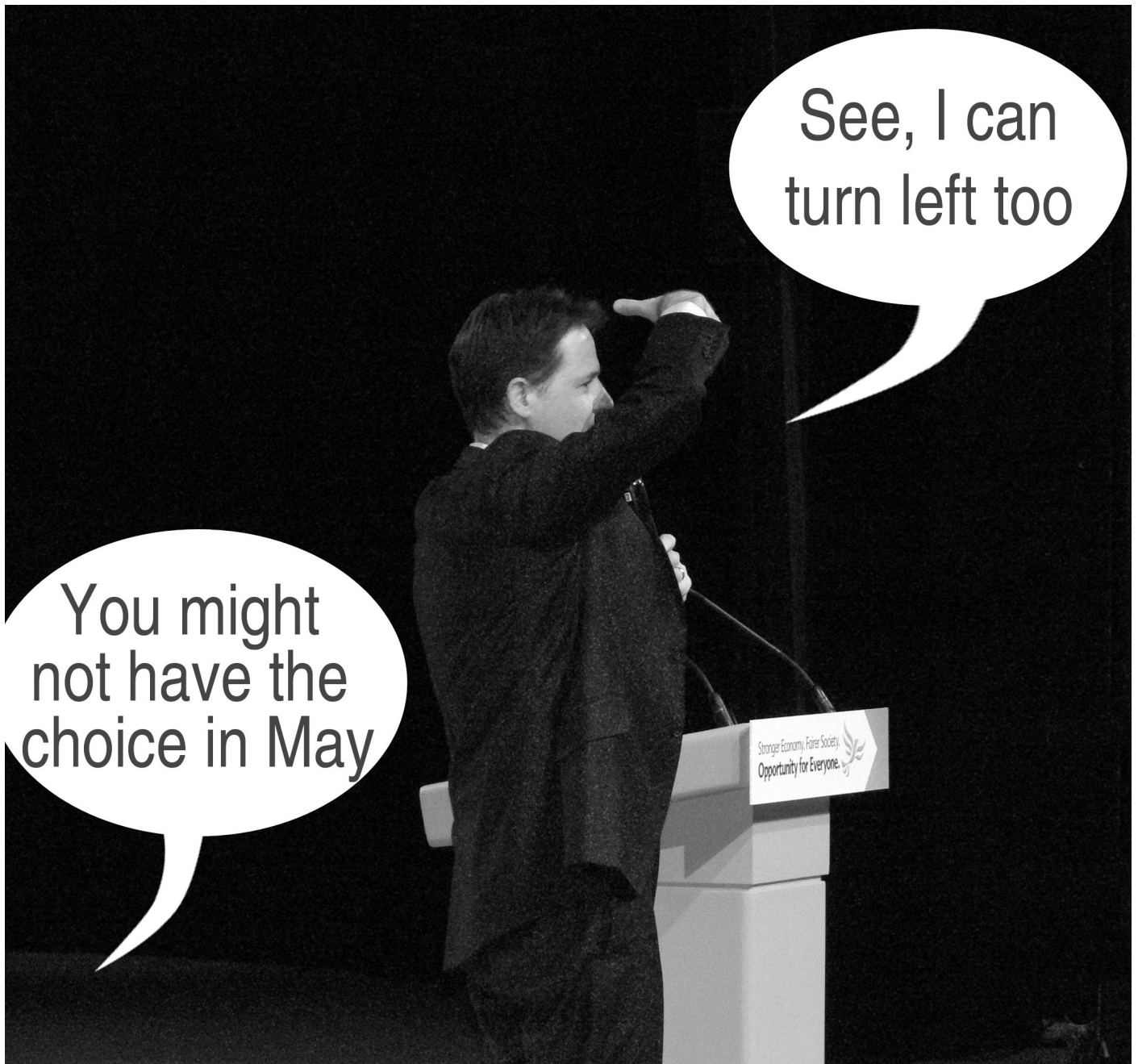


# liberator



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- 🔥 Perils of opportunism - Michael Meadowcroft
- 🔥 Early intervention, long-term rewards - Claire Tyler

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Stewart Rayment (cover)  
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# COMMENTARY

## HOW TO DO A DEAL

Would Nick Clegg and his hand-picked team of (more or less) like-minded confidantes be willing to walk away from a post-election coalition negotiation if they thought that what they were being offered by a prospective partner was not good enough?

If the numbers fall such that the Liberal Democrats are again in the position of being able to form a coalition with one or more other parties, will those with positions to keep and status to retain be able to bring themselves say, 'no'?

There is plenty of suspicion around that the task of this negotiating group is not to get the best deal for the party but to somehow contrive to keep Clegg as deputy prime minister and certain bums on seats to which they have become accustomed.

Effective negotiation means being willing to walk away if a deal isn't good enough; it emphatically does not mean seeking to do a deal at any price for the sake of being able to remain part of a government.

The fact that membership of this team has been solely in Clegg's gift hardly instils confidence that it will be very independently minded; nor does the appointment as advisers to it of Polly McKenzie and Matthew Hanney, two Clegg aides who owe their influence solely to him.

A generation ago the Liberal party got into a mess in the merger negotiations - though at least that team of negotiators had been largely elected - since the majority saw their job as being to negotiate a merger no matter what, not to see if they could get an acceptable deal.

As history shows, the SDP sensed this and ran rings round those Liberal negotiators who did not resign in disgust, and the resulting damage nearly killed off the merged party at birth.

If Clegg's team sees 'coalition at any cost' as its object then the resulting damage could make the disasters of 27 years ago look tame by comparison.

Just about the only thing that can be said with certainty about any coalition negotiations this time is that it won't just be David Rendel (or any other isolated individual) who opposes what is on offer.

There is a Reference Group to whom the negotiators are supposed to report back, and that at least may be able to stiffen any backbone that requires it.

The 'triple lock' worked in Clegg's favour in 2010, producing a huge endorsement at the Birmingham special conference and having the subsequent effect of having made sure that the entire party's hands had been dipped in the blood.

This time if the MPs decide to support a government, there has to be a special conference at which they will 'seek the approval' of the party for the proposed

arrangement, which will require a two-thirds majority to be passed.

Whether this requirement to seek approval covers 'confidence and supply' deals or anything else short of an actual coalition is unclear.

Also unclear is what happens if a majority, but less than the required two-thirds one, were to support the MPs' decision to enter a 'government'. The implications of that are also horrendous.

The Conservatives have sent up various signals about things being 'red lines' in coalition negotiations, however those who have heard from the negotiators before parliament dissolved were unable to discern any Lib Dem ones.

As Sir Graham Watson warns in this issue, one ought to be resisting Tory demands for an in/out referendum on EU membership in 2017 - a pointless distraction that would settle nothing since the zealots of euro-scepticism would not be stilled by a mere vote against them but would instead invent wild conspiracies and renew their agitation, while an 'out' vote would so wreck the economy the UK would soon have to seek some partial 'back in' status.

It is not for the Lib Dems to help David Cameron off this hook, except in the sense of letting him say, "the Lib Dems wouldn't let me do it".

Should the numbers mean that the Lib Dems have to talk to Labour there may not be such an obvious single obstacle but the negotiators are not exactly burdened with people likely to have a rapport with Ed Miliband's team.

In either case, since Westminster electoral reform has been holed by the shambles of the 2011 referendum, reform for local elections could be a useful 'ask', as could defending civil liberty.

The party ultimately cannot make being in merger talks more likely; that depends on the performance of others and the vagaries of first-past-the-post.

But if it is, it should remember that the most effective negotiators are those that can say, 'no' if they have to, and who know what sort of hard bargain they are supposed to be driving.

If the objective becomes a coalition at any cost then the resulting special conference could to say the least prove interesting.

Meanwhile, best wishes to all readers standing in the coming election.

# RADICAL BULLETIN

## IN HIS OWN IMAGE

It's well known that people tend to appoint to jobs people who are like them, and Nick Clegg is no exception.

The team to negotiate any coalition after the general election was originally Clegg himself, Danny Alexander, David Laws, Steve Webb, Lynne Featherstone and Sal Brinton.

All except Webb and maybe Featherstone were close personally and politically to Clegg.

Brinton then resigned having a conflict of interest when she became party president last winter.

After a very long, and unexplained, gap Kate Parminter was appointed in March to fill the role.

Parminter is a popular and industrious member of the Lords team but hardly someone likely to rock any boats, and is noted for her loyalty to Clegg.

Negotiation needs people prepared to walk away from coalition if the deal isn't good enough. A team dominated by people who presumably want to keep their current jobs is unlikely to drive a hard bargain.

Quite apart from the coalition negotiators, there is the question of who will sit on the Reference Group, to which they are supposed to report back on the progress of their talks?

This is to be nine-strong, drawn equally from the parliamentary parties, Federal Executive and Federal Policy Committee.

Since a number of MPs are on the negotiating team, only one more is expected to join the Reference Group, with the other two seats being taken by lords Jim Wallace and Dick Newby, whom others peers learnt with some surprise they had elected to these roles.

The FPC at least planned a proper election for its places, though how the FE would deal with the matter was unclear as *Liberator* went to press.

It is also unclear what meant by 'regularly' in the requirement for the negotiators to report to the Reference Group and what will happens to any members of both the team and the group who lose their seats.

MPs surely would not stand for a coalition being negotiated by people who were no longer among their number.

## LAMB'S TALES

For a long time many have assumed that Tim Farron will have a smooth progress to the Lib Dem leadership should Nick Clegg lead the party into a poor result next month, or meet with an accident at the hands of his local voters.

But quite apart from his tendency to imply that he is carrying out the Almighty's wishes, Farron's support among MPs is less extensive than in the party generally and he is viewed as an upstart by the party establishment.

Some think North Norfolk's Norman Lamb could be Clegg's successor, and might be pressed into service as a 'stop Farron' candidate, since he has pulled off the feat of doing a big serious ministerial job at health without offending anyone.

Ed Davey, another potential contender, has also done a big serious ministerial job but has offended some over nuclear policy and fracking, though these would not be insuperable obstacles.

Alistair Carmichael is another possibility, but with Scotland's status in the UK problematic in the middle to long term his Scottish seat might create difficulties as leader.

## ERMINE SHORTAGE

Talk around the House of Lords suggests the Lib Dems will get only four peerages in the dissolution honours list, which is traditionally published after a general election.

Happily, there are four obvious Lib Dem contenders on the basis of length of service as retiring MPs: Alan Beith, Malcolm Bruce, Menzies Campbell and Don Foster.

But would Nick Clegg want to find a berth for his closest political friend Danny Alexander, should voters in Inverness mess things up by not re-electing him?

If so, will we see an unseemly squabble for the scarce peerages?

## DON'T SAY 'CHEESE'

Social Liberal Forum ran a humorous (or not, depending on one's position) sweepstake at the Lib Dem spring conference, in which bets were invited on how many seats the party would hold come 8 May. Answers clustered in the upper thirties.

Panic ensued when Nick Clegg did his tour of the stalls area and his minders realised he might be photographed next to this embarrassing display. SLF refused to remove it, so various people stood in front to obscure it.

Clegg's presence at the *Liberator* stall next door consisted of a rushed "hi, guys" as he sped past to avoid been seen with something even less to his taste.

## CORNISH CLOTS

Members of the Liberal party in Cornwall have so utterly lost their political and moral compass that they proposed in early March to stand down their parliamentary candidates in favour of Ukip, the country's least liberal party of any consequence.

This finally provoked some action against what one prominent member referred to as "the anti-EU crazies" in that party.

Delegated nomination rights were withdrawn from the offending Cornish members, and *Liberator* was

told an internal inquiry would follow, but only after the general election, on charges of having brought the party into disrepute.

The Liberal party was founded by Michael Meadowcroft and others after the old Liberal party merged with the SDP in 1988.

Meadowcroft joined the Lib Dems in 2007. Some may follow him over this incident, *Liberator* has learnt.

## A MYSTERY FOR HOLMES

Liberal Democrat attempts to recapture the Chesterfield seat have stalled, mired in infighting, with campaign chief Paddy Ashdown looking askance at the place.

Former MP Paul Holmes lost by only 549 last time but decided not to stand again, his place being taken by new candidate Julia Cambridge.

What follows appears to have been a classic case of a newcomer unable to live up to expectations, whether realistic or otherwise, of what they should do to win the seat back.

This sorry saga culminated in Holmes being reprimanded by the English party - he is appealing - and the Chesterfield local party being suspended.

It seems the English party has learnt nothing from the Rennard saga about how to prevent something difficult becoming far worse.

Thus a row at a local party executive a year ago was elevated into embarrassing headlines on the eve of spring conference.

Most of the allegations that Holmes bullied Cambridge were dismissed some time ago. The only finding against Holmes was in relation to verbal bullying at a constituency executive in March 2014.

Eleven members of the Chesterfield executive are understood to have given evidence that Holmes' conduct did not amount to bullying. Two gave evidence in support of Cambridge that it did.

This should surely have been a matter for mediation last year rather being left to fester until such a sensitive time.

## A SPAD IN THE WORKS

After some negotiations, a race equality strategy produced by a working group and by Ethic Minority Liberal Democrats was agreed in 2013 and eventually warmly endorsed by Nick Clegg (*Liberator* 360).

One might have thought that this would form the basis of what went into the general election manifesto.

But no. EMLD members and others were horrified to find the draft proposed for manifesto on the subject was something concocted by Clegg special adviser Veena Hudson and by unelected 'race equality champion' Ibrahim Taguri, before his donations embarrassment became known.

The Hudson-Taguri version was described by one senior EMLD figure as something that, "could have been lifted from any party from the '80s onwards," and likely to impress neither ethnic minority voters or anyone else.

President Sal Brinton, who has a history of poor relations with EMLD (*Liberator* 358) insisted "a lot of [the task force report] was in the manifesto", but was unable to say where.

It may be that the resulting row at Federal Policy Committee will see a rewrite in time for the manifesto

- but it seems extraordinary that those working for Clegg should ignore a report he had endorsed.

## ECONOMICAL LIBERALS

Never let it be said that *Liberator* is unwilling to learn from others how to manage the economics of publishing.

We shy away though from the example of the Lib Dem magazine *Ad Lib*. This was launched as a monthly from the ashes of the weekly *Lib Dem News*, carrying over subscriptions and presumably gaining some new ones.

It then vanished last winter before resurfacing as a quarterly sent free to all members.

The party though omitted to tell existing paying subscribers, so people are paying for a monthly magazine that no longer exists and instead getting a quarterly that is free anyway.

As ever with anything involving Great George Street, staff and committees blame each other.

## YELLOW PERIL

Danny Alexander's stunt of holding up a yellow briefcase to present an alternative Lib Dem budget was fairly cringe-worthy, as subsequent online satire showed.

The party had hoped for a photo-opportunity with MPs and peers, whom it duly invited to stand with Alexander's custard-coloured artefact outside parliament, a task that must have appealed to very few of them.

These began: "I know it is last minute, but we are keen to get a crowd together from 11.10am."

Next came: "The timings of this event has had to be pushed back due to an urgent question in the Commons. The new time is 11.30am."

That was followed within 40 minutes by, er: "The Lib Dem budget photo event has now been cancelled."

## "WILL YOU PLEASE WELCOME..."

The conference rally is usually pretty cheesy but this year plumbed new depths when party president Sal Brinton arrived on stage to the strains of the old soul song *Mustang Sally*.

Brinton's first name is in fact Sarah. Presumably, five and half minutes of the slow and anguished Bob Dylan song of that name was thought inappropriate for the event.

## NO LONGER ABSENT FRIEND

*Liberator* is sometimes asked what became of former Glee Club host and collective member Ralph Bancroft, and for the past few years we haven't really known.

We are happy to report that Ralph is alive, partially sighted but otherwise well, recently joined us for a drink, and would like to hear from old friends. Those who would like his contact details please email: [collective@liberatormagazine.org.uk](mailto:collective@liberatormagazine.org.uk)

# WHAT PRICE A LIB DEM PEERAGE?

Seth Thevoz describes how his academic research has revealed the scale of donations by those nominated for the Lords

Liberals have a credibility problem. For at least the last 104 years, we have attacked the way other parties have fudged the issue of Lords reform, and how they have dragged their feet over proposals to either abolish or elect the second chamber. And then we have our own record in the coalition.

It was disappointing that a draft bill on Lords reform due by December 2010 took an extra six months to appear. It was disappointing that it then took a further year for a final bill to appear, by which time the coalition's momentum had - predictably - run out of steam. It was doubly disappointing given the deputy prime minister had taken personal responsibility for the programme, so it could not be conveniently blamed on being kicked into the long grass by a Conservative minister.

It was disappointing - to put it mildly - that when the prospect of a Tory rebellion first came up, the leadership's response was to indulge in ill-judged sabre-rattling ("Block our Lords reform, and we'll block your constituency boundaries"), playing right into the hands of the opponents of Lords reform. It was disappointing to see the proposals quietly ditched.

While it may have been overkill to threaten a dissolution on the issue, the fact that it was left relatively late in the parliament meant reformers were left with few cards to play, and so once again, the issue was deferred. This has largely been the story of Lords reform since 1911.

The result is today's chamber, which no-one seems to want: still imbued with a smattering of bishops, 'people's peers', and 92 hereditary peers; but overwhelmingly the product of the patronage of leaders of the three main parties.

In 1917, Liberal barrister Walter Hazell asked: "How many honours are paid for in money, how many partly in money and partly in public service, and how many for public service of various kinds only, no man can tell, but we can all guess".

With more patronage than ever in the hands of the three party leaders, the phenomenon has not noticeably changed; it is relatively rare (though not unheard of) for a big donor who is a complete political unknown to abruptly become a peer.

## ABSURDLY OVER-REPRESENTED

But certainly, of all the rank-and-file members to be elevated, donors do seem to be absurdly over-represented, especially when one considers how some of them can be very recent converts to the liberal cause indeed.

Last month, my colleagues Andrew Mell, Simon Radford and I released a study through Oxford University's economics department (Is There a

Market for Peerages? Can Donations Buy You a British Peerage? A Study in the Link Between Party Political Funding and Peerage Nominations, 2005-14), examining a phenomenon that has been long rumoured.

We found a statistically significant link between big donors and peerage nominations (including nominees who had been blocked by the House of Lords Appointments Commission). The prevalence of 'big donors' among nominees was striking: one in 10 overall; and when you took into account 'the usual suspects', for whom there was an immediately apparent reason for their nomination, then major donors made up one in three of the others who were left. Those 'others' just happened to donate £33.8m to political parties (over 95% of that from just 27 individuals), while 'the usual suspects' who made up 69% of peerage nominees collectively donated just £735,000, or 2.1% of the donations to come out of Lords nominees.

One doesn't have to be a professional statistician to suspect that something funny is going on. Indeed, we found that the odds of so many 'big donors' having been ennobled by coincidence were the same as winning the National Lottery five times back to back.

On the one hand, the data is drawn across all parties, and Liberal Democrat peerage nominees account for only 53 of the 303 nominees of the last decade. Indeed, on an absolute tally, only six of the 28 'big donors' we identified as having been put forward for a peerage were Liberal Democrat nominees, compared to 13 from the Conservatives, and nine for Labour.

On the other hand, as a share of nominees, this figure is frankly embarrassing for Liberal Democrats: one in seven of the party's (admittedly rather limited) pool of 'big donors', compared to one in 14 Labour big donors, and one in 22 Conservative big donors. If anything, Liberal Democrat promotion of big donors has been dragging the cross-party averages up, not down.

This links into a phenomenon a number of Conservative fundraisers were the first to observe five years ago: as Fraser Nelson wrote in the Daily Telegraph, "Tory fundraisers had noticed that some of its [sic] more dubious prospective donors - interested in concealing donations - ended up with the Liberal Democrats."

Indeed, for the less conspiracy-theory-inclined, the fact that the right-wing press has pursued Liberal Democrats so relentlessly on fundraising issues has less to do with political bias, and more to do with their contacts in Tory fundraising circles being the very first to note the defection of some of these donors to the Liberal Democrats, and the press then being tipped off.

Of course, both turning to shady donors, and the sale of peerages, is nothing new. Selling peerages has

been a long-standing source of revenue for all parties, including the Liberals. Asquith sold peerages. Lloyd George was notorious for the sale of honours (although he actually sold relatively few peerages).

Liberals were allocated few peerages over the next few decades, but this changed after the Orpington revival of the 1960s. When Jeremy Thorpe became the first Liberal leader since Lloyd George to nominate a sizeable number of Liberal peerages, six of the 11 he awarded went to wealthy donors - Tim Beaumont, Gerran Lloyd, Simon Mackay, Stina Robson, Basil Wigoder and the former MP George Mackie.

By contrast, David Steel's peerage lists largely went to party activists. Meanwhile, the newly merged party's 'big donor' nominees of the 1990s so outraged party activist Donnachadh McCarthy that in 1999, the Interim Peers Panel was introduced, whereby peerage nominees were (supposedly) elected to a slate from which the leader would select nominees.

From a then-current copy of the list, such peers as Sal Brinton, Tony Greaves, Matthew Oakeshott, Brian Paddick, Ros Scott and David Shutt were appointed; in other words, such people have tended to be some of our more effective and outspoken peers over the last decade and a half. Although Charles Kennedy largely adhered to the list, a loophole whereby the leader could still appoint their own personal nominees was increasingly exploited by successive leaders, so that of Nick Clegg's 41 nominees, just seven have been drawn from the then-current panel.

## **FATUOUS EXCUSE**

Furthermore, the panel elections were quietly dropped in 2012 - ostensibly, this was a temporary measure on the grounds that it would have made the party look as though it was not serious about Lords reform (a fatuous excuse, as the Lords reform bill had already

*“Patronage has now completely returned to the leader, without conference voting for it to do so”*

collapsed in August by the time the federal elections were held in November). Bizarrely, the party chose to not resurrect the list elections in 2014, and so the last of the panels elected in 2010 had their term expire then, resulting in the party no longer having a current panel. This means that patronage has now completely returned to the leader, without conference voting for it to do so.

Accordingly, the Liberal Democrat record in tackling 'cash for peerages' is less than impressive.

What can be done? Well, for a start, we can begin enforcing our own rules, and re-commence elections to the Interim Peers Panel. We can give some party bodies advance notice of the leader's new peerage nominees, to scrutinise whether any big donors are present, and so ask appropriate questions before such names are forwarded.

Naturally, this issue fits into the purview of the Federal Finance and Administration Committee, responsible for the scrutiny of finance and donations, and to which I was recently elected, last January.

I am not permitted to divulge the proceedings of FFAC, but there are no rules to prevent me from divulging what I have intended to bring forward to FFAC as a concern. I can confirm that I have protested to FFAC in writing about the astronomically high probability of 'cash for peerages' having been an income stream for the party in recent years. Since I am not permitted to comment on the response of FFAC, I would encourage members to press the committee on what action has been taken; and to judge for yourself whether such action is suitably robust. It's your party, not the establishment's.

---

Dr Seth Thevoz is a historian and sits on the Liberal Democrat Federal Finance and Administration Committee. He is honorary librarian of the National Liberal Club.

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# THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

## Decades of opportunism and targeting have left the Liberal Democrats vulnerable to Ukip, the Greens and SNP.

### Michael Meadowcroft calls for a rescue plan from 8 May

It may seem odd even to contemplate anything beyond polling day but it is certainly not. Even party stalwarts accept that there will be a significant difference in votes between constituencies with sitting Liberal Democrat MPs plus, perhaps, a handful of other target seats, and the rest of the country.

Twenty years of targeting has succeeded in diminishing the party's base in most of the country.

The Rochester and Strood by-election last November was far more of a disaster than can be imagined or was acknowledged. There was a time when the party thrived on by-elections when at least it was possible to bring party workers into a constituency to build up the party's vote and, if nothing else, to build up the local association for future elections.

However, Rochester and Strood was the worst by-election result ever for the Liberal Democrats or the Liberals. We lost 7,450 votes of the 7,800 we polled in 2010.

My concern is that the combination of resurgent Ukip, SNP and Green parties, with too many constituencies neglected for decades, will produce many similar results on 7 May. That is why there needs to be a preparations for an immediate plan to rescue the party, constituency by constituency.

Targeting is a peculiarly Liberal Democrat self-caused wound but the causes of the rise of Ukip apply to all the established parties. The combination of massive disillusion with these parties and their long term failure to confront the perverse views of a substantial number of their supporters has been lethal.

The seeds of the mainstream parties' vulnerability to the populist appeal of Ukip, (and to a lesser extent the principled appeal of the Green party and, for Labour in Scotland, the calculated positioning of the SNP), were sown long ago.

At election after election the parties have been content to retain the votes of a significant number of voters whose personal beliefs were widely at variance with the values of the party.

Any one who has canvassed white working class voters on any council estate is aware of the widespread anti-immigrant and reactionary views of many electors who declare themselves lifelong Labour voters. The Labour party was happy to have the electoral support of these voters believing that they had nowhere else to go.

Similarly, in industrial west Scotland, Labour regarded the historic allegiance of the considerable working class vote as a permanent given. In our first-past-the-post electoral system, the party was not even worried by the declining electoral turnout in its traditional fiefs, after all the vote wasn't going anywhere else and it was still winning a wide swathe

of these seats. Given all this, the leakage of votes, particularly to Ukip, was an electoral blow waiting to happen.

The former West Riding director of education, Sir Alec Clegg, highlighted the political cynicism of this attitude back in 1973: "Some of the industrial towns of the north are places that combine maximum need with minimum resources and overwhelming dereliction..... there are whole areas of our country affected in this way and nearly all of them are in the industrial north. They lack both the charm of the countryside and the amenities and entertainments of the town. Further more they are areas of no political consequence. The 'left' know that they will not lose them and the 'right' know that they cannot win them, and so both political sides can ignore them, and exploit them politically, socially, economically and educationally without fear of reprisal."

## LABOUR'S VULNERABILITY

The far right - the National Front or the BNP - never had much traction with these voters but a 'respectable' far right party such as Ukip, made viable by a couple of Conservative MP defections, has exposed Labour's vulnerability to the seduction of many voters who realise that they actually agree with Ukip's populism. Similarly, in Scotland, the growing dissatisfaction with Labour's neglect and complacency has been cleverly seized upon by the SNP which is now providing a viable and non-Conservative alternative in many traditional Labour constituencies.

It is a curious irony that Labour's Blairite attempts to widen its appeal beyond its traditional class-based loyalties has made it more, not less, vulnerable to the defection of members of that class base to Ukip and the SNP.

It is not a phenomenon unique to Britain: the plight of the Parti Socialiste in France has precisely the same problem with the abandonment of the party by many of those in the high rise suburbs surrounding Paris. Even before Marine le Pen deliberately made the far right Front National more 'civilised', 40% of its support came directly from the Parti Communiste. Now the threat to the whole left is increasingly acute and only Jean-Luc Melenchon of the Left Front appears willing to take on the Front National on any kind of intellectual basis.

Historically it was the same situation in the USA where, until the Barry Goldwater election of 1964, the Democrats could always rely on the most right wing bloc vote in the states - the southern Democrats, who were programmed historically to oppose the Republicans because it was a Republican, Abraham Lincoln, who had promoted the civil war against the southern states to maintain the union. Eventually, this traditional loyalty to the name rather than the policies was eroded by the successful efforts of Ronald Reagan



to seduce what became known as Reagan Democrats.

The Conservatives have tended to make a virtue of not being ideological even though the party has over the long years amassed a corpus of philosophy. This has never prevented the party from opportunistically absorbing other political forces, such as the Liberal Unionists from 1886 and the National Liberals from 1931.

If these precedents led the party to believe that it could assimilate Ukip it has clearly failed, not least because David Cameron cannot square the circle of appeasing Ukip sufficiently over Europe while maintaining the UK's crucial involvement with the EU. One of the few Cameron comments I've agreed with was his description of Ukip as being made up of, "nutters, fruitcakes and closet racists."

## **CAPRICIOUS AND DEBILITATING**

The Liberal Democrats are the most vulnerable of the established parties to the seductions of the minor parties. They have a much smaller loyalist base and therefore need to put much more effort into promoting their political values and philosophy to avoid having to rely on the capricious and debilitating perpetual motion of local personalities and the ubiquitous Focus leaflets.

Apart from a handful of places, such as Eastleigh, Southport and Sutton and Cheam, and a few others, where they have succeeded in persuading electors to have an allegiance to the party's basic political values, they have failed to embed these values.

Too often canvassers meet the elector who expresses a rooted objection to the EU but who expresses enthusiasm for voting Liberal Democrat. One mumbles a non-committal response and moves on.

Once there is another apparently viable party vying for the populist and for the 'none of the above' vote the Liberal Democrats are in serious trouble. The lack of interest in, and attention to, persuading the electorate to support the party as such rather than relying on fake opinion polls, populist campaigns, continuous petitions and instant compassion, has left the party vulnerable to a party such as Ukip that peddles even more populist fantasies.

The difficult but healthy task of persuading the electorate to vote positively can be assisted by a change in the electoral system. The present lottery of first-past-the-post is itself damaging to the enhancement of politics and the development of a politics of values.

A move to the single transferable vote in multi-member constituencies encourages more attention on positive and co-operative ideas and policies rather than the negativism and recourse to tactical voting under FPTP. The evident problems for governance of the 'lottery election' puts the case for electoral reform squarely back on to the agenda.

The obvious fact for all these established parties, and particularly the Liberal Democrats, is that they simply cannot ignore the threat to their effective survival. There is no longer a deference vote nor a significant

*"There needs to be a preparations for an immediate plan to rescue the party, constituency by constituency"*

class vote and they cannot rely on the complacency and naivety that has served them well over long years.

It is going to be necessary to develop a politics of values whereby the parties set out their view of society and are prepared to argue for it.

Unless they take on the oppositional attitude of Ukip and the expose the inherent dangers of the SNP's nationalism - and, indeed, point out the contradiction that the Green party is based

on an analysis, not on a prescription, and that its success minimises the green imperative that needs to underpin the policies of all parties - their electoral future is bleak.

For us, 20 years of targeting compounds the problem and we need to be planning now, even before polling day, to swing into action immediately after what is likely to be a generally depressing overall result on 7 May.

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Michael Meadowcroft was Liberal MP for Leeds West 1983-87

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# IT JUST WON'T ADD UP

Without at least 50 MPs, the Liberal Democrats will not have the people to staff ministries no matter what coalitions the election result might make possible, says Tony Greaves

Let's start with a simple question – who has studied the Coalition Agreement recently, or indeed in the past two or three years? Five years on from all those excited meetings in May 2010 it's turned into a forgotten irrelevance.

I refer of course to the Programme for Government (PfG), which was actually the second of three Coalition agreements and was the more detailed and expanded version of the first interim agreement that was approved by the Federal Executive and MPs and peers and put to the special conference in Birmingham. The point about it is that it's all about policy, in detail and department by department - but it was all within that over-riding requirement to abolish the deficit.

One Word to rule them all, one Word to find them, one Word to bring them all and in the shadows bind them, in the land of the Treasury where the shadows lie.

Austerity – that at least remains, and the threat of a lot more austerity from a new Conservative government hangs over this election like nothing else. But the rest is largely forgotten. As I write, the PfG can still be found on the government website though it may be swept away into the recycling bin of history with the dissolution.

The eclipse of the PfG was inevitable. Policy is always a fragile and ephemeral thing and in this case it was open to being wrecked from the start by ambitious and footloose Tory ministers – Gove, Lansley, Duncan Smith, and on most constitutional matters Cameron himself. The parties intended to refresh and renew the PfG for the second half of the five years in a mid-term review overseen by Oliver Letwin and Danny Alexander, leading to 'Coalition Mark 2' or even 'Coalition 2.0'.

## POLITICALLY IMPOSSIBLE

This was soon found to be politically impossible, not least due to resistance from the Tory right wingers who had been ambushed back in May 2015, and by Liberal Democrats worried by the involvement in the exercise of right-wing groups in the party. All we ended up with were various check-lists of actions done, in hand and not yet done which were soon forgotten.

The third document agreed in May 2010 was the Coalition Agreement for Stability and Reform (CASR). This set out “how we expect our Coalition Government to operate in practice” and how “working practices need to adapt”.

It covers the composition of the government, collective responsibility, the functioning of the government (cabinet committees, civil servants etc), and the whipping systems in Parliament. The CASR states that “there is no constitutional difference between a Coalition Government and a single party

government, but working practices need to adapt”.

What they meant is that they wanted a government in which two parties behaved as far as possible as if they were just one, and certainly not any basic changes to the Westminster system itself. The only innovative proposal in Westminster terms was a new Coalition Committee, “co-chaired by the prime minister and deputy prime minister”, with equal numbers (five ministers) from each party. This was to be the main place for the resolution of major disputes but astonishingly it met only twice in 2010, and apparently never again.

The proliferation of new committees included two other curious bodies, not named in the CASR. One was called the Coalition Operation and Strategic Planning Group, co-chaired by Letwin and Alexander. This never seems to have met, shrinking from the start to cosy chats between the two co-chairs and culminating in the ill-fated mid-term review. The other was the now infamous Quad – the two leaders plus George Osborne and Alexander – which was at first a lower level means of sorting out problems which involved money. But it soon became the high level place for resolution of all disputes that could not be sorted at departmental level, signing off major Bills and sealing Coalition deals in the face of departmental and party revolts. In effect control of the Coalition had been seized in a top-level coup by the offices of the PM and DPM and the Treasury.

This top-down system fitted well with the aim, set out in the CASR, for the two parties to act as if they were one. The outcome for the Liberal Democrats is well-known. Our public support has dropped by two-thirds, our councillor base by half, and our membership by a third. It is not clear how many constituencies are now effectively derelict since the party has a rather pointless and debilitating habit of tacking them on to a neighbouring local party. But my guess is that in Great Britain at least a third of constituencies no longer have a functioning Lib Dem presence.

Where does this leave us for next time? Like everything else after 7 May, it's partly a matter of numbers. With the predicted 35 MPs or less, entering a coalition is neither practicable nor sensible. There are two kinds of coalition for the smaller party – flat or deep. You can, as in the past five years, try to have a presence in every department. Or you can go deep and take over complete departments. If we get fewer than 30 the flat system is impossible. Even with 40 or a few more it's very hard, even with more ministers from the Lords.

## SUPERFICIALLY ATTRACTIVE

Taking over whole ministries is superficially attractive, but a little thought shows that it would mean Liberal Democrat MPs and peers being whipped to support

legislation from most (wholly Conservative) departments. There were examples of this early on in the Coalition (Defra and DCMS) where the position was partly rescued by active and competent co-chairs of Liberal Democrat parliamentary committees (Andrew George and Don Foster) but with far fewer MPs there won't be many such people around.

As I pointed out in *Liberator* 368: "There will also be pressing questions of how to prevent five more coalition years from completing the destruction of the party as a countryside campaigning movement. A new marriage with the most rightwing Tory party in modern times will finish off a lot of people who are hanging on as they count down to the end of the present nightmare. A coalition with Labour will do nothing to resuscitate the party in Labour areas and is likely to result in another mass slaughter of councillors, this time against the Tories. No wonder so many Liberal Democrats at all levels of the party are secretly hoping and praying for an overall majority next May."

Well, that's not looking likely. Not only does it seem hard for a single party to get to 323 (326 minus the Speaker and Sinn Fein) but a majority formed from two parties or even more may not be possible, particularly if a Labour-SNP coalition is not on. The Tories are fed up with Coalition, Labour are wary (and a Labour-SNP coalition is being ruled out by both sides). So there is a growing belief that minority government is on the cards. Traditionally (the three post-election minority governments in the past 100 years) they haven't lasted very long. The last to survive more than two years was (perhaps significantly) the Liberal Government formed after the second election in 1910 with the support of the Irish Nationalists.

But now we have the Fixed-term Parliaments Act. There has been a lot of loose talk in the media about a minority prime minister cutting and running after a few months, but that's a lot harder than it was. It needs a two-thirds majority of the whole Commons membership (434 MPs) voting to call an early election. Or a vote of no confidence (simple majority) followed by a failure to form another government within 14 days.

Given the likely politics of this, in relation to whatever the polls may say at the time, and the unwillingness of turkeys to vote for Christmas, it will not be easy. Of course the Act can be repealed but exactly the same constraints apply. Such a repeal will have to be part of a post-election agreement, and short of a Grand Coalition that may not be achievable.

The position of the SNP is interesting, to say the least. Threats by Nicola Sturgeon to "vote down a Tory Queen's Speech" are just bluster – if it's going to be voted down, it's not going to take place. On the other hand, if she and her party are serious about sustaining a minority Labour government they are going to have

*"If we think that the future needs of this country include the existence of a radical Liberal party, we won't take part in any new Coalition unless we have at least 50 seats"*

to think hard about their role at Westminster. If they hold most Scottish seats and continue to abstain on 'English matters' they will fall into the exact trap that the Tories want to set with their "English votes for English laws" nonsense, handing the Tories an English/ Welsh majority on legislation.

And when the Commons send Bills to the Lords they will go to an SNP-free Chamber (their choice) where the very clear balance of power will be held by the Liberal Democrats. If Sturgeon wants the SNP to be treated seriously in helping to sort out Westminster – "to shake up and reform that

discredited and outdated system" on behalf of "the needs and demands of those ordinary people, wherever they are in the United Kingdom" – she'll have to find ways of taking part.

As for the Queen, she is not going to invite anyone to try to form a Government unless and until she is advised that they can survive a confidence vote. Any monarch would be foolish to turn up in her coach and trappings to read out a Queen's Speech that was at high risk of being voted down. She will wait until negotiations are completed. One idea which may be too radical for the UK is to hold an indicative vote in the Commons before she sends for a potential prime minister (which would be possible since the Speaker will be in place). On the other hand the provisions for a no confidence vote under the Fixed Term Parliament Act cannot apply until a government has been formed!

So what should we do? If we think that the future needs of this country include the existence of a radical Liberal party, we won't take part in any new Coalition unless we have at least 50 seats. A comprehensive 'confidence and supply', such as the Lib-Lab Pact is a no-no. If necessary we offer just enough, from the opposition benches, to keep a government and parliament in operation. Then we use our pivotal position in that parliament, in both Houses and outside, to reform how it works. To sustain a more democratic set-up in which on legislation the government proposes and parliament disposes. And in which on holding the government accountable the system begins to work.

Outside Parliament? We set about the task of rebuilding our party and our movement – both what we stand for and what we do.

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Tony Greaves is a Liberal Democrat member of the House of Lords

# ACTING EARLY

## Early intervention on education, parenting support or mental health can improve people's life chances, says Claire Tyler

We all know that life is intrinsically unfair with some people dealt a far better hand than others. But it's only the last couple of years while working on the pre-school years that I've fully come to realise what an incredible difference to later life chances those first few years make.

The research is simply piling up. By age five, children from low-income families are more than a year behind their more affluent peers when it comes to vocabulary and cognitive development. So what's to be done?

When I attended the recent launch of the Early Intervention Foundation's report *Spending on Late Intervention*, we were presented with some staggering figures. (Late intervention refers to services that people receive once they experience severe difficulties including spending on crime, child protection, mental health problems).

We spend some £17bn on late intervention for children. The tragedy is – both for the individuals affected and for the public purse – much of this could be saved with smart investment in early intervention. Simply put, prevention is better than cure. Research clearly shows that the earlier we intervene to resolve a problem, the more cost effective it will be and the greater the long-term effect.

Liberal Democrats have long recognised the potential of early intervention. We understand the empowering potential of a first class education for everyone, irrespective of background, and I see it as one of our enduring core values. Within the coalition government, Lib Dem ministers – to their credit - have worked hard to ensure that disadvantaged children get a fairer start in life by introducing the early education entitlement to all three- and four-year-olds and to disadvantaged two-year-olds and more recently through the Early Years Pupil Premium.

### ENORMOUS POTENTIAL

In my work on the Lords Select Committee on Affordable Childcare, we were constantly reminded by those giving evidence of the enormous potential of early education to narrow the attainment gap and break the cycle of inter-generational poverty. Large-scale studies have shown that children receiving high quality early education achieve better academic outcomes and increased lifetime earnings. These effects are particularly marked for disadvantaged children.

Yet, we also heard evidence that the early education entitlement as currently provided, is often not of sufficiently high quality to achieve these benefits. Recent research from the Nuffield Foundation indicated that the effects of the early education entitlement on disadvantaged children's cognitive development are modest, and can disappear by primary school. This must be a matter of real concern for policy makers and practitioners alike - not only

are we failing to harness the full potential of early education but in addition the state's childcare/early years' policy is not achieving value for money.

I was pleased that the committee recognised the particular importance of early education to improved social mobility and produced a report that prioritises the interests of disadvantaged children. It's also good news that as from April, the Early Years Pupil Premium will give additional funding to early years settings that work with disadvantaged children to ensure they can invest in the resources they need.

But we need more sustained action to ensure that the early education produces sustained effects. The private, voluntary, and independent sector (known in the trade as the PVI sector), which provides the early education entitlement to most children, needs to be resourced to offer high quality provision. So, rather than underfunding hours provided by PVI as at present, local authorities should tie funding to quality. At the same time, we need to steadily raise qualifications levels in the PVI sector. It is the qualifications of the staff - specifically, the presence of graduate leadership - that accounts for the main difference in the quality in the sector in advantaged areas compared to those in disadvantaged areas.

So far so good. But it was also made clear to the Select Committee that early education, while critical, is not sufficient to address social mobility and inter-generational poverty.

As Professor Cathy Nutbrown, the author of the Nutbrown Review into childcare qualifications, memorably said: "The 15 hours cannot make up for all the other hours in the week."

When poor children are already nine months behind in cognitive development compared to their more advantaged peers, even the best early education will not be enough to make up the difference. A child's home environment and relationship with their parent(s) can be the defining factor. Indeed, research suggests that effective parenting has an even bigger influence on a child's outcome than income, class, or educational attainment. As the All Party Group on Social Mobility said in its 2012 report *The Seven Key Truths of Social Mobility*, "the point of greatest leverage for social mobility is what happens between the ages of 0 and 3, primarily in the home".

As co-chair of the recent Parliamentary Inquiry into Parenting and Social Mobility, I argued for more consistent and accessible parenting support including a national parenting campaign conveying simple and clear messages about child development to parents. Our recently published report found that parenting support in the UK is highly fragmented and variable in success. Some programmes are very favourably received: for example, 92% of those who participated in CANparent classes gave positive feedback and 94% would recommend the programme to other parents.

That said, it's undeniable there can be a stigma

around seeking and receiving help with parenting, which is totally understandable. Some parenting programmes seem to emphasise what parents are doing 'wrong' and target certain groups or practices, giving parents the feeling that they are being singled out for blame.

## NANNY STATE

As a consequence, some parents just don't want to get involved. Contrary to the populist view that this sort of activity represents the 'nanny state' at its worst, these programmes aren't trying to supplant the role of parents, but rather, when done well, can empower parents to be the sort of parents they want to be, by providing up-to-date information about child development and giving parents the opportunity to get advice and support from trained professionals. This can be particularly helpful for parents who, through no fault of their own, did not themselves receive good quality and consistent parenting.

## SEEN AS NORMAL

I hope that in the future, rather like antenatal classes, parenting support becomes seen as a normal part of being a parent. Indeed some of the best classes are formed from parents who have already been together as an antenatal group. In Sweden it is becoming common practice for expectant parents to be invited antenatally to join a group in their local community which provides the hub for everything that follows. As a result attendance at parenting groups is high across all social groups.

It's important also when we talk of supporting parents, we do not slip into talking exclusively about mothers. It should surprise no-one that norms about family and caring responsibilities are shifting—according to a Bright Horizons survey fathers, and young fathers especially, increasingly want to reduce the number of hours they work and are more concerned about their work-life balance.

Yet, parenting programmes and indeed Children's Centres are still too often designed with mothers in mind. The government could do more on this front. A national 'fathers and children' reading campaign would be a good start.

To ensure that the early years remains high on the political agenda of an incoming government, the inquiry also supported the calls of others for a cabinet level minister of children and families, who could work between departments to develop and implement this agenda.

The potential for early intervention is not limited to improving social mobility, important as that is.

Take criminal justice: we spend £32bn a year on criminal justice. Yet, 30% of crimes are committed by people who had conduct disorders as children - if parents had access to resources to help them respond constructively to their children's behaviour, perhaps these instances of crime could have been prevented?

The Royal College of Psychiatrists reports that while addressing a child's conduct disorder through a parenting programme costs about £1,750 per case, the cost to society of severe behaviour disorder is around £260,000 per person.

And then there's mental health. We spend almost £12bn a year on mental health services to cope with the one in four people who will experience a mental

health problem at some point.

Yet dig more deeply and you find that 75% of all mental health problems begin before the age of 18 and half by age 14. Those involved in the field know that CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) has always been a Cinderella service: indeed some have dubbed it the Cinderella of the Cinderella Service that for too long adult mental health has been.

You can see why when you realise that only some 6% of the available mental health budget is spent on children's and young people's mental health. It's hardly surprising therefore that it's been highly fragmented, hard to access, had very long waiting lists and the help that is available simply comes too late.

So I was delighted with the recent announcement by Nick Clegg – in advance of the election campaign - that the Government is committing £1.25bn over five years to improving mental health services for children and young people linked to access and waiting time standards, better help for children under five and disabled children, as well as perinatal health.

The timing means that the money is in the base-line for any incoming government and that these services can finally start getting more into prevention and early intervention.

Coupled with the newly published report of the Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing Taskforce launched by Norman Lamb, which sets out a blueprint for transforming services, there is finally cause for some optimism in this long neglected area.

The seeds of adult mental health problems often begin at or even before birth. As many as 20% of women experience perinatal mental health problems. Not only are such experiences difficult for the mother, they can have lifelong effects for the child.

According to the Building Great Britons report by the First 1001 Days All-Party Parliamentary Group, the odds of a child developing depression by age 16 are nearly five times greater if their mother experienced perinatal depression. Yet less than 15% of localities provide perinatal mental health services at the level recommended in national guidance and 40% provide none. It doesn't have to be this way. We have in schools a golden opportunity to support children and young people's social and emotional well-being in a non-stigmatising way. That why I would like to see personal, social, and health education a mandatory part of the curriculum in all primary and secondary schools.

To conclude, effective programmes have demonstrated that whether it's parenting support, early years education or mental health, early intervention can mean the difference between a lifetime of disadvantage and one of fair chances for advancement.

In early intervention, we have the rare chance to invest in programmes that are in the best interests of both people who stand to benefit and the public purse. We can't afford to miss it.

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Claire Tyler is a Liberal Democrat member of the House of Lords and served on its select committee on affordable childcare, chaired the Parliamentary Inquiry into Parenting and Social Mobility, and is co-chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on social mobility.

# TRIBAL LOYALTY

## Is Labour really part of any ‘progressive alliance’, wonders David Thorpe

It is a term pregnant with a promise of the ages, ‘progressive alliance’, the idea that Britain has a progressive majority, wrenched from governing in the progressive way by historic splits.

In an electoral environment as feral, populist and besieged by such a spirit of counter-intellectualism that the nationalisms of England (via Ukip) and Scotland are setting the tone of the election, it is a matter of debate as to whether Britain truly is in a progressive place right now.

But such a discussion is not the purpose of this article, rather it is to examine on the electoral outcomes favoured by many Liberals seeking to build a progressive consensus at this time, a progressive coalition with the Labour Party.

No Liberal would claim that the coalition with the Tories has been anything other than at best, a pragmatic arrangement, and certainly nothing as wholesome as a progressive alliance,

Now, I am none of the wiser as to what options the electoral cards will place before us after the election this May, but progressives must surely hope that, how the Liberal Democrats act in any subsequent negotiations is framed by empiricism, rather than the sentimentality that often attaches itself to talk of a progressive majority.

No one would claim that the Conservative party is progressive, though in their history occasional dollops of enlightenment have pierced the mordant, insular way that party seeks to run Britain.

But it is my contention that, in its present incarnation, the Labour party is no more capable of governing from the plinth of progress than are the Tories, even if the legacy of every Labour government, including the unlamented Blair era, has been at least some movement towards a progressive Britain.

The principal reason why liberals should look through the glass darkly at the incumbent Labour Party’s pitch to be a progressive movement comes at the very top of the dial, Miliband and his ilk’s desire to deploy a ‘35%’ strategy.

Such an idea, that 31-32% of the population will always vote Labour and another 3-4% can be garnered from the crumbs of voters discontent with other parties, is inherently counter to the enlightenment principles of the progressive movement because it is a tribal notion.

Bidding to entrench the superiority of one tribe over everyone else’s creates a dark dynamic, where the principle of evidence-based policy making must be secondary to the concerns and biases of the tribe.

This approach damages the cause of progress in several ways. The first is that the assured loyalty of the 31-32% removes the ‘moral hazard’ from Labour’s policy making process, by not having to worry about harming such a large proportion of the population, the accountability and ‘checks and balances’ that ensure

a progressive movement stays outward looking are diminished.

Instead the power drops into the hands of a much smaller group, a combination of those within the tribe most capable of wielding power for their own interests, such as special interest groups and lobbyists, who by looking only inwardly understand more how to exercise the levers of power, and don’t have to look outward at the 31-32% as they will be onside anyway.

Power also drops into the hands of 3-4 more percent that are disgruntled with some other party, and fuelled by resentment, shout loudest for attention.

Every party wants them, but the party without the moral hazard has less to lose by dancing to the whim of a group which, because it is adrift from the movement from whence it came, is looking for short-term gratification.

Because Labour has the least to lose with this group in the current climate and with its 35% strategy, it is the most susceptible to framing policies in the interests of that group, rather than in the interests of empiricism and progress.

Thus Labour swings away from the granite of evidence based policy making in the areas of emigration and the economy, and towards the swamplier ground of what the great 19th century liberal Edmund Burke called “the howling, swinish mob”, and unlike the Liberal Democrats, because of that 31-21% of tribal vote, they don’t have to worry about the impacts of rash or self-interested policy making on the core vote.

This article should not in any way be read as against the principle of entering coalition with Labour in May or any other time.

Rather it is a call that the discussions of the Liberal Democrats charged with creating such an alliance be framed in the same pragmatic portmanteau as the 2010 coalition with the Conservatives, and not as a sentimentalised encomium to an apparent shared history.

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

# LOST BEFORE IT'S CALLED

## Any referendum on European Union membership may be held in a more hostile climate than pro-Europeans like to think, says Graham Watson

Before Liberal Democrats commit to supporting the Conservatives in a second term of office - should the opportunity exist after 7 May - the question of a referendum on EU membership bears some thought.

In Scotland, voters were asked to choose between (broadly) a status quo which they know and a self-government which they were equipped at least to imagine.

A referendum on whether to remain in the EU will be marked by precious little public knowledge either of the status quo or the alternative. For that reason, if no other, Gladstone's maxim of 'trust in the people, qualified by prudence' should not guide our leaders.

But there are more important reasons why for Liberal Democrats to concede a referendum would be dangerous. However much experienced pollsters like Peter Kellner might protest that public opinion now is similar to that a year prior to the 1975 referendum (i.e. slightly more hostile than favourable, but with a broadly neutral centre capable of being won over), the conditions for campaigning in such a referendum have changed markedly.

First, in 1975 the business community capable of financing a campaign was overwhelmingly in favour of remaining in the EU. The 'Yes' campaign outspent the 'No' campaign by a factor of twelve to one. Today, while the bulk of UK industry remains favourable to continued membership, important and wealthy sections of industry (hedge funds in the City, who favour regulation from nobody, least of all Brussels) will finance the campaign for withdrawal. The financing of the anti-European case may be boosted by US neo-liberal or tea party interests. Moreover, shareholder control of how company funds are spent is stronger; and the Electoral Commission now has a duty to set limits which balance spending between the two camps.

Second, while the broadcast media in 1975 was more susceptible to influence by government and the print media more reflective of a common 'establishment' view, the explosion of outlets since 1975 and the recent switch in the support of the Daily Express to Ukip simply adds to the anti-EU sentiment spread by the dominant Murdoch faction, aided and abetted by Paul Dacre's Daily Mail. And social media, while a great unknown, has hardly been a haven hitherto of pro-EU sentiment.

Third, the condition of the continent is deteriorating. It is not too far-fetched to imagine that by 2017 Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia will be de facto under Russian control, Greece will have left the euro, Spain will be breaking up, Marine Le Pen will be president of France and there will be large weekly anti-immigrant Pegida rallies in Germany. If the eurozone

economy fails to recover and the UK has 3.5% growth, membership of the European club could look far less enticing.

Indeed, Yeats vision in *The Second Coming* of how "the best lack all conviction and the worst are full of passionate intensity", is true of today's campaigners.

The Yes campaign brings together no fewer than four competing and mutually-jealous organisations: the European Movement, Britain in Europe, Business for a New Europe and the Sainsbury-backed British Influence.

If their joint Yes campaign, bringing in the mainstream political parties, were to revolve around an appeal for the hearts and minds of Brits to Churchill's "wider patriotism and common citizenship for the distraught peoples of this powerful and turbulent continent", it might have a chance of success.

But the idea that the triptych of supranational challenges (world population growth and migration, climate change and energy security and internationally organised crime and terrorism) posits solidarity in numbers for Europeans (in a difficult and often dangerous world in which we no longer make the most important economic decisions) will appeal to Cameron, Miliband and Clegg is far-fetched. This approach is unlikely to appeal to a UK establishment which will feel comfortable arguing only the far less easily provable economic benefits which membership entails. The Yes campaign is likely to lack not only vigour and unity but also vision.

I yield to none in my admiration for the youthful enthusiasm of those who argue that once battle is enjoined the gospel will necessarily convince. Yet I recall the same being said of a referendum on electoral reform. I have much sympathy for Miliband's (or Labour campaign chief Douglas Alexander's) argument 'Labour will not hold a referendum; that is a Tory agenda'. But I suspect we may end up with one.

My pessimism of the intellect will be tempered by an optimism of the will which will see me throwing myself heart and soul into any such campaign, should there be one. But I believe we would be foisting on the public a debate in which they are ill-equipped to make fundamental judgements, harangued by a blast of anti-EU propaganda and find that the clarion of the pro-European political 'establishment' sounds an uncertain note. Moreover, recent electoral tests suggest that a willingness to show two fingers to those perceived to be of the political class remains a defining feature of our age.

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Sir Graham Watson was a Liberal Democrat MEP 1994-2014

# WHAT'S THE PROBLEM WITH LONDON?

## Why do senior Liberal Democrats ignore the capital city beyond the Palace of Westminster, asks Flick Rea

This is a question for Liberal Democrats generally - what do you think about London?

Do you think about London at all? And to most of our MPs and policy makers - do you think about anything in London outside Westminster? Do you understand London and Londoners? Do you not consider that, as one of the greatest capital cities in the world, London deserves your attention, its problems require solutions, and its views need taking into account? Why is London such a problem?

When I first joined the Liberal Party in the early 1970s, it was clear that London was considered a black hole in campaigning terms; no MPs, few councillors, and virtually no functioning local parties. Those still extant mostly held bazaars and jumble sales, coffee mornings and earnest executive meetings about the minutiae of these events. Sometimes they also held an annual dinner with a speaker on some arcane Liberal policy or, if you were lucky, one of a handful of peers. No wonder London's rating in party priorities was so low.

Subsequent successes in (mainly) south west London included the brief spell of Graham Tope as MP for Sutton and Cheam and the revival of Liberal pockets across the capital, including Tower Hamlets. Even this barely got the national party interested but I do remember attending, for the first time a London party meeting and being excited by seeing about 50 Liberal members all under one roof.

London has always had, since I can remember, a large party membership, although much of it was then very elderly, sprinkled with new young enthusiasts who were keen on community campaigning (the new formula for success).

In a Camden Council by-election in 1979 we trebled our vote from 9% to 27% and got so over-excited by this we rang the Association of Liberal Councillors at 2am to tell them! They were somewhat taken aback and said afterwards it was the first time anyone had rung them in the middle of the night to say they'd come third. We wanted to counter their view that we, in London, were a waste of space as we didn't manage to supply the sort of results achieved elsewhere in the country.

We tried to explain that the terrain was different and had its own particular problems. Canvassing and even delivering mansion blocks with entry phones required a new skill set while the large London boroughs with all-out elections every four years didn't help you to grow a local party or hold on to student activists who after graduation were dispersed all over the country, or young professionals who'd moved elsewhere because of the cost of living. We did help to train up and encourage a number of these temporary residents (I still have a picture of a very young and slim Alistair

Carmichael helping out at our local community festival) but retaining activists and getting people elected only once every four years was more difficult.

During the 1980s things looked up. The Bermondsey by-election and the amazing Simon Hughes gave us a voice for London in a new way and broke tradition by winning a Labour stronghold. We were also making our mark on several London councils - things, we thought, could only get better. The Alliance and subsequent merger with the SDP helped augment membership and bring new strengths and we began to become more ambitious and professional. London council groups grew from single figures to double, and the number of councils we controlled or where we were the principal opposition, increased.

But did the party recognise this growth? It didn't seem so. More attention was still paid, for instance, to keeping rural areas happy by not supporting higher petrol duty, than by looking at congestion in inner cities and cutting traffic.

### CHARMED CIRCLE

Environmental issues in the cities had not begun to play a leading role. London, as a policy area with its own issues, didn't figure highly. Simon remained our only MP, Party Leaders came and went - always from Scotland or the West Country - and the party still seemed to maintain its traditional anti-Tory facing stance. But London remained outside the charmed circle although by the end of the decade, we were still increasing in numbers of members, councillors and influence.

Things changed, for the better, in the 1990s when we won half a dozen Westminster seats in 1997; Simon was joined by Vince Cable, Paul Burstow, Tom Brake, Ed Davey and Jenny Tonge. We continued to maintain control or influence on a number of councils and in 1999 we had our first MEP Sarah Ludford. London was on the up.

However, we were faced with a new problem for the millennium. London was scheduled to get its own form of regional government - a mayor and an assembly in 2000.

The national party rather washed its hands of the whole issue. We weren't, it seemed, keen on Mayors and the new assembly was only the old GLC revived wasn't it? Well, no, it wasn't. It presented a whole set of new and complicated electoral problems. The Mayor was to be elected by first/ second preference voting, the constituencies (groups of 2-3 boroughs) by the traditional first-past-the-post and the 'top-up' members by the closed list system. Not only was this potentially troublesome for the electorate, the national party didn't seem interested and left it to the London Regional Party to work out.



The result? We didn't win a single constituency (some thought they had been deliberately constructed so as to deprive us of the chances of victories) but we had success with the top-up list – achieving four assembly members headed by experienced London politicians Sally Hamwee and Graham Tope.

The mayoral election was another matter – there was little or no national support for Susan Kramer's self-funded campaign and no national Lib Dem comprehension of how important this role was. Worse, there seemed little attempt to focus any national policy towards London.

Sporadic attempts have been made since, nationally, persuading both Simon Hughes and Brian Paddick to stand in the subsequent mayoral elections but still without actually understanding what matters to London. (The current Tory mayor may be regarded by some as a buffoon, but he knows what Londoners care about and has the clout to help them get it.)

Latterly, after some short-lived and spectacular successes (with a nod to those Labour voters who switched allegiance because of the Iraq war) from 2006-2010 we controlled or had a share in the control of a healthy number of London councils.

But it all started to go wrong in 2010. First because the Labour machine cranked itself up, the voters largely forgot about Iraq and, hard as we'd fought in our individual boroughs, our national policies didn't seem to resonate with Londoners. We kept all our London MPs, except the much respected Susan Kramer, but lost a tranche of councillors and control of most of the boroughs, and we did even worse than usual in the GLA/mayoral elections in 2012 where we lost the mayoral deposit and ended up with only two assembly 'list' members.

Also we were in coalition with the dreaded Tories. Remember, Inner London in particular has a left-wing history although those suburbs which used to be Kent and Surrey are more conservative in nature – and therefore traditionally more straightforward for Lib Dems to fight.

## **TERROR TACTICS**

So now east and much of inner London was back in the brutal grip of the Labour machine which controls tenants associations, school governing bodies, BME organisations, much of the voluntary sector all maintained by terror tactics ("they will take your council flat/benefits away") and the judicious use of grants and patronage (something well understood by former mayor Ken Livingstone). So after three years of the 'ConDem' coalition, most Londoners were made grumpy by either or both the mansion tax and the bedroom tax, the changes to benefits, more violence on the streets, the fragilities of the NHS and swingeing and apparently disproportionate cuts to London local authority funding and therefore gaps in local services.

Add to this discontent an invigorated and superbly oiled London Labour machine and the result was the tsunami of 2014 which removed our London MEP, 160 long-serving councillors and we were completely wiped

*"It's hard to see where a London renaissance might begin"*

out in seven boroughs for the first time since 1970. We lost control of all our councils except the sturdily yellow Sutton.

Many activists have lost heart, the few councillors left are seriously overstretched and it's hard to see where a London renaissance might begin. The opinion polls suggest that several of our

seats are at risk in May and 2016 sees the next round of GLA/ London mayoral elections. It's not hard to see a further loss of support over the next year unless the Liberal Democrats start to take London's problems seriously.

In spite of the sterling efforts by our current London MPs, the excellent assembly members Caroline Pidgeon and Stephen Knight and the few remaining councillors, we are largely regarded as irrelevant to Londoners. Sadly we also seem largely irrelevant to the national party although we have the largest regional membership in the country. So irrelevant indeed that our most recent past president, Tim Farron, never managed to speak at a single regional conference in four years.

At the most recent London regional conference we were happy to welcome Nick Clegg to help kick off the London campaign, but although he made what many thought was an inspiring speech, his reference to London and policies relevant to London was virtually non-existent.

Housing, transport, crime levels, and increasingly our environment and green spaces – all these matter to London. Yes, yes, the Lib Dems have committed to new homes, though not primarily in London; yes, we are committed to better transport, but that means unwavering support for HS2 which is anathema to much of north-west London; meanwhile the huge threats to the harmony of the multi-cultural and diverse nature of London seem to be the subject of sympathetic words but no real policy for action.

As a Londoner I make no excuse for being London centric but it would be great to know that the rest of the party cares what happens in the capital - the engine-room of the UK.

London needs the support and resources and the policies which often seem in short supply from the Liberal Democrats. Why? Because we're worth it.

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Flick Rea is a Liberal Democrat councillor in Camden and a former regional party administrator.

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# SOUTH AMERICA'S LOST CORNER

Ever wondered what one of the odd shapes on euro note is? Its French Guiana, and next door is equally little-known Suriname. Jonathan Fryer reports

The French were much more effective at hanging on to their vestiges of empire than their colonial rivals.

When it came to delectable islands in the Indian Ocean (Réunion and Mayotte) and the Caribbean (Martinique and Guadeloupe), they just made them part of metropolitan France – and therefore now part of the EU, though not of the Schengen area – offering them a few token MPs in the national assembly in Paris.

The fifth and by far the largest such Overseas Department of France is French Guiana, on the north-east mainland of South America, which is also the strangest of all.

You may know it, at least from a distance, if you read the memoirs of the convicted murderer Papillon (part fantasy, part fact) or saw the eponymous film with Steve McQueen and Dustin Hoffman. Or if you studied the Dreyfus affair when you were at school.

Poor Captain Dreyfus, a victim of French anti-Semitism and wrongly convicted of treason, was sent off to Devil's Island, just off the coast of French Guiana, from which it was impossible to escape. If one jumped into the water, one's body would be dashed against the rocks, or else the sharks would gobble you up. If Papillon (as he claimed) did escape from the penal colony in French Guiana that was in operation until the Second World War it was probably from a larger, easier island, nearer the shore, where most of the common prisoners were kept.

## RAMPANT MALARIA

Conditions were harsh and malaria was rampant in French Guiana so that even those not subsisting on hideous prison rations tended to last not very long. Not that that is obvious today. The prison complex has been turned into a boutique hotel and a comfortable catamaran does the run from the Iles de Salut, as the archipelago is known, to the mainland.

Devil's Island itself has been totally cut off since the wire linking it to its larger neighbour, along which both supplies and political prisoners like Dreyfus were transferred, collapsed. The roads in the coastal zone are as good as any two-lane highways in rural France and one might as well be in rural France for much of the time, down to the large Carrefour supermarket on the edge of the capital, Cayenne, home of the famous pepper.

Cayenne has the same population as the northern English town of Stockport, but could hardly be more different in appearance.

In the 19th and early 20th century the settlers built rather graceful wooden houses, many with balconies, while the central market is one of those cast iron affairs that one sees in French Guiana's huge neighbour, Brazil, shipped in pieces from Europe and then erected. Brazilian Portuguese is also a language heard in the market and surrounding streets. Although Brazilians, unlike EU citizens, need a special visa to visit French Guiana many have settled there, and many more infiltrate the sparsely populated south of the territory, where the only feasible means of transport is by river.

Thousands of young Brazilians have come specifically to be illegal gold miners, using hydraulic methods and mercury that are dangerous for the environment as well as to them. The cafés and bars of Cayenne are much frequented by French squaddies, who are employed in trying to keep the illegal miners or garimpeiros out.

The other major security concern is the Ariane space centre, which is located near the port from which the catamarans leave for the Ile de Salut. Once a month a rocket is fired, and one gets an excellent ringside view just by standing by the seashore even in Cayenne. Officially this is the EU space programme, but the French, not surprisingly, regard it proudly as very French.





A river separates French Guiana from Suriname, formerly the Dutch colony of Guiana, though for a while it was ruled by the British and the traffic still drives on the left.

*“One really has the feeling of being in the back of beyond”*

the dengue fever that has been sweeping the forest areas.

The city of Paramaribo itself is quite extraordinary, with a mixture of whitewashed wooden Dutch colonial architecture, little shacks and huge concrete casinos – 40 of them, to be precise – which attract Brazilian tourists as well as Chinese migrant workers from the whole region.

Except in the lush grounds of the one upmarket hotel in Paramaribo one really has the feeling of being in the back of beyond, which one is. Well away from the eyes and events of the outside world, in a place where drug smuggling, gold panning and unconventional politics can flourish without anyone overseas much caring.

But it’s rather wonderful being somewhere where there is no Starbucks and one sometimes wonders what on earth one is eating. It is indeed the lost corner of South America, and long may it remain so in our globalising, homogenising world.

## COUP BY PHONE

Suriname hit the world’s headlines back in the early 1980s when there was a series of coups and counter coups, one of the latter notably being carried out by means of a telephone call. Interestingly, the erstwhile military dictator, Desi Bouterse, who was tried in absentia in the Netherlands on drug charges, succeeded in getting himself elected as civilian president in 2010. His office in the capital Paramaribo, which is almost next door to the diminutive parliament that bears a startling resemblance to Croydon’s pre-war airport, seems to have just a couple of soldiers on guard. One afternoon I and a few passers-by casually waved to the president as he came out and clambered into his land cruiser.

I was in Paramaribo to do an atmospheric piece for the BBC on the city and the fate of the Brazilian garimpeiros who go to Suriname in quest of their fortune, just as they do in French Guiana.

Brazilians don’t need visas in Suriname and the authorities believe there are probably about 40,000 of them – which is almost 10% of the country’s population. As in French Guiana, most of the human settlement – except for the indigenous Amerindians – is along the coast and the miners up country are in danger from

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Jonathan Fryer is a broadcaster and Liberal Democrat activist.



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**The Prostitute State, how Britain's Democracy has been bought**  
by **Donnachadh McCarthy**  
**3 Acorns Publications 2**  
**Coleman Road London**  
**SE5 7TG 2014 £12**

This is a very disturbing book, particularly so for Liberals and Liberal Democrats, because that is where Donnachadh's mainstream political experiences took place, but it would be naïve to interpret or use this book as an attack on the Liberal Democrats, because the same situation in the Labour and Conservative parties is much worse.

What is the problem? It is the position and influence of lobbyists, usually corporate lobbyists, within the political system; how it extends to (or comes from) the media and permeates academia. Even the Green party is not immune.

Anecdotally, Donnachadh told a meeting, when this question was raised, of how he had criticised the recyclability of Tetra packs in an article for *The Independent*, only to receive a defence from a party member, who was in turn a lobbyist for a manufacturer. His advice to Green party members – read this book, learn and apply, before it is too late.

I sometimes wonder what a number of people that I've known through politics actually do. A lot of them fall into the category of public relations or lobbyists.

To get things straight, I describe myself as an intellectual properties consultant – that is, I advise and help people in a specialist area of law concerning (mainly) trade marks, patents, copyright and the like. People can do these things for themselves, but alas, in my experience, frequently fall short of the fast moving complexities of the field.

On occasions I've employed (or attempted to employ) people in PR or worked for them. The opinion that I formed, which has been backed up by people working in the field, is that they by-and-large know nothing in particular, except perhaps that they may have made useful contacts and may have some experience of the systems in which those people operate. I'm aware of some of the



# REVIEWS

campaigns that such people have led, in the course of their jobs, and would not necessarily fault them on these. Typically some of these people had been blazing a trail for the party across the 1970s and 1980s, had no particular career development outside of politics, and when needs must, found themselves gravitating to PR as a job that matched their skills.

I've always been a long haul man. I recall a conversation – why did Holme have so much influence in the party? The reply was not so much about money, simply that he gravitated in the right circles and was 'available' to do things (in an under-resourced party) when something like a general election came up.

As I said, this is a deeply disturbing book. Much of its content is in the public domain, but Donnachadh has brought it together, exposing the extent to which lobbyists promote a narrow range of vested interests across the body politic, the media, and academia. In addition to this he exposes the relationship between these and the use of tax havens. While we may not be too surprised about the extent of this within the Labour and Conservative parties, the degree to which it penetrates the Liberal Democrats is distressing.

Included is a non-exhaustive list of prominent LDs who are caught up in the lobbying gutter. At a recent gathering of Liberal activists, of both social and economic persuasions, I canvassed opinions of those listed – were they the good, the bad or the ugly? The results were mixed and not always predictably so. While the youngest member of the panel frequently didn't know who the people in question were, older members may have interacted with some of those on the list since at least the 1970s. This tended to promote more positive views, where as more recent arrivistes were seen through from the outset.

There is a serious international issue, which is the extent to which corporate lobbying is associated with off-shore tax havens. This is probably an issue that has to be dealt with at the supra-national level (if it is not too late, in terms of the turkeys voting



The late Richard Holme features heavily – I first came across Holme when he was Liberal PPC for Braintree. David Scott had turned the new seat into a three-way marginal in February 1974, but had burnt himself out in the process. The seat was thus attractive and Holme jumped in. He expressed some fairly dodgy views to my mind, calling for a kind of National Service for youth – perhaps something like the American Peace Corps – but it wasn't anything neighbouring Young Liberals would have much truck with.

He was always suspect, and later became associated with the 'quick fix' in politics – something much loved by that ilk, whereas

for Christmas, which bedevilled Donnachadh's struggles within the Lib Dems).

Depressed, Donnachadh urged me to read on to his final chapter which calls for The 21st Century Great Democratic Reform Act. We certainly need it and among others, the proposals of the European Initiative for Media Pluralism are very sound.

But what of controlling the lobby? Certainly necessary, but would it be like asking the turkeys to vote for Christmas, as has been seen in the feeble attempts at bank and media reform under the Coalition government.

Donnachadh's message should by now be well rehearsed in Liberal Democrat circles, though his departure will make it less familiar to newer members. In terms of saving the planet, first get your own life in order, then extend it to your institutions; stop sponsoring the corporates in your buying, support local small scale capitalism, every penny you spend in a mainstream supermarket is likely to be sponsoring tax avoidance through the prostitute state.

He has been impressed by the Occupy movement and advocates non-violent direct action. Donnachadh perceives the corrupted media to be the weakest pillar of the prostitute state.

There is likely to be much soul searching in the Liberal Democrats in a few months time; an excellent opportunity for them to clean up their act. This book gives much food for thought in that process.

Stewart Rayment

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## **The Rise of the Islamic State: ISIS and the new Sunni Revolution by Patrick Cockburn Verso Books 2015**

Patrick Cockburn is a Middle East correspondent for the Independent. He has written a short and intelligent history of the Islamic State based on a book which was originally published last August and recently updated to include the siege of Kobane. It manages to capture that sense of journalism and immediacy which means it is a compulsively good read, but also be historically accurate and politically incisive.

Principally Cockburn's opinion is that it was the war in Syria that provided the conditions for ISIS to flourish in a destabilised Iraq rather than Maliki's sectarian policies.

It was the belief by the west that Assad was going to be defeated which was the most serious mistake, despite his backing by Russia, Iran and Hezbollah. This view runs counter to much current political narrative that it was the US and British invasion as part of the failed 'war on terror' in 2003 which fundamentally led to the rise of ISIS.

However, there is no doubt that the invasion left behind a weak Iraqi state, crippled by corruption and religious sectarianism, which was totally incapable of effective governance which provided the pre-conditions for ISIS to make the progress it did.

There is also no doubt that after the election in 2014, Maliki's handling of the post election negotiations, refusal of the offer from the Peshmerga to deploy against ISIS - seeing it as a land grab - and the arming of the Shi'a militias was a factor in allowing ISIS to consolidate power in northern and western Iraq. Even after the handover of power to Al-Abadi the degree of political change was exaggerated and he was unable to fill the posts of defence and interior ministers until October.

Cockburn provides a devastating analysis of the shortfalls of the western security agencies that misread the signs, underestimated the capability of ISIS and were taken by surprise by the fall of Mosul in June 2014. Why they did is one of the themes of the book and explored well.

There is no doubt that the security forces should have understood the prison break out of Abu Ghraib in September 2013, which demonstrated the military strategy and operational capacity of ISIS. In my view the security services should have also understood sooner the hybridisation of warfare between terrorist, guerrilla and conventional that ISIS displayed.

Cockburn also spares no quarter for US foreign policy particularly the failure to act against Jihadi sponsors in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan in the aftermath of 9/11.

I have recently returned from 18

months in Baghdad watching the drama unfold and my view is that Cockburn has called it right every step of the way. He gets under the skin of Iraq and particularly Baghdad, as we were waiting for ISIS to attack - although he was flying in as I was being evacuated out. The rumours among our Iraqi colleagues were that the ISIS would invade Baghdad or Shi'a militias would restart their regime of brutal violence and many left either for Erbil or outside Iraq. We grew pretty used to hearing the car bombs, but they took on a new significance as possibly the beginning of the invasion of Baghdad.

From Erbil I watched the siege of the Yezidis on CNN, saw the heartbreaking sight of Christian displaced persons camping in half finished buildings and listened to the coalition bombing during the night. Old men in their ancient Peshmerga uniforms stood on street corners ready to protect their street from the ISIS advance.

We are watching Iraq shatter into pieces; it is unlikely that it can ever be governed from Baghdad again. The Kurds, who were already pressing for independence, are buoyed by the effectiveness of the Peshmerga, which has probably increased the strength of their claim, particularly when contrasted against the performance of the Iraqi army.

Shi'a militia are a significant force fighting ISIS to retake Tikrit and Iran's influence in Iraq looks set to consolidate for some time leading to further pressure on the prime minister and remaining Sunnis in the south of the country.

The book offers no answers to how the west should address this - probably because there are none. The air strikes are limited in effectiveness, although it is widely agreed they probably prevented an all out attack on Erbil in August 2014.

The war in Syria shows no signs of concluding, ISIS affiliated groups are consolidating territory around the Mediterranean and the call of Jihad is spreading to western countries and causing bloodshed in Denmark, France and the UK.

That the west so fundamentally misread recent political events, underestimated ISIS and so ineptly implemented their foreign policy means we will live with the

consequences for a very long time.  
Sue Simmonds

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## **Chance Encounters by Tim Razzall Biteback 2014**

Tim Razzall has spent a long time in Liberal and Liberal Democrat politics, and although best known as a successful lawyer, party fundraiser and peer he has a serious record in local government in Richmond too.

To be honest, the chapters in this autobiography about Razzall's early life and business career are likely to interest only those close to him.

For most other readers, the main things will be Razzall's position close to the heart of every general election campaign from 1987 onwards and his role in raising funds and fending off those who thought they could buy peerages.

It's written in a slightly random way so that, for example, the 2013 allegation against Chris Rennard appear in a section otherwise devoted to the 2001 general election, and speculation about why Des Wilson fell out so thoroughly with both Paddy Ashdown and the party peters out inconclusively.

Razzall's account of the 1992 general election campaign's disastrous lurch into talking about hung parliaments (opposed by Wilson) is interesting for its analysis of why it failed, as is his judgement on why Ashdown ultimately got nothing from Tony Blair - Ashdown was convinced that Lib Dem fortunes were tied to Labour's when in fact the party flourished as Labour fell from its peak in the 2001-07 period.

We learn though much about the extent to which Lib-Lab co-operation carried on in to the Charles Kennedy era.

While Kennedy is usually credited with knocking the joint cabinet committee and 'the project' on the head, Razzall says both parties co-operated in the 2001 election to ensure their fire was directed most effectively against the Tories rather than (with a few exceptions like Bermondsey and Chesterfield) each other. This was repeated in more limited way in 2005, the Iraq war having driven a wedge between the two parties.

The book also explains how the party came to accept the notorious donation from Michael Brown

and how it also gained some donations from people so rich they subsequently forgot their largesse and claimed to have always been Tories.

Razzall was close to Charles Kennedy and, while admitting the latter's drink problem, sees his downfall as part of a wider conspiracy by supporters of Menzies Campbell, and others. He adds the startling statement that, 'the conspirators' (those opposed to Kennedy) had induced the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust to finance them, though does not explain how, or why the trust acceded to this.

It's fair enough to write an amiable book that does not seek to settle scores, but there is feeling of punches pulled at crucial moments.

Mark Smulian

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## **Indonesia etc. exploring the improbable nation by Elizabeth Pisani Granta 2014 £18.99**

While idly surfing the Liberal International website I came across a reference that former president Suharto was an individual member - the reference can no longer be found. Martin Lee is our only individual member.

I was surprised, because I recalled him as leader of a military dominated government, brutal in its suppression of Communists, who would later invade East Timor. LI could throw no light on the matter - but thought it unlikely - could the worm have turned?

LI has the Partai Demokrat as observer member in Indonesia (but they have not been active in the last two years) of now ex-president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, while in the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD) the member party is the PDI-P of the new president Jokowi. I know next to nothing of Indonesia; it has the largest Moslem population in the world, but four other official religions (discounting the animism and ancestor worship otherwise widely practiced).

Nationalists took over from the Dutch at the end of World War 2, first under Sukharno, (perceived as too left-wing by the west, and with imperial ambitions against Malaysia) who was ousted by Suharto.

News from Indonesia in January

of the execution of six drug mules, has not unreasonably, outraged the world. Dutch Liberal Prime Minister Mark Rutte has recalled his ambassador in protest, since one of the victims was a Dutch national.

Indonesia is clearly a country we need to know more about. By virtue of its size alone it is among the coming nations. It is on the fault line of conflicts with radical Islam. Pisani as a journalist in the field has chosen to explore the country widely and gives us an entertaining introduction telling us more about the people than we might get from a drier academic text, which, for example, might tell us about the multiplicity of environmental laws, but miss the chaos of the system on the ground.

We worry about the Amazon, but forget about Indonesia. Time to rethink all that and Indonesia etc. is an excellent introduction.

Stewart Rayment

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## **Owning the Future: Lindiwe Mazibuko and the Changing Face of the DA by Donwald Pressly Kwela Books, 2013**

Lindiwe Mazibuko is one of the most exciting political figures in the world. From

2011-14, she was the South African Democratic Alliance's parliamentary leader of the opposition, just three years after she came to public attention. She is the youngest MP to ever lead a party in parliament in South Africa.

Donwald Pressly's book was written in the run-up to the 2014 general election.

Given Ms Mazibuko is having a sabbatical year off at Harvard, it might seem late for this review. As it is anticipated she will resume politics on return to SA, I hope this review is a little early.

My first impression of this book is that it was not what I expected. I thought the author would know a lot about Ms Mazibuko and be favourable to her, and he is.

However, this book is not a typical biography. It does not tell you much about her childhood; you aren't told she spent a year working at the Notting Hill branch of

Starbucks or about the university

work which brought her to the attention of party leader Helen Zille. No, this book goes straight in to focus on three intense years of her life and more particularly, three years in the life of the DA. You have really got to be interested in the minutiae of South African politics to get through his. There are only a few anecdotes about Ms Mazibuko's life. This is tough high octane journalistic politics reporting. You must be up to speed with events like the Nkandla scandal and DA strategy and what happens in the Western Cape province, which the DA runs.

Pressly has a keen interest in some events and rewards us with pages and pages, causing me to wish he had reined himself in. At times, it is a bit too much. For a South African reader, it may not be. They can see how the DA was challenging the electoral fortress of the ANC, wrestling with plans to look and be more like South Africa.

So the reader learns a lot about the DA. Interesting so long as you are in the loop.

Other political players are discussed, the ANC in detail, fairly depressingly. You have to shake yourself to realise, yes, this was the party of Nelson Mandela, only recognisable now as the sort of outfit eastern Europeans said goodbye to years ago. Julius Malema turns up on various pages.

One of the key issues prior to the 2014 elections was the break-up of the planned alliance with Mamphele Ramphele. Towards the end of the book, it's a topic you know Pressly will cover in detail from his ringside seat and he does.

A book which can be recommended to some, particularly to those who want to see South African remain a vibrant democracy with a strong competing opposition party ready to take over. If they do, you will have Donwald Pressly's assurance

Lindiwe Mazibuko is the right person for the tasks ahead.

John Pindar

## **Inventing the Individual, the Origins of Western Liberalism** **by Larry Siedentop.** **Allen Lane, 2014**

"The canonists' egalitarian concern for individual conscience and free will led them gradually to recast natural law as a system of natural rights: pre-social or moral rights inhering in the individual. In that way, the canonists converted the primordial Christian concern with 'innerness' into the language of law. That conversion laid the foundation of modern liberalism."

By the time Larry Siedentop makes that statement, we've already had 12 centuries of Christianity. Early in this book I realised that I would have to reconsider Paul. I have conventionally argued that any understanding of western Liberalism had to begin with Christianity.

Either man is born fallen and therefore needs to be governed, which is an authoritarian (conservative, most socialists) view, or man is not fallen, or if he is, is capable of redemption and quite capable of governing himself – the liberal view. The Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles are thoroughly radical documents, but the Letters seemed to constitute a reining in, an orthodoxy.

This led me to conclude that there wasn't much wrong with early Christianity until it fell into the hands of Paul and Constantine. My reading of the New Testament seemed to confirm that view. While there are clear roots, you can't really talk about Liberalism as a political philosophy before revolutions of the late 18th century, a liking for Machiavelli and Milton aside, I've paid little attention to anything between them and Plato. Now I have to look deeper.

Siedentop causes me to rethink a lot of this. Insofar as I'd given any consideration to proto-Liberalism before the 17th century, there were family connections, and the high-points of the Whig interpretation.

While one doesn't doubt that the barons of Magna Carta were no less robbers than good King John, their actions had unforeseen outcomes; ditto the appalling de Montforts. To an extent Siedentop follows a similar thesis. The Christian

focus on the individual soul as the point of redemption would slowly percolate down; the soul of the emperor and the soul of a slave are equal in the eyes of God. This in turn would eventually lead to a Christian rejection of slavery and serfdom in its progressive projections.

Siedentop is an American political philosopher who has spent most of his academic career in Oxford, where he studied under Isaiah Berlin. His major interest has been in French 18th and 19th century philosophers, his work on De Maistre perhaps influencing Berlin and sowing some of the seeds of the present volume (De Maistre holding the erroneous view that the Roman Pope should have ultimate authority in temporal matters).

His work on François Guizot has a clear stamp on the work. Siedentop follows Hazlitt as an editor of the *Histoire de la civilisation en Europe* (1828 [Penguin 1998]). There is also a biography of De Tocqueville (OUP 1994), who influences Siedentop's *Democracy in Europe* (2002), which doesn't mince words about the difficulties of establishing a supranational democratic state.

Guizot, notably commenting on a post-revolutionary France where market forces had created a democratic capitalist society that could not return to aristocratic privilege, but at the cost of an over-bearing bureaucracy and lack of autonomy, tells us something of the development of the European Union.

A classical Liberal, Siedentop regrets that modern Liberalism, particularly in Europe, has practically reduced itself to an economic doctrine; for Siedentop the central value of Liberalism is equal liberty. He regards utilitarianism as a heresy – reductionist.

Post-war thinkers like Berlin and Rawls have paid too little attention to the state. We can't have everything and it is a shame that as we move closer to modern times we lose the detail that Siedentop paid to the early Christians – the next volume maybe? I hope so.

Stewart Rayment

What scenes we have enjoyed in Leicester this week! The eyes of the world have been upon us as we reentered Richard III – and I know for a fact that more than one envious city mayor has given instructions for all his city’s car parks to be dug up Just In Case. I won’t pretend to have agreed with every detail of the celebrations: whilst I agree it was a nice touch to give the old boy a ride round on the Sunday, I couldn’t help feeling that taking him back to the battlefield at Bosworth was a trifle tactless. Couldn’t he have gone to Twycross Zoo or Foxton locks instead?

The only sour note was that, on my way to the service, I came upon Polly Toynbee touring the streets of the city on a Fabian ‘National Efficiency’ Women’s Bicycle waving a megaphone. “Go home, you fools!” she bellowed. “We don’t want a monarchy. We want an elected President like Tony Blair or Gordon Brown or Doctor David Owen of the Continuing SDP.” When she stopped and attempted to sell the crowd her latest book *A Lot of Figures Showing I am Right About Everything and You Ought to Vote the Way I Tell You*, she is pelted with out-of-code pork pies. The citizens of Leicester have much to be proud of.

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To my solicitor to discuss the latest turn in my legal action against MegaGalactic Studios of Hollywood, CA. Perhaps you remember the film *Speed*, which was released some years ago? It concerned a bus with a bomb on board that would go off pop is said bus’s speed fell below a certain figure. Well, here’s the thing, that film’s plot, twist for twist, was copied from a film we made at Oakham Studios back in the 1970s.

Seeking actors who were well versed in the practicalities of operating a bus, I hit upon the idea of recruiting the cast on *On the Buses* en bloc. The result was that *Bomb on the Buses* was wildly popular – who could forget the scene where poor Olive is rescued from the speeding bus? Lines of dialogue such as “Blimey, Stan, keep your foot down” and “Don’t you dare touch that brake, Butler” were on everyone’s lips. I leave the office having given the instruction to instruct counsel.

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The North Norfolk coast has long been a favourite stamping ground of mine. I often bring the Great Seal of Rutland to Blakeney Point for a holiday, and as a young man I would go to Cromer to catch the crabs. I was summoned here yesterday by a tearful telephone call: “The road has been jam-packed with traffic for weeks. We

# Lord Bonkers’ Diary

can’t get in our out of the house. My children are hungry. Please, you must do something.” When I heard the address of my caller, my ears pricked up: it was the very same street in which our own Norman Lamb lives. So I travelled down to the Norfolk coast at once.

When I arrive at the road in question this morning, I do indeed find it crammed with traffic. So I tap on a few

car windows and ask the occupants why they are there. “We are friends of Norman Lamb,” says the driver of the first vehicle. “We have come to tell him that we think he should stand as leader of the Liberal Democrats.” The second car contains someone who was at university with Lamb and says much the same, as do the inhabitants of the third car (a couple who met him on holiday a few years ago) and the fourth (who used to live just round the corner from him when he was at a previous address).

When I finally manage to get to Lamb’s front door, I find him a worried man. “I don’t want to be leader – the idea had never occurred to me – but my friends just won’t leave me alone.” At this point we are interrupted by a woman whose daughter was at school with Lamb’s son and wants to urge... I expect you can guess what she wants to urge Lamb. When she has done urging and left, I tell Lamb: “It is clear to me that you have no alternative. If your neighbours are ever to enjoy a normal life again, you will have to make an announcement that you will be a candidate for the leadership of the Liberal Democrats the very next time there is a vacancy. Only then will your friends leave you alone.”

I return to my hotel confident that he will do the right thing. Really, I think Norman Lamb’s friends have a lot to answer for!

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I see the Duke of Rutland has had the rozzers crawling over his Estate after one of his employees turned out to be a former Conservative MP with a conviction for caning rent boys. This shows, I feel, the importance of insisting upon references before offering someone employment. I have every confidence that my own Secretary does not get up to That Sort of Thing.

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