in favour of an inarticulate and unsympathetic figure, whatever Alexander's other merits.

IMMOVABLE OBJECTS

Nick Clegg made it known - at least before Norman Baker's abrupt disappearance from the Home Office - that he did not intend to hold a reshuffle before the general election, a move many will see as a sensible refusal to tinker with people's jobs to little likely effect as the election nears.

The mini-reshuffle caused by Baker's resignation saw Lynne Featherstone going back to the Home Office to resume her duel with the home secretary, but little else of significance resulted.

But Clegg had wanted to carry out a proper reshuffle. He was thwarted by some of his intended victims.

The talk around conference was that Clegg wanted to end the embarrassment of not having appointed a woman to the cabinet by making Jo Swinson Scottish secretary.

Quite how this additional burden would have helped her in fighting to hold a marginal seat was unclear.

But moving her would have meant sacking incumbent Alastair Carmichael on the grounds, as a story circulating at Glasgow had it, that he had been rude to pro-independence Lib Dems during the Scottish referendum.

The other key move would have been sacking Vince Cable as business secretary and giving the job to Danny Alexander so that he could debate with Osborne at the next election (see above) without the embarrassing complication of still being his deputy.

Messrs Cable and Carmichael are, though, big beasts and dug their heels in, leaving Clegg to decide that discretion was the better part of valour.

GROUND FOR DIVORCE

Possibly very wisely, the LGBT Plus presentation at conference appears to be absent from the Lib Dem website.

Federal Conference Committee had thought it a good idea to show how a motion passed at conference could end up changing the law, and so asked LGBT Plus to do a 20 minute slot on the law on equal marriage

Its chair Ed Fordham, who was being challenged for the post by Dave Page, undertook to do the presentation.

LGBT Plus members were expecting, not unreasonably, to see a presentation about how Liberal Democrat activists, and MPs such as Steven Williams, Lynne Featherstone and Steve Gilbert, had worked hard on the subject.

Instead, after a Stonewall video of highlights of the Same Sex Marriage Bill passing through parliament, delegates then squirmed for five minutes as Fordham and his partner Russell Eagling played a video of their wedding and then appeared before them in their

wedding suits.

It fell to Featherstone to tell the story of how the law came to be passed and to make the point that Liberal Democrats had been instrumental over many years in making it happen.

INITIATIVE TEST

Members of the South East Liberal Democrats must have been surprised to receive an e-calling notice for their regional conference and annual general meeting that didn't actually ask them to submit any nominations.

The returning officer asked for the deadline to be extended and the calling notice resent properly, but the region refused.

A few days before the conference the only nominations received were from existing executive members, and at the AGM all candidates were elected unopposed, with multiple unfilled vacancies.

IN THE GENES

The Liberal Democrats have won a by-election. Yes you did read that right, however it was held to fill a vacancy under the arcane procedure used to top-up the 92 hereditary members still sitting in the House of Lords in the event of a death in their ranks.

Lib Dem Lord Methuen had died and so a by-election as called with the Earl of Oxford and Asquith and Lord Kennet both standing as Lib Dems even though both have previously flown under other flags.

Heavy pressure was applied by the party establishment in favour of Oxford and Asquith, no doubt because of his relationship to the influential Bonham-Carter clan.

Although anyone can stand, by convention the winner must come for the same party as the deceased. Oxford and Asquith got 155 votes, against 29 for Kennet.

The by-election really did bring candidates out of the woodwork.

Crossbencher Lord Calverley said in his election address that since being ousted from the house by the last lords' reform: "I have been greatly dismayed by the behaviour of a minority of newer members."

This was not perhaps the best way to curry favour among this electorate, but Calverley ploughed on: "These individuals have usurped their new found status for their own cupidity...their actions have brought the house into disrepute in the eyes of the British public and the world at large". He got one vote.

Lord Sudeley, a former leading light of the far-right Monday Club, devoted his election address to airing a 114-year-old grievance concerning an ancestor, for which he also got one vote, while Lord Harlech got four votes despite being unable to count to 75, at which number of words his election address was cut off by the house authorities.

BEADS WITHOUT STRING

Liberal Democrat general election messages have turned out to be tactics, not strategy, says George Potter

Liberal Democrat strategy director Ryan Coetzee recently sent out a briefing to party members outlining key messages and policies for the general election.

It began with the headline: “Stronger Economy. Fairer Society. Opportunity for Everyone”, and proceeded to outline what is now the familiar message: Labour can’t be trusted with the economy and the Tories are selfish and will cut too much, making the poor unfairly bear the heaviest burden.

The problem with this message is that it lets both the Conservatives and Labour off the hook for their respective weaknesses on economic and fairness – something pointed out repeatedly in *Liberator*.

By arguing only that the Lib Dems are fairer than the Conservatives, the latter are left unchallenged on their own economic illiteracy on issues like breaking up the banks and the idea that massively rolling back the state will somehow lead to an economic boom rather than increased poverty and social decay which will stifle economic growth.

And, by arguing only that the Lib Dems are better on the economy than Labour, the latter are unchallenged on their harshly unfair policies to slash out of work and housing benefits for young people or their ruinous damage to the NHS through private finance initiative deals which cost hospitals billions while producing obscene profits for private companies.

That being said, it is quite clear reading the two briefing documents that a lot of expensive polling must have been done to ‘test messages’ (in a rather depressing example of the way that politics seems to be becoming increasingly like commercial marketing rather than about principles).

For example, of a list of five key manifesto policies, various are selected to be aimed at groups which are, respectively, Lib Dem-Conservative considerers, Lib Dem-Labour considerers, men, women, parents with children, 18-24 year olds, over-65s and those deemed receptive to ‘Lib Dem DNA’ messages.

Given the research, it may well be that these messages will be successful in winning a bigger share of what Coetzee calls the “market” for the Liberal Democrats in 2015.

However, what is utterly depressing is how insipid these messages are.

While good liberal achievements in government are identified such as extra money for the education of children from low-income backgrounds, more free childcare and preventing the Conservatives from scrapping basic workers’ rights, there is very little which speaks of a radical vision for the UK.

The key manifesto policies turned into messages are: balance the budget by 2018, protecting the economic recovery and bringing down Britain’s debt; cut income tax by £400 for low and middle earners, easing the squeeze on household budgets; guarantee equal care

and waiting times for mental health as for physical health, by increasing spending on the NHS; ensure every child is taught by a qualified teacher and protect spending on nurseries, schools and colleges; pass a Nature Law to protect green spaces, trees, birds and animals, clean up polluted air and rivers and ensure Britain is at the forefront of fighting climate change.

These are all worthy and sensible policies. But there is nothing behind them. No principled vision or radicalism. Nothing which identifies and aims to fix the major challenges facing the UK.

On climate change only environmental conservation is spoken of – good, but far from a proposal to significantly cut greenhouse gas emissions. On education, funding is to be protected and, teachers must be qualified – but there is nothing indicating a vision for tackling the huge discrepancy in educational attainment between those from poor and wealthy backgrounds.

On health there is a major priority put on finally treating mental health with the seriousness it deserves and a promise of extra money for the NHS, but nothing to suggest a solution for the strain on it that comes with an ageing population. This despite the fact that policy adopted by the Lib Dems in Glasgow contained far more effective ideas such as reducing the pressure on GPs and hospitals by making better use of trained pharmacists.

For the economy there is a pledge to balance the budget, which every other major party is making, while increasing the tax threshold can only benefit middle earners while costing billions which will need to be found through cuts to public services which will hurt the poor.

Like many other party policies, these all seem aimed at winning over ‘progressive’ middle-class voters rather than doing anything to tackle poverty, inequality or severe regional economic imbalances.

Perhaps this, ultimately, is the problem with the briefing. The messages it recommends might work at winning over groups of voters but they are tactics, not strategy, and they are well below what the Liberal Democrats should be aspiring to.

In fact, they all have a very strong whiff of a party aiming to get ameliorate government policy as a junior partner in coalition rather than of an independent party aspiring to govern in its own right.

If this is the highest that the Liberal Democrats are setting their ambition then political liberalism is in a very poor state indeed.

George Potter is a member of the *Liberator* Collective.

A PAUSE ON THE ROAD TO INDEPENDENCE

Wendy Kyrle-Pope campaigned for a 'no' vote in the Scottish referendum, but thinks the issue will soon be back, with a majority for independence likely

A Scottish poet likened the referendum campaign to the start of a ceilidh; a few were very keen to dance from the outset, the majority unsure, until the music started, and people began to tap their feet.

Although the Better Together 'no' campaign won, 55% of the vote, the music and the foot tapping have not gone away. The result was far closer than anyone had envisaged barely three months before it took place, but the whole experience of the debate in Scotland, the total engagement of the entire population, the victory for democracy of the incredible turnout were signs that Scotland had awoken from a long sleep.

The acceptance of the result by the 'yes' voters (after a few days of staying in bed with the depression and disappointment of it all) comes with the certainty that independence will come within a generation, maybe sooner.

There is a widely held belief that it was the older voters who were predominately 'no', and they, in time, will be outnumbered by an increasingly pro-independence electorate.

Recent polls in Scotland show that around 60% of Scots want to have another referendum within the next decade, but, if there is another Conservative Government without any MPs in Scotland, and an EU referendum in 2017, an almost similar number want a vote in five years. Nicola Sturgeon says that Scotland will be independent in her lifetime, and, at 44, it looks increasingly likely that she will live to see it.

A sea change has also occurred with many of the 'no' voters, and non-voting Scots who live outside the country, who have also begun (albeit reluctantly) to think in terms of the inevitability of the break-up of the UK.

But, however pro-unionist and SNP loathing they are, the debate, the vote and its aftermath have wrought this change in attitude; the fear is subsiding, and being replaced by vague thoughts of how best to prepare for such an eventuality, an inevitability, to make the best of it for Scotland.

The only matter really settled was that of the Queen's position; she (or her heirs) will be head of state. The problems of currency, share of national debt, what to do about the NHS, BBC, defence, the end of the oil, embassies abroad and all the other unresolved issues are still there, but there is a will and an optimism that these issues can be negotiated and overcome, given time and a bit of luck.

Other independence movements throughout the world have praised the British Government for allowing the Scottish referendum to take place. Closer to the truth is that the Westminster Government was

so out of touch, so arrogant, that there were only the 'yes' or 'no' choices on the ballot paper, with no third option for 'devo-max', because they assumed less than 30% would want independence.

DESERVED FRIGHT

And they got the fright they deserved when, in the last month before the vote, the opinion polls showed a good chance of a 'yes' victory. In their panic, Westminster promised Scotland the moon and all the riches of the Orient to make it stay within the union, but how much this promise is worth remains to be seen. It is, even in Scottish eyes, a tad unfair to the other regions of the UK. In fact, other than giving the Scottish Parliament more to handle, more practice in the art of government, of balancing budgets, of raising taxes, it is unlikely to make any difference to how Scotland will vote in the next general election.

The SNP is at an all-time high in the polls for next May's Westminster elections. Currently, a Scottish Television poll shows 52% for the SNP, 23% for Labour, 10% for Conservatives, and only 6% for Liberal Democrats. Translated into seats, of which there are 59, the SNP would take 54, Labour four, and only one Liberal Democrat seat would remain. Of course this will change before May, but, if nothing dramatic happens between now and then, it is likely Labour will lose most of its current Scottish 41 seats, which would make it very unlikely to be the next Government.

And the party with the most seats after Labour and the Tories might well be the SNP. A Conservative/SNP coalition is unlikely because, aside from mutual loathing and ideological incompatibility, the SNP do not vote on English matters as their own resolution of the West Lothian question, so we may be denied the extraordinary sight of Cameron and Sturgeon holding hands in the Rose Garden of number 10.

However, such electoral success may not be in Scotland's best interest in the long term, as a Labour Government is unlikely to hold an EU referendum, and that membership holds the key to a successful independent Scotland, not only in economic and trading terms, but the whole question of citizenship.

In the days of panic before the referendum, my-95-year-old, London-based mother started to talk about cattle trucks taking Scots over the border in the forced repatriation, which would follow Scottish independence.

This seems a very extreme scenario which even Cameron's greatest detractors could not imagine him doing, but she did have a point; what would be the position of expatriate Scots in the rest of the UK, in

the EU and the rest of the world, where residency depends on a British passport?

Would Scotland to have a fairly easy entry into the EU, thus remaining EU citizens, and thus retaining their right to live and work in the rest of the UK and Europe?

One could choose to be a Scottish citizen if one wanted, providing you fulfilled the criteria (of Scottish parentage, born in Scotland and even being present on independence day to make your claim). But several dissenting voices were raised in Europe, especially in Spain, (where they are doing everything in their power to block Catalan independence, despite the vast majority of Catalans calling for it), saying Scotland could not expect automatic membership of the EU. And if an EU referendum did go the way of an exit, an independent Scotland's position would be even more precarious, as it always better to negotiate from within than without.

SENSE OVER SENSIBILITY

The referendum debate showed up all these issues, and more, which is why the 'no' campaign won, sense over sensibility, if you like. But the debate also highlighted the differences between the Scots and the rest of the UK, most notably the sense of self in the community, which has always been there since ancient, clan system times, but has been lying dormant. It is not quite the Scandinavian Lagom (and Finnish sopiva), which translate as just enough, a sufficient and sustainable state, a correct balance, but something close to it. The SNP's centre left, anti-nuclear, environmentally friendly, fair shares for all and tax the rich stance resonated with many as an extension of the lagom ideal, perhaps a chance to regain the balance, with enough for all.

Labour and other socialist parties promised this fairness, this balance too, but are not perceived to have delivered it. The rise of the SNP mirrors the decline of the British Empire (in which Scots played a major role) and in heavy industry.

The current party was created out of two tiny entities in 1934. Generally regarded as a party of eccentrics, it remained little more than an object of curiosity until Winnie Ewing won a by-election in Hamilton, a very Labour town, in 1967. This seemed to be a flash in the pan, a protest vote, but the movement grew. Thirteen years under Thatcher and Major with barely a Scottish Tory seat, and the direction Blair's New Labour government took, despite delivering the Scottish Parliament, the loss of Donald Dewar and John Smith all fuelled the fire that sees today the SNP as the third largest political party in the UK, with over 83,000 members.

There has also been a change of tone since the vote. The Bravehearts are going out of fashion, and a different, more quietly confident nationalist is emerging. The Scottish arts world was predominately

“Many of the ‘no’ voters have begun (albeit reluctantly) to think in terms of the inevitability of the break-up of the UK”

pro-independence, and had a huge influence. They celebrated the history, art, drama, music, literature and connectedness of Scottish Culture, pro-Burns though less keen on the Unionist Walter Scott. Rona Munro's 'James Plays' (about Kings James, I, II and III of Scotland, which premiered at the Edinburgh Festival weeks before the Referendum) have been compared to Shakespeare.

The Irish nationalism of De Valera harked back to the Celtic Twilight (and held Ireland back for years); the new cultural nationalism of Scotland is not

making that mistake, as it manages to link the past with the future, invention and reinvention, with the triumphs in bioscience and medicine, computer aided design, and the inventiveness of the nation all thrown into the mix.

However, much more is required to reach national solvency before it can gain sovereignty. As oil prices fall, and the rich fields of the North Sea begin to dry up, Scottish ingenuity is needed to start developing a sustainable future, one of renewable energy, a more fluid economy, a pared down welfare budget, the creation of more jobs, and picking up the tattered reputation of the financial services industry and restoring faith in Scottish fiscal probity.

No back of a fag packet stuff this, but structured plans on sharing the pound (or not), the economy, debt and citizenship. And all this will take at least half a generation, another full economic circle, and a fair wind for all of the UK.

This article is written from a wholly Scottish perspective and no mention has been made of other regions of the UK and their aspirations. Normally Scots are not openly emotional, preferring to be cooler headed and objective, but the referendum, because it mattered so much, has changed us.

Look at the passion and oratory that came from Gordon Brown, the wardrobe in a suit as one commentator described him, wheeled out by a desperate 'no' campaign at the last minute.

I campaigned for the 'no' side in this referendum, and, in all my years of canvassing, never has a vote mattered more – 'yes is forever'.

Rarely has the will of a people been demonstrated in such a turn out. The question has not gone away, it will roll and roll. Let us hope that the momentum begun by the independence referendum can translate itself into a similar Scottish turnout if there is an EU referendum, to balance the exit-ers and UKIP further south, because remaining in Europe is the first step towards achieving that inevitable independence.

Wendy Kyrle-Pope is a member of the Liberator Collective

RADICAL LIBERALISM BEYOND THE COALITION

Iain Brodie Browne finds hope for social liberal action to combat disadvantage beyond the coalition in a new book from a group of Scottish Liberal Democrats

Leave that bundle of Focus undelivered by the door, switch off the phone and send your apologies to all the boring meetings; there are more important things to do.

A new book of essays has been published by a group of Liberal Scots. Its self-proclaimed objective is "...to re-establish the anti-establishment, challenging, coruscating radicalism which is our party at its best".

Editors Robert Brown, Gillian Gloyer and Nigel Lindsay have brought together an inspired group of thinkers who bring us the hope that there is life for radical Liberalism after the travails of the past five years.

The standout essay of the collection is Nigel Dower's on Liberalism. He takes the ideas associated with New Liberalism and the writings of Hobhouse and Green and makes them fresh and relevant for this generation; greened, decentralised and internationalist.

He contrasts these radical liberal ideas, which are predicated on social justice, with the fashionable libertarian ideas that underpin the small state and ultra free marketeers and their allies in the Chicago school of economics. It is an impressive contribution and lays a solid foundation for the ideas that follows.

The dozen or more essays that follow examine five areas: The Financial Crash and its Aftermath; the UK, Europe and the World; Strategy, Power and Values; Geographical Justice in a Global Age. The editors make clear the challenge we face - it is, as Lindsay says quoting Jo Grimond - to be on the side of the governed not the government. It requires a programme that offers "hope and opportunity, enhances freedom and life chances.

GROTESQUE DISPARITY

There is a grotesque disparity of wealth and income in our society and that directly impacts on people's opportunities to fulfil their potential; or as the 1928 Yellow Book asserted; the end of all our policies was that men and women "may have life and have it more abundantly", take your pick but economic disadvantage undermines that aspiration for too many of our citizens. In line with Dower's essay this is identified as a key barrier to building a liberal society. Time and again the writer return to this issue.

In the section The Financial Crash and its Aftermath the full extent of our economy's failure to deliver prosperity for all is laid bare. Liberator readers will be familiar with the SLF's Plan C for the economy, and that approach is advocated here. The failings of the banking system and the continuing need for radical reform are rehearsed with ideas for establishing a network of regional banks arranged as mutual or

co-operatives. These "would have close links to local businesses and a stake in their success" - very similar to the Basque Caja Laboral Popular Cooperativa de Crédito that impressed Grimond and which he saw as a model for the Highlands.

The maldistribution of income is repeatedly challenged. Wages for super managers have surged ahead far beyond the point that is justified by the contribution they make to the enterprises they head up. They sit on each other's remunerations committees ratcheting up the 'going rate'. For large numbers of other people wages have stagnated or fallen in real terms.

Liberals in the post war years predicted this development. The Unservile State, a collection of essays that helped launched Grimond's radical ideas, and which was the first major Liberal publication since the Yellow Book, drew on ideas of decentralisation and Distributism.

In it Peter Wiles essay Property and Equality discussed the growing divorce between legal ownership and management control. In 1956 Anthony Crosland, in the Future of Socialism, had looked at the significance in both practical and ideological ways. For him it underlined the irrelevance of the traditional socialist plan for state ownership. Wiles thought differently, absentee ownership through limited liability meant "the absentee shareholder in a modern limited company was the possessor of a mere scrap of paper which entitles him to a certain payment by a remote and unknown agent". Shareholders rarely exercised power and control it had passed to managers separate from owners. This may have meant, as Crosland said, that state socialism was dead but it also precluded the Liberal aim widespread employee ownership and industrial democracy.

It was on these authentic Liberal ideas that Liberal Leaders from Grimond through to Ashdown built. In his 1985 book David Steel set himself the task of winning the intellectual argument against Thatcher's new free market Conservatism.

Like James Meade, who contributed a chapter to the book, Steel recognised that wages were not growing as fast as the dividends received by the owners of capital. The fear was abroad that cheap labour from new economies, the impact of automation holding down wages and the consequent reduction of the bargaining power of workers would lead to unemployment and insecurity.

Steel advocated a "substantial part of the average person's take home pay should not be expressed as a regular wage but as a share of profits or value added in the company to which he or she has contributed".

Meade argued another way to redistribute income from property was for the state acquiring a share and distributing the income either as a citizen wage or through “the payment of social benefits on more generous terms”.

CONCENTRATIONS OF WEALTH

When these ideas are added to long standing Liberal proposals to break up concentrations of wealth through levying inheritance taxes on those who receive bequests rather than on the estate, we are approaching the goal of ‘ownership for all’ and the economic security and independence that results.

Steel also contributes a chapter this book reflecting on the implications of the Scottish Referendum. Hibernophiles everywhere will be delighted to see references to the Darien Scheme, Aine Satyre on the Three Estates, and phrases like “tachraidh na daoine, ach cha tachairna cnuic”, and a proper anger at the unbalanced development of our economy to the disadvantage of the majority caused by the concentration on London.

Tony Hughes expresses this well in his essay London versus the Rest. But this is not a tartan shortbread box portrait of Scotland; it is resolutely focussed on the here and now in a country with low wages, insecure jobs and homes and where (despite the Edinburgh Parliament) political decision making can be remote and alienating.

It is good to read such a robust defence of federalism entrenched in a written constitution. We northerners could do with a similar manifesto to ward off a London answer to the English question. Glasgow may have the biggest City Deal at £1bn, but if you asked the Scots to have it as an alternative to their Parliament it doesn’t take much imagination to guess their response. We should not settle for less.

A great strength of this collection is the reflections on the constitutional upheavals that must surely come. This not only encompasses the rest of the UK but our relations with Europe and the wider world. Steel’s thoughts based on his time as co-chair of the successful Scottish Convention have important pointer for those of us south of the border who wish to see powerful regional assemblies established, and he challenges us to think again about the role of the second chamber, the senate, in a federal constitution.

But some of the best insights come from those like Ross Finnie and Robert Brown who served as ministers in the Holyrood Parliament. I think they are very restrained given their successful time in coalition government. It must be galling to hear the crass comments coming from some of the ministers in the present Westminster government posing as the first Liberals in government since World War 2.

The Scots have a lot to teach us about how to prepare for and run a coalition while keeping the party together. In this regard Caron Lindsay also has some wise things to say in her essay.

It is appropriate the heading of this section is Strategy, Power and Values. It is important to affirm

that entering a coalition is a political act and not just a managerial response to a set of circumstances. Lindsay in his chapter, Future Challenges for Liberalism makes this point and goes on to say “Our party, which voters once identified with an agenda of reform and social justice, has lost much of the trust it had on these issues.

“The party will need to work very hard, once the coalition has ended, to persuade voters that it is still capable of radical action to help the least well-off to meet their aspirations.”

The first challenge to face up to the truth of that statement and the next is to develop a new radical programme to respond to this situation. Lindsay identifies three serious threats to the possibility using political power to create the conditions in which people can exercise the positive freedom that is the objective of social liberalism.

Political power is not what it once was in the new global economy. Government’s room for manoeuvre is constrained by the power of large international corporations who have larger budgets and greater power than some governments that seek to regulate them.

Secondly he identifies “the globalisation of what we ironically call financial services”, and the mass movement of money by financial institutions and hedge fund speculators over which governments have little control. The third threat is “the mass movement

of people fleeing from despotic and incompetent regimes, which is certain to have a substantial impact on all parts of Europe over the next decade or two”. None of these threats would be rectified by “leaving it to the market”.

There was little fanfare when this book was launched. There was no fringe meeting at the federal conference in Glasgow and no website to taken on the debate, and I think that was a

“Entering a coalition is a political act and not just a managerial response to a set of circumstances”

mistake.

Social liberals have not been slow to fire up the debate about the future of Liberalism. The Little Yellow Book (the first offering of this Scottish grouping), Re-inventing the State, the Green Book and now Unlocking Liberalism all testify to a determination to face the intellectual challenges of this century.

It also the give the lie to the comment made by Tim Farron when he told a fringe meeting: “My answer to those on the left of the party who criticise the Orange Book is: write your own flippin’ book.” We have, and as a recent poll on Lib Dem Voice confirms the majority of party members self-identify as members of the social liberal tradition.

All things considered we have hope that after the coalition we can build a radical future for this party, we must hold together, add to this debate and go and deliver those Focus that you’ve left by the door.

Iain Brodie Browne is leader of the Liberal Democrat group on Sefton Council.

Unlocking Liberalism: Life After the Coalition, published by Liberal Futures. Robert Brown, Gillian Gloyer and Nigel Lindsay (eds).

WHEN THE VALUES VANISHED

People who adhere to ethical values in the Middle East tend to end up powerless and oppressed. How can a region of autocrats change, asks our Mohammed Nosseir

What matters in the Middle East is the reality on the ground. Power is the name of the game that enables citizens to multiply the influence they wield and accumulate additional authority.

Having good ideas and some moral values - but no power - makes you a useless entity, while possessing power but no ethical values can sustain your presence for a lengthy period and enable you to gain more ground. This is Middle East realism. If you don't like it, please move to another region. So far, working on changing this reality seems to be a waste of time.

People and nations should be driven by values. We live and die for a good cause, working to defend and promote the values we stand for. However, this is not the case in this region of extended turbulence where power is the name of the game. x

People are struggling to empower themselves, legally or illegally. Power will give them some status. Meanwhile, citizens who abide by a set of values lead an inferior life to people who possess power and may very well end up being criminalised or, at the very least, marginalised - depending on how far they are willing to go to defend the values they believe in.

Middle Eastern rulers do not really favour innovative ideas, nor are they bothered with the issue of values; they show no tolerance towards citizens who are indifferent to them, refrain from applying basic human rights, won't listen to opinions that may be at variance with their beliefs and harbour a strong desire to remain in power forever. Apparently, citizens who wish to challenge their rulers must adopt harder attitudes, presenting a tougher position than that of the rulers to their fellow citizens.

Any citizen who wants to change his or her country, for better or for worse, must first build a powerful entity. Over the past decades, the entities that have managed to have some impact on the region are those who were able to create either a patriotic group, an ethnic army, or a terrorist group.

While the labels attached to these groups depend on your political perception, in reality those are the main players on the scene, beginning with Hamas and Hezbollah, up to Al Qaeda and the recently founded ISIS organisation. There is not a single Middle Eastern country that is not challenged by one of these, or by other, similar, organisations.

ON FIRE

The Middle East, which has been a potential firetrap for a longtime, exploded a few years ago with the beginning of the Arab Spring. Rulers and violent groups benefit substantially from being on fire. Each party goes back to its supporters, requesting

the necessary backup to sustain its fights; without engaging in more violence, they will not succeed in amassing either emotional or physical support.

The Arab Spring, of which we had a glimpse for few short months, when the majority of Arab citizens were proud of the values that they stood for and their respective countries, has been completely diminished.

The region has reverted to the old habits of internal political struggle and ethnic fighting. Even those countries that are facing neither political struggle nor ethnic fighting have gone back in full force to widespread human rights abuses and a far higher level of freedom of expression limitations than existed prior to the Arab Spring era.

The idea of building democratic nations in the Arab world has failed totally. Citizens are not ready or willing to stand for freedom and democracy as they watch people being killed on a daily basis in the course of various violent and terrorist activities. Living in such an environment helps to shrink Arabs' intellectual capacity to understand that the lack of democracy is the cause of violence - not the reverse.

Autocratic rulers and extremist groups are strengthening one another; obviously in opposing directions. Autocratic rulers team up and support one another in sustaining their harsh attitudes towards extremists; they have explicit and implicit agreements to fight extremists all the way, and their harder positions serve to bolster each other. Meanwhile, surprisingly, extremists are gaining in popularity by widening the scope of their violent engagements, even if the groups concerned are not connected to one another. More violence is strengthening extremists in general.

Arab citizens become attached to whoever is active on the political scene. They want to be affiliated with a winning group. Thus, the majority chooses between one of the above-mentioned entities. Individuals or organisations who advocate for values, and promote ideas that aim at engaging the entire society in a peaceful solution, find themselves squeezed between the rulers' accusation that they are the weak link in an era of war or that they are espionage groups working for a foreign country. Meanwhile, extremists are happy to welcome the ideas advocated by these groups or individuals, capitalising on what they offer in order to gain ground until they come to power - at which point they will quickly disregard the values that they had been happy to espouse previously.

Wealthy Arabs favour and support successful and powerful groups. They consider their financial support as a 'return on investment', and thus either backup whoever is in power, or offer their support to the

extremists, betting on their ability to topple rulers from power.

Rarely do we hear of a wealthy Arab offering financial support to a value-driven organisation, such as a human rights group, since this might be perceived as waste of money and effort.

The same concept applies to the Arab-Israeli struggle. Apart from the Egypt-Israel peace agreement that took place decades ago, negotiations between both parties have come to nothing. If you want to play a role in this conflict, get empowered. Israel, which is considered to have one of the most advanced militaries in the world, keeps bombarding innocent civilians, claiming that it is protecting its nation, while Hamas and similar groups fire back (but with a very limited impact and few casualties). Still, violence, not values, is the key driver.

RAMPANT INJUSTICE

Arab citizens end their evenings by learning about dozens of violent actions that have occurred during the day and the hundreds of casualties they caused. At the same time, they hear of innocent people imprisoned by various autocratic regimes in order to prevent violence. The combination of violence and rampant injustice concludes in more bloodshed, making the Middle East the region with the highest rate of violence in the universe, where hundreds of new patriots or terrorists (again, depending on your view) emerge every day.

By simply dealing with whoever is in power, Western and advanced nations play a negative role that supports this realism. What matters to these countries are their political engagements - not how they affect the region, nor even the values that they purport to uphold.

Most of these countries have a special envoy to the Middle East; a politician who enjoys travelling to the region and engaging in any struggles on the ground, but who is never been able to offer a solution or to achieve progress towards one. Saving the travelling costs and per diems of these envoys would be in the best interest of taxpayers in their respective countries.

None of the Western countries or advanced nations is concerned with the issue of values. They may sometimes attach false value-related labels to their efforts and missions, but these are used for domestic political purposes alone. Western nations simply don't want to upset autocratic rulers expected to stay in power for a long time, nor do they want to provoke any terrorist groups, since doing so could backfire and affect them at home. Thus, the best way to deal with realism is to engage with it by travelling and holding talks, without providing any real concrete solutions.

The United States, which has a great interest in the region and is continuing to lose its political leverage in the area, has realised that the state of affairs described above works quite well in its favour.

Internal conflict in every country, regional terrorist groups and the long lasting Arab-Israeli conflict have given the United States a strong renewed political

“The idea of building democratic nations in the Arab World has failed totally”

leverage to capitalise on. In my opinion, the United States did not create any of these conflicts, but it can easily be accused of fuelling them or at least working on keeping them alive.

Most of the challenges facing Arab countries are interconnected; they revolve essentially around the lack of basic liberal values. However, values should not be manipulated; you either advocate for values, or you leave them alone. This applies both to the internal political struggles in

the region and to the enduring Arab-Israeli conflict.

The rampant lack of justice has encouraged Arabs to apply equality as they perceive it from their own, very narrow, perspective, which translates into avenging themselves (an eye for an eye).

Heads of states, or terrorist group leaders, have managed to persuade their followers that, rather than seeking to establish a common ground with opponents, the way to resolve any given struggle is to win it.

Until Arabs agree - regardless of who is winning and who is losing - to adopt and uphold a number of common values, and until there is some genuine support for values from western nations, regional struggles will continue in the Middle East.

Mohammed Nosseir is an Egyptian Liberal politician working on reforming Egypt on true liberal values, proper application of democracy and free market economy.

Unlocking Liberalism - Life After the Coalition

This new book shows how our party can reconnect with radical Liberalism after the 2015 general election. It covers the economy, high pay, welfare, human rights, Europe and lessons from the coalition.

Contributors include David Steel, the Equality Trust, Graham Watson, Caron Lindsay and Robert Brown.

Order *Unlocking Liberalism*, cheques for £11 (including postage and packing) made payable to Liberal Futures, from: Liberal Futures, 4 Church Road, Bo'ness EH51 0EL.

“...this book provides much needed heart and encouragement”, David Steel.

GOODBYE TO OIL, AND OIL STATES

Fracking may seem to have little connection with the Middle East, but as the USA's shale frees it from dependence on oil, so may its interest wane in the region, says David Thorpe

For at least half a century, the global economy and the geo-political considerations of policy makers have been framed around the question of the secure supply and stable price of oil.

There has of course been a fast rising consensus in many countries to examine alternative sources of energy, such as renewables, and indeed to reduce energy consumption.

But most of those solutions are in the 'jam tomorrow' stage of being long-term prospects with oil still dominant, and public unease regarding the safety of nuclear may mean that its potential is limited. Much is made of the potential for shale gas, extracted through 'fracking', as a game changer

I don't propose to examine in any detail the energy options for the future, or to take a view on the merits, from any angle of fracking as an energy source.

What I want to look at is the impacts on the global economy and on policy which fracking is already having. One only has to look at the fact that crude oil hit a price below \$90 dollars in October, even as geo-political risk in Russia, Iraq and Kurdistan should have been constraining supply and sending the price higher, while the economic recovery would be adding demand side pressure on the upside, and so pushing the oil price yet higher.

That it hasn't happened is the consequence of fracking.

And that's the first point, whatever the public or policy makers decide with regard to fracking happening in Britain, its impact in the US makes it a game changer for the entire globe.

The key point is that, under Federal law in the United States, the ground under a person's private residence belongs to them, and they can choose to allow fracking, as they wish, with no real recourse for government to change that.

In the UK, the crown is the owner of all land under all property, so it's very much a government decision. The clock won't likely be turned back on fracking in the US.

And the scale of the resources is enormous. In Texas, there is the potential for a fracking field the size of Great Britain.

SELF-SUFFICIENT

Domestic access to an energy source on that scale will transform the US. The International Energy Agency predicts that, even without the US taking action to use energy in a more efficient way, the country will be completely self-sufficient in energy within two decades.

And the years prior to that are likely to be a tale of falling, in real and absolute terms, energy prices

for the US economy. Such is the confidence of policy makers in the US regarding the potential of fracking, that a law which was crafted in the 1970s making it illegal for anyone to export crude oil is facing a campaign for repeal.

With the US firmly embracing the fracking route for its energy future, the EU countries have instead pursued a path of encouraging, through legislation and subsidy, greater use of renewable energy.

This is almost certain to mean that in aggregate, energy costs to households and business will rise in real terms in the decades ahead, at least until the capacity of renewables has expanded, and energy efficiency increases. Of course more work can be done to reform the energy market in the UK, with some potential to drive prices down, but the potential for any such reform to make a difference in aggregate and long term must be filed as 'known unknown'.

At the same time, energy prices in the US are likely to reduce steadily as fracking takes hold and US companies become less reliant on imported oil.

For those charged with framing the economic policy narrative and delivering economic growth to keep pace with population growth, a part of the conundrum must be the realisation that US companies will have a structural competitive advantage over EU counterparts by having lower energy costs, reducing the costs of production.

This is already happening, with many economists already noting the phenomenon of 'reshoring' in the United States, whereby large companies which in the 1990s shifted production to lower wage economies in Asia, are moving back, as the lower energy costs compensate for the higher wages paid in the US, with less political risk than there would be with significant investment in for example, China.

Creating an economic model which allows developed consumer and service sector led economies such as the US and the UK to build a sustainable manufacturing base is perhaps the greatest prize of all for policy makers in those countries.

And of course, energy is also a major outgoing for the end customers of those companies, households.

A material reduction in the cost of energy for US households would serve to increase the level of aggregate demand in the economy, consumers saving on energy if they are consuming the same amount, will have more cash to spend on other items.

So even with the current 'productivity puzzle', whereby amount of economic activity generated by each person employed is lower than in the past, causing real wage growth to be slender in the US and the UK, the purchasing power of the consumer

would increase, allowing for sustainable growth.

A competitive advantage relative to its peers in export markets, and consumers able to increase the level of aggregate demand without embracing the debt fuelled consumption of the Clinton years creates a powerful economic narrative for that country, and one which it will be difficult for others to match in the 21st century.

Nor is it the case that US use of shale gas will automatically cause the price of regular oil to fall materially on the global markets. That's because, as all economic liberals know, cartels are not minded to act in the public interest, and the global supply of oil is to a large extent controlled by the OPEC cartel, which has long showed a willingness to reduce the amount of oil it supplies the market if it feels prices are falling to far.

The arguments regarding whether the UK should, or shouldn't embrace fracking are probably more complex than participants in either side of that debate are willing to admit, but whatever conclusion that discussion reaches, the economic consequences of fracking in the US will be central to UK economic policy makers thoughts for many governments to come.

For many younger voters, the first time the Liberal Democrats came to public notice was when the party took a principled stand against the US invasion of Iraq, many of us who took to the streets at that time chanted that we didn't wish to see a 'war for oil' conducted in our names, and more than a decade later, the feeling that the war was indeed conducted to allow the US influence the global supply of oil remains strong.

But observers of foreign policy will be conscious that in recent years, the US has adopted a far more conciliatory tone in the region, negotiating with Iran, rather than, as many feared going to war with the country, while in Egypt, under George W Bush and his predecessors the second largest recipients of US military aid in the world, the Mubarak regime was allowed to fall.

Politically the signals from many policy makers in the US have been more isolationist, the rhetoric of Rumsfeld's 'project for a new American century', which domi

THIRST FOR ISOLATIONISM

While some of this thirst for isolationism is probably a product of the American people wary of further adventures on foreign fields, there is also, I contend, an element of US interests no longer needing to have client states in the Middle East for reasons of guaranteeing the oil supply.

People forget how relatively recently it was in history that the American people were reluctant to serve as a global policeman, World War 1 representing a shift in that dynamic. So if the American public don't wish for the global policeman role, and the economic imperative which many on the political right identified in the Middle East are both no longer dominant discourses,

“People forget how relatively recently it was in history that the American people were reluctant to serve as a global policeman”

the consequences for those concerned with foreign policy in the coming years are potentially seismic.

While no fair-minded person could argue that the US influence on the Middle East has been particularly benign, it led to a particular kind of grim stability,

Mubarak's repressive regime in Egypt kept, at a horrible price for the people of Egypt, forces with more extreme and disruptive aims for the whole of the Middle East in check.

The US alliance with Assad had a similar effect at a similar cost; the rise of ISIS, and a US response which has, to date, been fermented in the reluctance of reasoned disinterest, rather than the rashness of an interested party with its interests threatened.

While the horrors of Syria and Iraq capture the narrative of the present, those looking through a slightly longer lens will be focused on Saudi Arabia.

This country is almost the prototype US client state, the reason for the alliance is as obvious as the oil fields are on the landscape of that country, the regime is as repressive as any in the world, despite the Bush-era government claiming otherwise, and the House of Saud, which rules the country still has the complacency which had deserted Mubarak prior to his fall when he realised he was on his own.

So while the US views Saudi Arabia as the premium partner in its rolodex of client states, the massed forces of reform within the country have little chance of success, and those of a more dubious virtue, who lick their lips at the potential of Saudi Arabia to fuel their malignant aspirations, either towards Israel or primacy for their branch of Islam, are also certain to be stifled.

A key geo-political event of the coming years, fracking, or no fracking, will be the transition to a new regime in Saudi Arabia, the current king is rather elderly and has no heir, it is a country without noticeable political dissent at present, whether that could continue in a transition, particularly a transition where the oil price restricts populist measures, is a question for foreign policy makers to ponder.

At the moment the full extent of the US's interest in the Middle East is hard to gauge, and of course Israel will continue to act as a magnet for involvement, but as the rise of ISIS and the fall of Assad shows, without the imperative of oil, US hunger may be far greater than its stomach for future significant intervention in that region and others, creating a whole new set of dilemmas for those targeting liberal outcomes for global foreign policy.

The fracking story is really only in the early chapters, there are likely to be many twists in the global tale for this energy source, but it poses a whole suite of economic, social, and geo-political considerations for the policy makers of the future.

David Thorpe is an economics journalist and sits on the London Liberal Democrat regional executive.

CAPITAL CASE

Devolution is needed right under the government's nose in London, says Ruth Dombey

It's time to put a radical programme for decentralisation back on the agenda with renewed ambition ahead of the next election.

The Scottish referendum and 'Devo Max' has brought into sharp relief the massive centralisation of power that has taken place throughout the UK and particularly how devolution to the nations has barely touched England. There have been some important moves towards localism by the coalition government but turning back the tide of centralisation is a long march.

This is both a matter of principle and practical imperative. The need to reduce the deficit has placed a premium on policies capable of securing renewed economic growth and reducing the burden of complex dependency. Shifting real power to the local level has the potential to do both.

Last May, the independent London Finance Commission released its final report - Raising the Capital. It recommended handing full control over business rates, stamp duty and council tax to London government, offsetting their transfer with a reduction in government grant, but allowing future revenues to be retained in the capital for self-determined re-investment in infrastructure to meet the pressures of growth and to encourage additional growth.

The estimated scale of this is unprecedented: London's population is forecast to break its historic high of 8.6m in early 2015 and be more than 10m by 2030. Over the same period it will also add more than 500,000 jobs. The impact on London's physical and social infrastructure will vary.

However, evidence already suggests existing challenges, such as London's exceptional shortage of primary and secondary school places and the critical undersupply of new affordable housing, will increasingly become barriers to growth. Put simply, fiscal devolution will help London government build the schools, houses and transport vital to maintaining the capital's competitiveness and liveability.

By international standards, the recommendations are relatively modest. They would raise London's share of locally raised taxation from 5 to 12%. In comparison, New York controls half of locally raised taxation; but in England the commission's proposals stand as a significant act of devolution.

The detailed proposals of the commission have been endorsed by the Core Cities Group of England's other major cities, and they provide a workable model for devolution.

The devolution proposed is not just to the mayor but also to the London boroughs promising a true decentralisation of power to both city and local level.

Fiscal devolution complements calls for an ambitious programme of public service reform through the decentralisation of national policy programmes. London's recent Growth Deal outlined a package

of proposals including locally led and integrated employment support programmes for those furthest from the labour market and a skills settlement tailored to the needs of London businesses.

The deal includes development of pilot schemes to demonstrate how integrating services at the local level can better help Londoners with complex needs to find work and to show how local schemes deliver better outcomes and value for money.

It also contained a commitment towards giving London local government greater influence over employment support programmes. London Councils – the voice of the boroughs – believes this should lead to a single funding pot for employment services made up of co-commissioned mainstream funding between the Department for Work and Pensions and groups of boroughs with targeted funds fully devolved to local level. Of course, developing more effective employment support is only one piece of the puzzle; many of those furthest from work have complex barriers that require an integrated approach to resolve.

In Sutton we've pioneered a programme, our Skills Match project. By developing better links between local businesses, training providers and schools we've been able to provide residents with the skills needed to secure jobs and progress towards more rewarding employment. Although we're less than a year into the project we're already starting to see the benefits of more people in work and more high-skills businesses attracted from central London, as well as record low levels of youth unemployment.

Projects like this show the potential for London boroughs to lead on addressing barriers to growth and prosperity. Councils know their communities and understand the needs of local businesses, but they are constrained by top-down funding arrangements and an over-reliance on centrally developed systems. The Growth Deal contained much to champion, but London boroughs are ambitious to do more. And with nearly 500,000 long-term unemployed or economically inactive people who want to work living in the capital, there is a pressing need for them to have the freedom to get on and deliver.

Devolution is an idea whose time has come – regardless of the result in Scotland. In England, local leaders, experts and businesses have presented a convincing case, but they can only go so far without a national party willing to be genuinely bold in advancing fundamental change. This autumn, leaders from cities and regions across the country will be watching for signs that their proposals have been taken seriously at a national level by those looking to form the next government. The question has been asked and the opportunity is there for the Liberal Democrats to provide a compelling answer. There is no time to lose.

Ruth Dombey is Liberal Democrat leader of Sutton council

GET RID OF EXPERTS

Liberal Democrat policy-making is in hock to vested interests, evidence-supported but not evidence-based, says Stan Collins

We Liberal Democrats are praised, even by some who hate our guts, because we still make party policy at our conference.

Members put policy motions to conference which, if passed, become party policy perhaps against the wishes of party leaders.

But the bulk of policy (by word count) comes out of the Federal Policy Committee (FPC) in papers sent to conference along with a conference motion for debate, amendment and vote.

Policy produced this way is not embarrassing but it's often prosaic, uninspiring and rarely radical.

Would the policy work in practice? Yes, usually, but would it promise an outcome of which we would boast? Would it make a difference to the world that is distinctly Liberal Democrat? Too often not.

The most distinctive policy is that proposed by members to conference, usually drawn up quickly by a small group and covering a narrow topic.

So, why not leave it to conference representatives to write our policy? Because we need a comprehensive set of policies covering the whole of a subject, after all, aviation policy is more than whether we should have a third runway at Heathrow. And we need policies that cover duller matters, sometimes hugely important to the public but rarely grabbing headlines.

If the present method doesn't produce the kind of policy documents we deserve, how can we make it better?

FPC does not write policy itself, it commissions the work. There are two routes.

The simplest is to ask for a parliamentary spokesperson's paper on a fairly narrow section of policy in the light of new circumstances. This produces policy that is focused and succinct.

The other route is to appoint a working group to write a paper on a wide area of policy, from a list of applicants and people who have identified themselves as having some expertise, usually 15 or so members are appointed.

The reason for so many is to make sure that every interest with an axe to grind has a seat at the table and sometimes to provide gender balance or to include members of minorities. It's worthy but it's cumbersome and anything but transparent.

The group is given a brief to write a paper of X thousand words for a specified conference. That brief is written by the policy department staff, sometimes with the help of the likely chair and tinkered with by FPC and it shapes the paper.

A group takes a year to complete its work, sometimes longer: one just ground to a halt and was dissolved.

It takes evidence from witnesses, usually from outside the party, who naturally have an interest – professional, charitable or commercial. Their evidence is often slanted to produce a particular policy by defining the problem to favour their preferred solution

or deflect us from another solution.

There are several sessions with a different member attendance at each. So when the paper is written some on the group will not have heard the bulk of the evidence, which is used in the group debates to support members' interests.

The paper is written by the chair or a drafting team or by the policy staff. It's revised endlessly by email and at meetings, with each member pressing their case. FPC also asks for further revisions, either to content or style or just to shorten it.

The policy produced is evidence-supported but not evidence-based. It's the product of bargains and compromises. It tends to concentrate more on the mechanics than on what we are trying to deliver – the audience seems to be interests and bureaucrats not the voting public.

We should sharpen our act by changing the nature of the working groups and their method of working. I'd cut down the number of members to three (or even one) none of whom are experts in the field but people capable of assessing evidence, questioning witnesses and drawing conclusions.

This would make it easier to hold meetings, shorten the process and reduce the tendency to produce dull compromises.

The evidence taken should be published on-line, at least internally, and comment invited from members, perhaps more widely.

The work could be split into two phases. The first defining the problems to be addressed and the broad outcomes sought. FPC would be consulted and sometimes the brief improved.

The second phase would look at how to deliver those outcomes, taking evidence on possible ways to achieve our ends. More innovative means could be sought and found.

Again we should publish the evidence and invite comment and debate.

The paper written by the group would be shaped by evidence and debate, not pre-conceived notions.

Wouldn't this way take longer? Why? It would be easier for this small group to meet frequently and by video link. No more need for travelling would open group membership to people from all over the UK.

It would be more transparent and open to participation. It would put our aims first and the means second, which is the right way round.

It might fail but we should dare to experiment.

Stan Collins is a Liberal Democrat councillor in South Lakeland.

NOW FOR THE BULLIES

Same sex marriage has been achieved and the next step should be ending bullying in schools based on sexual orientation, says Mathew Hulbert

I'm certain that there will long be debate about what the greatest achievement of our party in this Coalition Government has been.

Is it the taking of millions of middle income earners out of income tax altogether? Is it the pupil premium? Maybe it's re-linking pensions to earnings?

As good as all of these achievements are, for me it is another one tops the list.

It is our seeing through on to the statute book same sex -or as I and many prefer to call it equal - marriage legislation.

I put this at the top of the mountain in terms of Lib Dem achievements in Government not just because I'm a gay man but because, for me, it best sums up what our party should always be about.

It's about freedom, it's about liberty of the individual, it's about empowering a community and, of course, it's about equality.

These things are the reason why I am and always will be a Liberal Democrat.

I'm so proud of our party's long record in supporting and voting for LGBT equality down the decades. We have, indeed, always been there.

Some commentators would have us believe, however, that equal marriage having been achieved in England and Wales (and, shortly, Scotland) means that's that in terms of LGBT equality. All victories have been won.

The fact is that nothing could be further from the truth. We've come a long way, for sure, but much more remains to be done.

From campaigning for equal marriage to be introduced in Northern Ireland, to full equal rights for transgender people, to ensuring service providers are not able to discriminate against LGBT people because of their personal/ religious beliefs - especially if they're paid from the public purse - overturning the ban on sexually active gay men donating blood, and campaigning for a change in law in the all-too-many places where to be LGBT remains to be considered a criminal and where discrimination - often in harsh forms - against LGBT people is not shunned but welcomed.

I'd like to focus in this article on another great task that confronts us.

That of doing all we can to end homophobic bullying, whether in schools or the workplace.

The School Report (produced by Stonewall) found that bullying "continues to be widespread in Britain's schools", with 55% of lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils having experienced direct bullying.

It further found that the use of homophobic language is 'endemic,' with 99% of gay young people saying they've heard phrases meant as negatives such as "that's so gay" or "you're so gay".

Shockingly, three in five gay pupils who experience homophobic bullying say that teachers who witness that bullying never intervene.

The report also states that homophobic bullying has a profoundly damaging impact on young people's school experience, with one in three gay pupils who've experienced bullying changing their future educational plans because of it.

It adds that gay people who are bullied are at a higher risk of suicide, self-harm and depression, with two in five having "attempted or thought about taking their own life directly because of bullying" with the same number saying they deliberately self-harm directly because of bullying.

Our work will never be done, or anywhere near done, until such homophobic bullying is no longer a scourge in our schools.

As a party which proudly believes in rights at work (having been the party of trade unionism long before Labour were ever heard of) we also need to continue to work to ensure LGBT people do not face discrimination in the work place.

Thanks to the Equality Act of 2010, all employees are protected and if anyone faces discrimination because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation then they are able to take action under that legislation.

This is very welcome and we need to ensure that all LGBT people are aware of this and know that they don't have to put up with discrimination at work.

Ensuring LGBT programmes and services, up and down the country, are well-funded and resourced to be able to deal with these and other issues faced by LGBT people is also an urgent priority.

So, we welcome the fantastic, shimmering achievement that is equal marriage and celebrate with the more than 1,400 same sex couples that have wed so far and look forward to many more, but now is the time to once again roll-up our shirtsleeves and get back to work.

For, as the great Martin Luther King Junior once said, the arc of the moral universe is long and it bends towards justice.

Mathew Hulbert is a Liberal Democrat councillor in Hinckley and Bosworth.

SHARP AND PERCEPTIVE

Dear Liberator,

Being a genuine Liberal collective, I don't think the team that produces Liberator has ever officially designated an 'editor' from among its number. Nevertheless, for many years now, that was more the way in which Simon Titley was seen, at least by original subscribers like me. He was the personification and thought-centre of a genuinely radical publication that has stood the test of time and the internet.

There have always been excellent contributors with sharp eyes and pens but Simon's comments - sometimes under his own name, at other times anonymously but still recognisably his - were almost always the sharpest and most perceptive of all.

Whether the Liberal Democrats were in opposition or coalition, on a high locally or in the depths nationally, Simon was better than anyone at putting his finger on the misdirections, dangers and, occasionally, opportunities that needed to be managed if the party was to continue to survive and thrive.

He never set out to be particularly helpful to party leaders and managers - his core beliefs as a Liberal were too strong to make life easier for those in charge - but he cared deeply about the role of party activists and their right to be part of an effective party for which they would want to work.

Simon clearly saw it as Liberator's job to continue to remind the higher echelons of the importance of local activity, committed activists and a sense of real commitment towards a clearly defined Liberal Democrat goal.

Inevitably, he never quite achieved his objectives. Whoever does? But without him Liberator might not, all these years after its founding, still be fulfilling a vital role in fighting party complacency and a please-all (or nobody?) drift towards centrism and moderation in all things - a bag of feathers if ever there was one.

It was very good to see the re-printing in Liberator 368 of Simon's article from June 2010. I kept that article in my personal file. It is a tribute to his powers of political perception and contains many



important lessons for the 2015 election.

Adrian Slade,, Putney
Last president of the
Liberal Party (1987-88)

FROM THE BACCYTIN

Dear Liberator,

Your snide comments about the "continuing Liberal Party" (Liberator 368) and its proposal for a World Commonwealth of Democracies as a replacement for the EU bring into question your claim to act "as a forum for debate among radical liberals in all parties and none".

In any case, what do you want from a small party with a handful of councillors and a few hundred members operating on a baccy tin budget? A 400-page consultation document?

All that can be expected of a party of such a size is the outline of an idea, which is what the Liberal Party has offered. The very least that Liberator could do is use the opportunity to kick start a long overdue debate on whether liberals should continue their traditional support for the concept of a federated United States of Europe.

For all its shortcomings, the Liberal Party has at least had the courage to contemplate a future beyond the EU, which is a damn sight more than can be said for the Liberal Democrats, hobbled as they are by a unique and ridiculous commitment to Europe in their constitution and by a seeming inability to comprehend that the EU just might be an idea whose time has gone.

This was evidenced by a welter of commentary and articles in the post-Euro elections edition of Liberator in which Lib Dem activists blamed everything and everybody for their appalling performance without once considering the possibility that

their enthusiasm for federalism and the EU was the problem.

The Liberal Party has started a vital debate which needs to be hosted by an organisation open to all liberals. Will Liberator take up the challenge or has the collective in its dotage decided life is easier just catering for those Liberals who threw in their lot with a bunch of dropouts from the Harold Wilson School of Politics?

David Green
Southport

LOOK IN THE HANDBOOK

Dear Liberator,

The gloss put on the Rennard Affair in Liberator 368 requires a little challenge.

Contrary to some public statements by 'friends' there was a very clear process in place at the time for dealing with allegations of sexual harassment against party staff.

The 2003 Federal Staff Handbook sets this out, defining "personal harassment" in part as "pestering for sexual favours" and "unwelcome touching".

It contains a foreword encouraging its proper use by a certain Chris Rennard, then chief executive.

It does not contain an exception for claims that such conduct was "inadvertent".

The Liberator story makes an erroneous assertion that given the police investigation found insufficient evidence to press criminal charges (a relief to all concerned), the failure to act internally "should have been less than a surprise".

The English Liberal Democrats chose to apply a criminal burden of proof to allegations of sexual harassment, which are normally amenable to a test by balance of evidence.

That inconsistency is also (in part) how the party has ended up

doing nothing about Mike Hancock for four years, while his victim was obliged to use the media, civil courts and council standards process.

What should have happened with Rennard is that when the matter was first raised in 2007, the complainant or complainants should have been offered support, guided on how to make a formal complaint, and directed towards the Federal Finance and Administration Committee.

Such a process might have ended internally or at employment tribunal. Any case would have been against both the man and the party as his employer. Had any part of that process concluded against him, he might have been fired for gross misconduct. That remains true today for current staff.

That though would not be the end of the matter, and the next stage is absurd - disrepute is a separate process tried by the local, regional and state parties, or SAOs. A staff member could be fired on balance of evidence for sexually harassing volunteers, but then not booted out of the party, as the allegations could not meet a criminal test. Victims then might be invited to spin the tombola with their molester at party events.

Secondly such protection appears not to be in place for volunteers molested by other volunteers. There only a criminal test applies. You would be mad to complain about harassment on this basis, we've just seen how the party treats people who do. On this basis the party is providing protection and comfort to bad people, not the people they harm. This will not end well.

Worse, the party still has the same procedures in place. The fundamental issues have not been address by recent reforms.

That the internal committees appear not be aware of how bad this looks in the real world, rather powerfully makes the case for fundamental party reform, starting with stripping the English Liberal Democrats of their disciplinary and grievance functions. Sorry lads you were rubbish.

Andy Mayer
Southwark

CRITICISED PROCESSES

Dear Liberator,

Your article in RB (Liberator 368) makes significant criticism of the English Regional Parties Committee and its handling of party processes concerning me.

You should be aware that my own criticisms of 'party processes' were the sole 'justification' for that committee deciding to suspend my membership of the party!

Hopefully, we will now be protected by the new Code of Conduct which says: "We encourage robust and passionate debate on policy, strategy and the way in which the party functions."

Almost everything that you say is correct, but your analysis (like that of almost everyone commenting on the allegations made against me) is handicapped by the party's failure to publish either the report of the independent investigator - as would happen with complaints to parliamentary bodies - or to issue a statement accurately reflecting it. To offer some clarification:

I had sight of all the evidence against me (including statements made by three of the complainants in interviews with specially trained police officers) as I had to respond to it. On the basis of all the evidence, Alistair Webster QC then twice reported that it was insufficient even to hold a disciplinary hearing to investigate further.

In the event that he had considered guilt to be possible (on any basis), then he would have had to recommend a disciplinary hearing to investigate further and, if guilt was proven, it could then have considered sanctions. He did

not.

Alistair Webster told me personally that the statement issued by the party after his report went to the Regional Parties Committee was "not his responsibility" and his report was withheld from me for 11 weeks. The party statement about the Webster report gave rise to misleading perceptions.

I sought mediation throughout the process, but this was not pursued by anyone else until after both the police and the Webster inquiry had rejected the basis of the complaints.

My apology was aimed at achieving closure. It was neither required nor recommended in the Webster report, and it was generous and extensive given the actual contents of that report.

An unqualified apology, without sight of the Webster report, or an apology for criminal actions, would have left me defenceless in court, in spite of the police and Webster conclusions in my favour.

The allegations were of a criminal nature (according to the police) but their specialist officers decided after investigation that there was no case to send to the Crown Prosecution Service.

Webster considered over 100 statements and 100,000 words of evidence. More than 20 female former members of staff at HQ (and many other women from across the party) wrote to the Webster inquiry strongly in my support. It is also important to note that there were no complaints from anyone ever employed by me, managed by me, or over whom I had any power of authority.

Chris Rennard
House of Lords

Buy the Liberator Songbook!

The new 25th edition of the Liberator Songbook is now available, containing loads of your favourite political songs, and lots of new ones

You can mail order a copy for only £5 (including postage and packing) by sending a cheque payable to

'Liberator Publications' to:
Liberator Publications
Flat 1, 24 Alexandra Grove
London N4 2LF

Why Vote Liberal Democrat?

by Jeremy Browne
Biteback 2014

My efforts to review Jeremy Browne's latest book were somewhat hindered by my dog deciding to steal my review copy and chew on it. What this indicates about the quality of the book I will leave to the reader to decide.

This is the first book by Browne that I've read and, in its favour, it is clear that he is capable of writing well as is well demonstrated at the beginning where he makes a persuasive argument that we are living in a 'liberal age'.

The way in which he contrasts the restrictive, uniform Britain of his childhood with the diverse, tolerant and dynamic country which is all I (as someone born in 1990) have ever known is compelling.

However, while the crux of the argument is that the Liberal Democrats are the only party best suited to tackle the problems of the 'liberal age', I was forced to stop reading on several occasions due to rage at the shallowness of Browne's political thinking.

In the chapter entitled Opportunity, for example, his look at the problem of poverty and inequality is to restate the problem as primarily one of 'welfare dependency', on a bloated welfare state which he claims has made people prefer unemployment to work.

In the process he repeats several right-wing myths such as that thousands live in homes where no one has ever worked (research has shown there are less than 100 households in the UK like this) and ignores the fact that, of the large welfare budget, only a small proportion goes to those who are unemployed while far more goes to people already in work.

However, the only solution to poverty offered is that of funding education better and forcing people into work – ignoring a whole raft of Lib Dem policy and the well documented issue of poverty among people in work.

There are other inconsistencies in this book – such as one chapter in which central planning by the authoritarian state is roundly condemned and another chapter where China is praised for massive improvements in



REVIEWS

transport infrastructure (due solely to central planning by an authoritarian state).

It is this persistent, self-contradictory shallowness of thought and a naïve faith that the market is always right (on public services he describes the ideal as being the citizen becoming an "enlightened consumer") which undermines the whole book.

While is well written, it is unlikely to be persuasive to any but those of a similar mindset to Jeremy Browne or too unfamiliar with politics to know better than to take his assessments at face value.

If this book were my only guide on how to vote then I certainly would not be voting Liberal Democrat. In that sense it is a failure.

For anyone who hopes that the goal of a book like this should be to reach beyond the narrow 5 to 10% bracket of the electorate who share the views of Jeremy Browne this book will be a disappointment.

George Potter

Lakshmi (Film) Hindi with English Subtitles Nagesh Kukunoor (dir)

This film shown in November at the National Liberal Club by Liberal International British Group and British United Indian Liberal democrats.

It has been described as 'heart-wrenching'. Another word would be horrifying.

It shows how child trafficking operates in India. A 14-year-old girl is sold by her father into prostitution. The people running the brothel in which this girl has been forced to 'work' are grotesque.

The courage of Lakshmi to survive is rewarded by a police investigation of the brothel providing her with the chance to

give evidence against those who have imprisoned her, a chance she courageously accepts.

It is amazing so much of this compelling film has escaped censorship. Unrelentingly brutal, not sparing its audience's feelings, it convinces in the most unsettling way.

The nauseating efforts of the guilty to escape justice are appropriately portrayed to produce feelings of outrage in the audience.

The star Monali Thakur, whose career ambition was to become a singer, shows the desperation of her position with astonishing sincerity, reacting to all the violence inflicted on her with convincing terror. Equally remarkable is the performance of Nagesh Kukunoor, who also directed and produced the film and wrote its script. By portraying the chief villain in the callous way he does (maybe causing a small part of this film's audience to feel they cannot take any more), his chilling performance demonstrates the evil of people like him.

I felt he made sure he presented his character in the worst way possible to make his point. He certainly succeeds. He has met the victims of child trafficking in real life, which no doubt inspired his performance.

There is an interesting portrayal of Indian courtroom procedures. It's difficult for me to comment on the accuracy and plausibility of the scenes in court. From a British perspective, it is hard to imagine the accused having such easy access to the chief accuser. From the viewpoint of the drama of the film, this needs to happen, so the vile characters can condemn themselves out of their own mouths, looking pathetic in the process. Overall, an astonishing film, but not comfortable viewing.

John Pindar

71 (Film) 2014 Yann Demange (dir)

For many of us the Troubles in Northern Ireland were part of our lives but it now seems well in the past. Arguably the cinema has underplayed the violence and hatred of that period but this taut, knuckle biting film really brings it back into sharp focus.

71 follows the deployment of the parachute regiment into Northern Ireland in 1971. This was a year before Bloody Sunday and their role was ostensibly to “assist the civilian police”.

Astonishingly under-prepared and naïve about the situation they were facing, the troops go out in their berets on the first day having been told to leave riot gear behind.

They have no idea of the layout of the city (this was before mobile phones with GPS maps and people still used street phone boxes) nor had they adequate intelligence about key local actors.

Inevitably a house-to-house search goes horribly wrong, there is a riot and two soldiers manage to get separated from their unit in the Falls Road. One is killed the other - Gary - runs for his life in the dark streets. And the next 60 or so minutes is a race between him, factions of the IRA and the British Army who are all trying to find him but not necessarily to save him.

The gloomy darkness and narrow streets add to the confusion about just who is double-crossing who, with senior British army officers playing their own game of double-cross.

The film vividly portrays just how much the Brits were hated the Irish Catholics who banged bins on their arrival and flung excrement in their face. But it also shows the extraordinary courage and humanity of individuals who put themselves and their families at enormous risk to succour and protect soldiers like Gary. There is no doubt that many paid the price of their kindness with their lives.

A minor criticism – it would have been good to know more about Gary's fractured family background and what drove him into the army leaving a kid who might be his younger brother in a miserable children's home.

The film is on limited release but go to see it. The situation is far from perfect in Belfast today

however this film reminds us how bad it was and what has been achieved.

Margaret Lally

Mr Turner (Film) 2014, Mike Leigh (dir)

Mike Leigh's exquisite filming alone makes this worth seeing. The colours are so rich and deep that I felt as if I was walking through a series of Turner's famous watercolours. The personal story of Turner is secondary to the filming of the landscapes and shimmering light, which are so much a feature of his work.

This is probably how Turner – who like all great artists was really only interested in painting – would have wanted it to be.

But it would have been good to have learnt a bit more about the experiences which helped shape Turner and how someone from what appeared to be an under privileged background came to the fore of British art society

Timothy Spall gives a masterly performance of the eccentric and grumpy painter – communicating much of the time through grunting. In some ways it is a harsh picture of the painter, who has fierce sex with and then ignores his down trodden housekeeper and refuses to acknowledge the death of one of his daughters.

But it is balanced by his tenderness to his father and gentle wooing of his Margate landlady. Spall took further tuition in art for this film and readily dashes off pictures and sketches.

Others are better placed than I to say how well he carried that off. But there is no doubting his portrayal of the painter's intense passion for colour and light – Turner was rightly known as ‘the painter of light’.

The film provides a rather comic and fascinating fantastic glimpse of how the British art society responded to someone who was clearly not gently born but whose paintings spoke to and for a nation. Towards the end of his career Turner started to move into more abstract art and was the film shows how little this was understood by the British public and how hurtful this was.

Margaret Lally

Falling off the Fence: The Story of Liverpool's Millennium Lord Mayor by Eddie Clein Boxed Off Communications, Liverpool, 2014 £7.99.

Eddie Clein was a Liverpool city councillor for 30 years, most of that time as Liberal and Liberal Democrat councillor for the suburb of Childwall. He was lord mayor in 2000-01, presiding over many momentous events. This book is a memoir full of interesting Liverpool culture, society and political snapshots from the 1950s to 2010.

It covers Eddie's quite privileged childhood as the son of an immigrant Irish / eastern European Jewish doctor, but difficult as he sent away to boarding school and his youth interrupted by war and change in family circumstances.

His stories of the events he attended and the celebrities he met as lord mayor (joking with Prince Philip, bestowing the freedom of the city on Ken Dodd), will interest Liberator readers less than his account of the rise of and battle against the Militant Tendency. He describes Derek Hatton as charismatic.

Those who know Liverpool now will be surprised that Eddie was first elected as a Conservative councillor in the working class Speke district in 1969.

Eddie talks of his disillusion with the Conservatives partly due to anti-Semitism (something pioneer Liberals in Southport also said to me) but the disillusion is partly due to bad luck of not getting the political progress he wanted. By the 1980s he was back in the political fray as a Liberal.

Cllr Clein was a key figure in city politics for the next few decades. His half brother, Paul Clein was much better known in the party as an outstanding executive member for education who helped turn education in Liverpool around.

Eddie's son, Richard (a member of the Liberator collective, is probably the best known scouser in the Liberal Democrats except for Trevor Jones or Chris Rennard. Eddie's personal ambitions often take centre stage – just pipped as deputy leader of the Liberal



autocratic but meeting-heavy committee system.

As a Young Turk in 1998 I thought most of the old councillors sat in their safe seats and didn't do much. Eddie did help me in north Liverpool, but the book reminds me of wise advice from Carol Storey. When you judge someone you must not look just at one period in time, at a few years, but at what they have done in their careers. (Critics of Chris Rennard would also do well to put his achievements in the balance as well as personal critique of his alleged conduct

– and then they might realise why 1990s activists who served under Paddy and Rennard admire Chris so much).

Falling off the Fence reminds us how far Liverpool fell and just how much the Liberal Democrat administration (with help from Europe, government, business, officers and the people) turned the city around.

Critics said European Capital of Culture 2008 would be a flash in the pan but the Labour council and Mayor Joe Anderson have reaped and built on the continued benefit.

Kiron Reid

Democratic Desert, the War in Syria

by Robert King
Schilt Publishing
2014 £35.

This is an ugly book. It is easy to say that war is ugly, but that is not enough. "Some of the scenes may be distressing", warn the news bulletins. King's photography equally qualifies for that disclaimer, but with a book you can hold it in your hands and meditate on the distress. Anthony Loyd's accompanying essay is almost unreadable – enough your eyes cry out, I've read enough.

I have a dilemma. Almost a year ago I sat where I am now in my office and spent two hours agonising on how to vote on British military intervention in Syria. A pacifist of over 40 years I finally opted 'against'.

Part of my reasoning was that Britain had screwed up in the region for too long and notwithstanding the 'responsibility to protect', had no clear idea of the objectives; China and Russia blocked UN action.

In the next issue of InterLib there will be an article on Syria and Iraq, which like all articles, is the opinion of the author. It argues rapprochement with Al Assad. I look back over the last year. Did 'no vote' give Putin the confidence to invade Ukraine? ISIS was a factor then, could we have predicted its success? By the time that debate had taken place it was already too late.

Read on of Loyd; he explains some of the shortcomings of the information we have before us; he gives us another example of how bad ISIS acolytes really are. To some extent he gives some argument for sitting safely in an office, miles from any conflict trying to keep these issues informed.

This is a horrible book. King makes no excuses "it's not my job to aspire towards aesthetically pleasing images of war that are palatable to the public". King's photographs speak for themselves. Buy this book and put alongside Goya's Disasters of War as a reminder of what war is.

Stewart Rayment

Democrats, a key disappointment.

In the memoir he correctly states that he promoted a huge number of improvements in environmental services in Liverpool, along with the then 'dream team' of leader Mike Storey and chief executive, David Henshaw (that went sour) but he neglects to give much credit to the other team members or officers who helped.

Key figures like Paul Clark and Mike's strategist Bill le Breton, or leading members of the administration or activists do not get acknowledged. His personal critique of the styles of Clark, Storey, and Warren Bradley, as group leaders is quite withering. Cliques and favouritism are attacked. Paradoxically Eddie is often quite sympathetic to Labour and other political opponents.

His bitter attack on Tony Blair and New Labour for creating cabinet council government is the typical critique of an old fashioned councillor happy with the equally

Monday

To Oakham Studios. I expect some of my readers will be surprised to learn that the old place is still operating. After all, the glory days of the Oakham Comedies are far behind us. I expect you have seen 'Passport to Pickworth,' in which a village declares its independence from Rutland – with hilarious consequences! (There is also one about a poor relation of an aristocratic family who murders his way to a title – I have never allowed this to be shown at the Bonkers' Home for Well-Behaved Orphans.)

Some years later, as chairman of Oakham Studios Ltd, I helped win a contract from the Association of Liberal Councillors to make a number of training films. More than one prominent member of our party learnt electioneering from watching 'Confessions from a Committee Room,' 'Confessions of a Canvasser' and 'Confessions of a Knocker Up'.

What, with the success of my own tribute to the Officer Training Corps at one of our leading public schools – 'Carry On Uppingham' – those were good years for the studios.

But why, I hear you ask, am I visiting them this Monday morning?

The answer is all to do with the European Union.

It seems that 70 years of peace are not enough to reconcile many to our membership of this excellent organisation. Nor does its sterling work weeding out the curlier bananas from our supermarkets cut the mustard any more.

So a few of us – I fear I cannot reveal any of the other names, but they are all Sound and many can be fairly counted as bigwigs – have got together to do something about this.

"What we need, ladies and gentlemen," I told our first meeting, "is something spectacular to show what Europe can do."

Various ideas were kicked around and it was eventually agreed that the most spectacular thing of all would be a European triumph in Outer Space.

It may be that this was my idea: I have taken an interest in interplanetary exploration ever since Raymond Baxter became the first Briton in space in Coronation year. Whatever the truth of that – I am not one to boast – discussion turned to the precise shape our Spectacular Thing should take.

Should we land on the moon? It's been done. Mars? Everyone is talking about that these days. Saturn? Terribly Far.

Someone said "We could send a probe to Uranus," but I wasn't having that.

Another cove suggested we land on a comet. It sounded a good idea, but it turns out the things don't stand still, so that if you aimed a rocket at one it would be gone by the time you got there. I don't suppose even the Department of Hard Sums at the University of Rutland at Belvoir could help with that one!

Lord Bonkers' Diary

It was then I recalled the early days of the Independent Television franchise for Rutland. In those days we prided ourselves upon our coverage of international affairs, so it was a blow when, owing to an unfortunate concatenation of circumstances, we found ourselves unable to cover Suez.

Nothing daunted, I stepped in and restaged the whole thing at Foxton Locks with the local Scouts

and a couple of narrowboats borrowed from Fellows, Morton & Clayton. We had a grand time of it, but imagine my annoyance the next day when I learnt that the promised legend 'Reconstruction' had not appeared on the screen even for a moment.

You know how one is always reading in the newspapers that people are "bracing themselves" for things? Well, I braced myself for a deluge of letters of complaint, but – do you know what? – not a single one arrived. The public had not noticed a thing.

So (we are back at Oakham Studios now talking about that blessed comet – do try to keep up) it was with this experience in mind that I suggested we stage the whole thing here.

"Is that ethical?" asked a fellow bigwig.

"It is for the European Union," I replied firmly, "and as Liberal Democrats we all know that the European Union can do no wrong. Thus any action to improve its reputation is morally justified."

The plan agreed, I searched the shelves of my Library until I found what I was looking for: "I-Spy In the Night Sky" by my old friend Big Chief I-Spy. (How a Red Indian Chief came to be living in Shepperton is a story I do not have time to unfold today.) And in it I found the perfect comet for our purposes.

So it was this morning that I made my way to Oakham Studios to stage the landing of Delors-1 on Comet Kardashian. More than one of the film crew remarked that our craft was "the size of a washing machine". That was not surprising as it is a washing machine. I may have neglected to inform my Housekeeper of my intention to borrow it, but we must all make sacrifices for Europe, what?

Tuesday

I seem to have left myself rather short of space for the rest of the week, so I shall not be able to share my encounter with Clegg with you – suffice to say, I informed him that appointing a few women to the Cabinet would be more use than wearing a T-shirt.

However, I shall say a few words in defence of "Peaky Blinders". Some have questioned the accuracy of its portrait of Birmingham life. Speaking as one who helped Wallace Lawler win the Ladywood by-election in 1969, I should say it is exactly like that.

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