

# *liberator*



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# COMMENTARY

## THE OUTSIDER WINS

Tim Farron is the first Liberal Democrat or Liberal leader in recent history to have won while having an array of the most eminent party grandees - self-appointed or otherwise - ranged against him.

He was in a sense lucky to be running at a time when those associated with the previous regime were so discredited by the events of 7 May that their influence was weaker than normal.

Although Norman Lamb did not run as an 'establishment' candidate, the establishment adopted him, which probably did him no favours.

He rather unjustly never escaped being seen as the continuity candidate when the party needed a rupture with its recent past.

The campaign was rightly fought, apart from odd blips, in a generous spirit on both sides and Lamb will clearly remain an important player.

But the outsider (in political if not in betting terms) won. So what will Farron do with his victory?

He made a promising start with his recognition that if what the Liberal Democrat have to say alienates 70% of voters that does not matter because the other 30% would provide an ample electoral base.

This suggests he knows the limitations both of continuing with the delusion that the party can 'win everywhere' and with efforts to avoid controversy in case someone somewhere is offended.

That approach led to a Lib Dem core vote of pitiful size, and even long before the Coalition had forced the party into a labour-intensive effort to win most votes afresh at each election.

This worked for a while, but the recent disaster suggests a dead end. Even if the Coalition had never happened it's doubtful the Lib Dems could have continued for much longer as the party people quite liked without quite knowing why.

Farron has also shown promise in his selection of issues on which he is prepared to risk offending - championing better housing, privacy, human rights, Europe Union membership and the benefits of immigration.

There is plenty in there where a liberal message will offend all manner of people. Well, let them be offended. If Farron can draw together this bundle of issues and others to give definition to the party he will be some of the way to building back a decent core vote, the previous glimmerings of which were snuffed out by the Coalition.

His approach to date is thankfully not that of a centrist. Nick Clegg's catastrophic pursuit of the political centre, with the Lib Dems reduced to being the party that offered voters a watered-down version of whatever everyone else offered, has utterly discredited

the centre ground route.

Given the state in which the Lib Dems find themselves following the election, Farron can probably count on a fund of goodwill in rebuilding.

For a while, he will be able to get away with quite a lot, and if he wants to shun the old guard of leadership hangers-on, take parliamentarians' campaigning efforts outside Westminster and promote diversity he will have a his best chance now.

There are though two problems that Farron will need to tackle. The first is his approach to campaigning, with his call to take back the party's position "ward by ward" by delivering thousands of leaflets.

This might sound perfectly sensible. He should though lend his authority to a radical rethink of the way the party campaigns. Focus leaflets and year-round political visibility were hugely innovative 40 years ago, but are now not enough.

Plenty has emerged since the general election on how the Tories were able to target messages on small groups of voters, even individuals, on how they used social media and how they were able to harvest and effectively use data.

Lib Dem campaigning has been left behind. The party may not have the money to replicate the Tories' work, but old verities about leaflets and door knocking are not enough in a world where fewer people see themselves as within a geographical community (or at least, not long term) and where doors stay unanswered because welcome callers habitually advise their arrival in advance.

Farron's other issue is his religion. Unlike Charles Kennedy, who was religious but knew when to be quiet about it, Farron has drawn attention to his faith.

In other places and times being a person of visible faith would be an electoral advantage. In one of the world's most secular countries it is more a cause for voter puzzlement.

This has already caused him trouble, with almost all LGBT activists backing Lamb because of Farron's presumed equivocation on gay marriage.

His Channel 4 News interview on 17 July was a poor start, when he failed to be clear on whether he believed gay sex sinful.

Having been so open about matters of faith, Farron must expect to be repeatedly quizzed on its influence on his political views.

Some will find his faith admirable. Others will be concerned about a leader suspected of basing his opinions on divine inspiration. He will need convincing answers, as the media will not let this line of questioning go.



# RADICAL BULLETIN

## NUISANCE CALLERS

The generally good natured Tim Farron versus Norman Lamb contest for Lib Dem leader was marred in June by the disclosure that two Lamb supporters had used information from the party membership list, issued to both candidates, so that an external polling company, could phone people to ask questions designed to put Farron in a bad light.

Lamb rapidly booted Gavin Grant (for it is he) and Mark Gettleson off his campaign.

An inquiry is understood to be in progress over whether a breach of party rules occurred on the use of membership data.

When complaints were made about the calls they were found to come from something called MQR, a firm with little visibility on the web and not to be confused with Obama pollster Jim Messina's company.

Gettleson is a pollster in his own right being listed as the only director of Portobello Communications.

All that can be found of Portobello on Google is two blog entries for the Spectator - an odd choice of outlet for a Liberal Democrat.

Gettleson sought to defend his conduct in the Guardian with the extraordinary statement: "There is an unusual culture within the Liberal Democrats that shuns internal scrutiny of our potential leaders and where any criticism resulting from that scrutiny is labelled as 'negative campaigning'." With insights like that he will surely go far.

Grant contrived to chair the Western Counties leadership hustings despite being a declared supporter of one candidate, and for good measure invited as speakers ex-MPs Stephen Williams and Tessa Munt, both of whom had endorsed Lamb.

It is unclear quite how Grant's presence in the chair assisted with meeting the rule: "The choice of chair should help balance the platform (including the candidates) to reflect the diversity of the party".

## FIGHTING THE LAST WAR

The right-wing Lib Dem pressure group Liberal Reform has always been enamoured of Conservative economic policy.

Few had though previously realised this admiration extended to the way the Tories run themselves internally, a process that lacks the slightest pretence of democracy in policy making.

Liberal Reform luminaries are backing a constitutional amendment to restore the leader's veto over the content of the Lib Dem manifesto - a power enjoyed, though seldom used, by leaders in the pre-merger Liberal party.

Handing this power to the leader would render the party's entire policy formation process pointless, since anything that had been agreed by Federal Policy

Committee and conference could simply be overturned.

Indeed, Liberal Reform proposed no limit on this power - the leader could veto the entire manifesto should they choose.

Although it doesn't say this, the logic of Liberal Reform's position is surely that the leader should be allowed to add things the party has never agreed into the manifesto in place of those omitted.

It has argued that the veto is needed to avert a repeat of the tuition fees debacle, believing that Nick Clegg would have vetoed such a policy had he been able to.

Talk about fighting the last war. Any leader worth their salt ought to be able to convince the party of a course of action by argument, and if they can't they are probably wrong anyway.

The problem with tuition fees was not its presence in the 2010 manifesto, from which it could have been dumped in the 'well, we tried' box once the Coalition was formed.

Rather, the damage lay in the very public pledge not to increase fees. Lib Dem candidates, even those who thought it unwise, were strongarmed into signing that by, er, Nick Clegg.

## LIONS' DEN

There was a polite but muted response when Nick Clegg talked to Lib Dem peers in June.

Peers are now 12 times more numerous than the MPs and are asserting themselves after five years of being ordered about by Clegg's clueless advisers and told they had to 'own' all the Coalition did.

As one peer put it: "He had the brass neck to trot out the line 'It was a fantastic campaign and could not have been better'.

"The results speak for themselves. It was a bloody awful campaign which failed on every level. We've had this Charge of the Light Brigade nonsense and we've been hammered in every election since 2010. Its time to take this on and get him and others to stop."

Clegg disclosed to peers that one does not win elections (a subject on which he is now a noted authority) "by giving people lots of policies" as if he's failed to notice the campaign didn't give people anything except that Lib Dems were 'in the middle'.

He did though have the grace to admit that he had got the imagery wrong, that all people had registered during the Coalition was the 'Rose Garden' cosiness with the Tories.

Peers felt it a shame he and his formerly highly paid communications team waited until now to share this wisdom and wouldn't listen to any advice while they were in office.

A sign that the Cleggbunker's erstwhile inhabitants have learnt and forgotten nothing came in former speechwriter Polly MacKenzie's interview on

Newsnight in June, when she said: "It was never more than transactional relationship between David Cameron and Nick Clegg. They worked together, the problem was nobody believed that.

"If [there was] any dissent people thought the government would fall apart so we had to tell story of unity to keep the government going."

Still having 'senior aide to Nick Clegg' on her CV may be a mixed blessing in her reported quest to become PPC for Brecon and Radnor.

## SILENT DEATH

To a great fanfare in 2006, the Lib Dems launched a simple list server system which allowed a single email address to reach an entire list - whether of residents, councillors, activists or a committee.

Members could respond instantaneously. No-one needed to know who was on the list and it would take attachments. Many local parties, council groups and other organisations use this straightforward system.

The emails that emerged just looked like ordinary emails, and did not require recipients to accept a deluge of headquarters propaganda.

On 9 July it was abruptly announced that the list would close in just over two weeks. People were told to rescue their data and migrate to other systems.

These included Nationbuilder (doesn't work for conversations between list members), Prater Raines (fine, but only if you use its websites), Mailchimp (a bit techie) and an even more fiddly commercial system. None performed all the functions.

The excuse given to the few who spotted the Facebook announcement from a junior staffer was that the system needed to be upgraded and cost £9,000 a year to run.

Given that many would be prepared to sling over £10 a month to avoid the hassle, headquarters managed to miss a fundraising opportunity while also annoying users. Naturally neither the party president, the Federal Executive, the Campaigns and Communications Committee nor any other federal body was consulted or informed. Chief executive Tim Gordon has studiously failed to respond to queries, even from FE members.

## A SLAP ON THE WRIST

The continuing Liberal Party's problems with its Cornish loonies - who endorsed Ukip candidates at the general election - seems no nearer to resolution.

Nominating rights were withdrawn from the offenders with the threat of an investigation after the general election.

The incident proved the last straw for Fran Oborski and Rob Wheway (Liberator 372) prominent members who broke their ties as a result.

Party president Steve Radford told Liberator the national executive had "passed a retrospective and further period of suspension" What will happen at the end remains to be seen.

## NOT ME, HIM

James Gurling is the Lib Dems go-to guy when something awkward needs to be reviewed, but there were protests when he was put in charge reviewing the general election fiasco since he

chairs the party's campaigns and communications committee.

Would he not be reviewing himself? "Oh no, CCC wasn't involved in running the election campaign," Gurling told objectors, thus neatly dumping the blame on Captain Ashdown's 'wheelhouse'.

## ANIMALS, ELECTRICITY, SCHOOLS...AND THE TOILET!

Have pity on the Mitcham and Morden Commemorative Gold Toilet, awarded by Liberator since 1983 to the worst motion submitted to conference.

The toilet has been on tenterhooks to discover to which deserving destination it might be sent this summer.

Camberwell and Peckham was one possibility, for a motion with the peculiar claim that the countryside is "mostly enjoyed by farm animals".

So was Hereford, for having missed the occurrence of May's general election with a motion that made recommendations "that the Liberal Democrats press within Government".

The Association of Liberal Democrat Engineers and Scientists nearly won for a motion on electricity of such baffling complexity that it admitted "the motion is rather technical", an observation guaranteed to ensure it was not debated.

The winner though is '10 conference representatives' for a motion on the compulsory teaching of citizenship in schools.

What the content of this might be and who would set the syllabus went unmentioned. A flavour was: "Citizenship must be taught in schools simply because it teaches people about government and democracy; as well as how to act as a citizen with society. This allow younger people to be educated about the political system and what all political parties stand for." Fear not Citizenship 10, the toilet will visit you.

## SPOILT FOR CHOICE

By the time you read this, the inordinately delayed dissolution honours list may have been published.

Possibly it was held back until the summer to discourage lobby journalists from enquiring into ennobled donors from various parties.

Before the election it was thought the Lib Dems would get five or six peers and that they would include retiring senior MPs Alan Beith, Malcolm Bruce, Menzies Campbell and Don Foster, possibly joined by Danny Alexander (Liberator 371).

Now there is an enormous number of ex-MPs who might fancy joining the Lords, so will the net be cast wider?

There is bound to pressure for diversity, so other names in the frame include ex-MEP Sharon Bowles, and former MPs Lynne Featherstone, Lorely Burt, and Julia Church (formerly Goldsworthy).

A lot of effort was expended during the leadership hustings to get both candidates to commit to diversity in their peerage appointment. Since the Lib Dems are unlikely to get any more peers during this parliament this all seems a bit academic.

# MORE THAN A PHONE BANK

The Liberal Democrats have forgotten how to campaign and must rediscover this is they are not to waste the potential of thousand of new members, says Tony Greaves

Well, here we are with all these new members and our shiny new Tim. The first leader since Paddy with a genuine party campaigning background. And the first since Charles from the left of centre - ideally placed to adjust our thrust on this new Tory government. Already a government loaded with banana skins, not only unleashing all the right-wing stuff we stopped them doing and worse but also behaving, in a reckless flush of post-electoral euphoria, as if they have a majority of 92 not 12.

And last but not least the Labour opposition, punch-drunk by its election failure and internally in a much worse state than us, all its attention now focused on a summer-long leadership scrap between three duds and Jeremy Corbyn. The unspeakable chasing the unelectable.

Add to all this the first hints from council by-elections that – in places where we remain strong and fight strong campaigns – votes are not quite as hard to come by. Surely the fight-back has started? Surely the only way now is up? Well, if you're stuck in a ditch, sooner or later someone might pull you out. Except, of course, you might get buried for good by a dolloping from a passing shit-spreader.

Anyway the Coalition is past history. It really does feel like a liberation. It doesn't make up for the loss of 48 MPs, all but one of our MEPs, most of our MSPs and all those thousands of council seats and dozens of councils we once ran, not to mention well over 300 lost deposits (more than the Liberal Party lost in 1950 when the threshold was 12.5%). Yet the weight of the Coalition is off our backs and this seems to be the most important reason for the astonishing rise in morale in our ranks since 8tMay.

And so in high levels of the party there are plenty of people who think that all we need to do is take a deep breath, pick ourselves up, dust ourselves down, and start all over again. Just keep on going and slowly but surely it will all come good again. Business as usual.

After all, have we not got the best campaigning system invented which elected President Obama twice and which we call Connect? Did we not invent seat targeting under first past the post? Have we not led the way in grassroots campaigning? Well, yes, yes and yes. Perhaps. But most organisations thinking about what to do next and how to do it also look at 'outcomes'. If the existing systems and people have flopped you ask what needs changing. And however you look at it, we've been stuffed. When you've been stuffed, you don't do business as usual.

## HAPLESS WEIRDO

We are told it's not business as usual because we are back to the 'status quo ante coalitionem'. We always knew that the Coalition would do this to us, didn't we? And anyway it's really all the fault of everyone being worried about that frightening woman Sturgeon controlling the hapless weirdo Ed Miliband who can't even walk down the steps without falling over. Isn't it? Not our fault at all. So now this is over, business as usual will work again, won't it?

Believe this if you will, and rest content with a gentle increase in the number of Liberal Democrat councillors, three or four more MEPs, and even (if we are very lucky) a by-election win in one of our much reduced number of winnable Westminster seats. And with another huge targeting effort next time perhaps a Commons party in the 20s. Such a re-girding of loins would not be dishonourable and it has started.

The House of Lords party is by historical standards enormous – as I write we have 101 members with (ludicrously) more on their way. Before the election members were drilled to phone people up all over the country and there was a challenge for '1,000 peers visits'. Now more is demanded – we are to set off and stir up the party in the country and there's more phoning to be done. No-one asks whether any of it was any use. No-one asks how many decades it will take to do another "1970 to 2010".

What's been done recently has not worked. What we had in the days before email, social media and the rest of the internet was a fairly decentralised party with local groups campaigning on the ground, building up their campaigning activities and their presence on local Councils. At one stage we had majority administrations on no fewer than 55 (it's now half a dozen).

Originally a lot of the push came from the Radical Bulletin group then the Association of Liberal Councillors (with the central party HQ – the Liberal Party Organisation playing no more than a supporting role) but as the scale of the activities grew much of the work of spreading best practice etc devolved to regional and city groups. In the Liberator 372 Gordon Lishman described this as the second (campaigning) phase of the party during the 60 years since Jo Grimond became leader, the first being mainly policy development.

Gordon's third phase, that of intensive targeting to win Westminster seats, was often on the back of the local progress that had been made. It was accompanied by a considerable centralisation of the country-wide



operation as party HQ, by now based at Cowley Street, intensified the HQ control of finance and what happened in target seats, notably under Chris Rennard as chief agent and then head of the organisation.

This achieved a quite dramatic increase in the number of MPs from the 20 in 1992 to 46 in 1997 and 62 in 2005, with a slight relapse to 57 in 2010. This phase also saw a significant shift of emphasis from campaigning to electioneering. The party still said it was campaigning but at best it was a very narrow aspect of campaigning – that of seeking and identifying and getting out votes. Roger Hayes' superb article in *Liberator* 372 set out the difference, something that swathes of people in high places don't understand.

Roger also declared so rightly that our politics must be fun, and fun comes from campaigning, not sitting at a telephone for hours on end talking to people you know nothing about who live in places you know nothing about, reading from arid scripts out of a sense of duty. Who ever has fun in call centres? ALDC changed significantly and became largely an election fighting resource (which it did well) dropping the campaigning side for both councillors and activists.

For the recent general election an ad hoc body called the Wheelhouse took control and stepped up the intensity of targeting of about 70 held seats and possible gains. The central control of these seats was strengthened as were their efforts to get activists everywhere else to move the focus of their electioneering to their nearest target.

Those who could or would not do this just got a rising tide of requests for money, ever more desperate, culminating in some getting three or four a day in the last week of the election. The inevitable result of all this is that in hundreds of constituencies campaigning atrophied, party workers had nothing to do, and hundreds more council seats went down the pan. Of course in some places such as Pendle local parties and activists ignored this nonsense and worked hard to hold on to their council base as best they could. But the outcome is that our party is effectively derelict in more places than for 35 years and the task of rebuilding is much harder. And on its own terms the operation was a flop.

## **PATHETIC SLOGANS**

This third phase over the past 20 years has also coincided with the enormous rise of the internet in all its forms which we have rightly sought to use. But in what ways? The main party website is conventional and boring. It's at best a news and policy platform, not a campaigns site. Lots of local party websites are the same (padded out with stuff from the national party). The party's idea of social media is to send people pathetic slogans to try to flood Twitter. Neither conversation nor campaigns, just propaganda. The daily and weekly emails (when not asking for money) are all one-way top-down 'this is the party line' sort of

*“There is a need for at least a partial clear-out of the people who have got us into this position - the change of leader is of course a good start. That includes some of the paid staff”*

stuff. (Does anyone ever get a reply to a comment they send back to HQ?) There are some useful Liberal sites on Facebook which are as they should be, like the old ALC stuff in a very different age and a different medium – top-down, bottom-up, side-to-side sharing.

But the main Liberal Democrat discussion site (Liberal Democrat Voice) is little better than the party stuff: tightly controlled by a small group of people who use it to promote their own (often fairly right wing) views, and

apart from regurgitating stuff from the national press and some obvious stuff like the leadership election, it's full of obscure and obsessive policy articles from people whose activism does not seem to go much beyond their keyboard. Certainly it's far from being a campaigning site. If you persist with views the controllers don't like you get censored, and if you then privately tell them what you think about them you get banned. (I declare an interest – I've been banned!)

So there is here a great need and a great danger. There is a need for at least a partial clear-out of the people who have got us into this position - the change of leader is of course a good start. That includes some of the paid staff. There is a greater need for a thorough overhaul of the generally dysfunctional party structures, including those bodies which ought to be leading the drive for campaigning. The policy-making processes via the Federal Policy Committee and working groups/policy papers are a useless waste of resources. The Federal Executive is by all accounts as ineffective as ever. The English Party is a waste of everything. ALDC is stuck in a groove, clicking the ticks as it goes through the same routines year after year when surely it should be leading the thrill of the campaigning chase.

The great danger is that the powers-that-be in the party 'machine' will rush to 'reform' the structure by undermining even further the rather depauperate systems of involvement and internal democracy when we should be encouraging a thousand flowers to bloom.

There are top people already saying: "If only the party had done what we told them to do..." when the truth is that the party whose inactions they bemoan has, as a result of their actions, withered on the vine. The new members can be a lifeline but only if they are encouraged to come forward with their talents and interests, and if they can become active by which I mean rather more than as automatons in a virtual phone bank.

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

# THE PATH TO PADDY'S HAT

## The general election exit poll should not have surprised those who had followed what the market research industry was doing, says Alex Dee

It has become received wisdom that the polls 'got it wrong' when it came to the 2015 election and is why the exit poll at 10pm on 7 May came as a surprise.

To be clear, due to the sample size (20,000 respondents) and the proximity of the poll to voting (at 140 polling stations on polling day itself), the exit poll should be the most accurate poll. Indeed, that had been the case in both 2010 and 2005, so the broadcasters had good reason to get excited about it.

So what of the polling that took place in the weeks and months leading up to the election? The first line of defence for any pollster accused of getting an outcome wrong is that a poll is only ever a 'snapshot not a forecast', which is of course true.

The wisest thing is therefore to look at the trend emerging from a series of polls over time rather than focus too much on what could be a rogue poll. In that respect the BBC's poll of polls is a good place to look to see what that trend was before the results started coming in on 8 May. This took into account the polling released by eight polling companies (ComRes, ICM, Ipsos Mori, Opinium, Populus, Survation, TNS BMRB and YouGov).

The BBC poll of polls was suggesting an outcome that was too close to call with a hung parliament a likely outcome. What was up for grabs was precisely how many seats each party would have. Here is the final vote share compared to the poll of polls:

Party	BBC Poll of Polls	Actual result
Con	34%	36.9%
Lab	33%	30.4%
Ukip	14%	12.6%
Lib Dem	8%	7.9%
Green	5%	3.8%

It was accurate for UKIP (14% versus 12.6% actual) and the Greens (5% versus 3.8% actual) and bang on the money for the Liberal Democrats.

For Labour and the Conservatives, the polls were, however, converging and pointing towards the likelihood of an election that was too close to call. The head of the BBC's Political Research Unit, David Cowling has reviewed all 92 polls released and none of them predicted the 7% lead the Conservatives would actually achieve. As Cowling points out "Among the full tally of 92 campaign polls, 81 registered leads for one party or another of between 0% and 3%."

% gap between Con and Labour	All polls	Con leads	Labour leads
0	17	-	-
1	32	15	17
2	22	7	15
3	10	3	7
4	7	5	2
5	1	1	-
6	3	2	1
Total	92	33	42

To put it another way, no polling results were suggesting a Conservative majority. And it is this that gave the 'hung parliament' narrative credibility. And because the polls were pointing in that direction, that is what the media narrative became and the two reinforced each other.

## POLLSTERS SPOOKED

The exit poll spooked leading members of the polling community and in the early hours of the 8 May an email chain started circulating suggesting an 'inquiry' be launched to look at the polls. There was a sense of urgency and all companies were expected to participate.

The word 'inquiry' is rather grand given nobody died and there is no suggestion of criminality. It looked like panic and a charitable person might attribute this to the long hours they had been working in the last few days of the campaign. Or it could just be self-important hype from men with egg on their faces and reputations to maintain. But it does beg the question - why were they panicking? Where did the polls go wrong?

Professor John Curtice, told the BBC: "Either all the opinion polls were wrong at the time they were taken, that's one possibility. Or, in England and Wales at least, there was a substantial shift from Labour towards Conservative at the last minute."

In addition, so-called 'silent Tories' could have skewed the results of the polls. Indeed the exit poll might have picked up on this as it was able to ask 'how did you vote' not 'how will you vote'. People can - and do - change their mind right up to the moment they have their ballot paper in front of them.

Another theory is that of 'lazy Labour' supporters, people who declared a Labour voting intention to pollsters during the campaign but didn't vote.



The sampling used by different polling companies may form part of the explanation - it may be that Conservative voters were under-represented.

It is also possible that the polling companies weren't releasing all the information that they had. They could have withheld some polls which in turn would have skewed any 'poll of polls' and the prevailing narrative.

Let's not forget that polling companies are not charities - they are commercial enterprises. Some focus solely on polling while others are part of much larger market research organisations. Polling is also undertaken for different reasons - for example, some are commissioned by broadcasters and newspapers for public consumption while others are for clients (including political parties) who may or may not choose to release the data they have commissioned. Other polling companies undertake their polling purely for PR purposes, to raise their profile.

The crucial element here is that they are under no obligation to share their polling. If a client chooses to make the findings public only then do polling companies have to make the data tables available within two days.

They can (and do) poll on all sorts of topics and choose to sit on the results. This is standard practice and there is no reason to suggest foul play - all of those listed in the BBC Poll of Polls are registered with both the Market Research Society and the British Polling Council and abide by their code of conduct and standards.

## GROUPTHINK DANGER

So, this is where groupthink is a very real possibility. If all of your competitors have Ukip on 19% but your numbers are suggesting they are on 9% - do you release it (in the interest of making sure all available data is out there) or do you sit on this particular one as it could easily be an outlier?

And what if all the polling companies sit on their outlier polls just in case they are wrong or because they don't want their methodology challenged?

They might choose to tweak the methodology or weighting to try to bring the findings into line with their competitors. If any or a combination of this was happening, the cumulative effect would be to skew the poll of polls and in so doing, the media narrative.

## LOST DEPOSITS

And what of the Liberal Democrats? Ultimately, the Liberal Democrats lost 334 deposits - failing to get 5% of the vote in more than half of the constituencies. For months the polls were on a downward trajectory for the party and the final poll of polls suggested an 8% share of the vote.

The evidence was there in the 92 polls published during the campaign (and arguably well before then too). Was this trend being tracked/monitored and acted upon?

As we might expect, the Liberal Democrats undertook private polling. Baroness Greender informed a meeting of the Liberal Democrat History Group on 13 July that it led HQ to the working assumption of a hung parliament. She also said the research only took place up to the start of the 'short' general election campaign to allow resource to focus on other vital campaigning activities.

Presumably this was the 'field and tab' service

provided by Survation that was partly leaked to the Guardian and New Statesman.

To those not familiar with the difference, Survation explains: "A 'field and tab' research vendor will typically not be responsible for drafting a questionnaire or assisting on high-level sampling design discussions.

"Likewise, after the data has been collected and tabulated, a 'field and tab' provider will typically not interpret the resulting data nor prepare a deck of presentation slides. These responsibilities fall on the client (the research buyer), or on a consultant that the client may hire."

In which case the party wrote its own questionnaire, designed the sampling and interpreted the results itself. They may well have had an expert consultant do that for them. But Survation distanced itself, pointing out that they were merely the data gatherer and not acting as a pollster in this instance.

Was this the research that gave Paddy such confidence to say he'd eat his hat if the exit poll was correct?

Either way, this election has shown that the polling companies have yet to figure out what a truly 'representative sample' looks like in a fragmented political system gripped by a loss of political loyalty.

As for the Liberal Democrats, perhaps they should heed the advice of Peter Kellner, chief executive of YouGov, who warned against over-reliance on polling when he said politicians "should campaign on what they believe, they should not listen to people like me and the figures we produce".

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Alex Dee is a Liberal Democrat activist who works in the market research industry.

## After the Storm

The Rt Hon Vince Cable, former secretary of state for business, innovation and skills, in conversation with Lord Skidelsky, biographer of Keynes and advocate of 'Keynesianism'.

What were the alternatives to Coalition economic policy and now to 'Osbornomics'?

Organised by Social Liberal Forum and Liberator

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# WELLBEING WORKS

## Looking at wellbeing provides liberals with route to express their commitment to redistribution, and they should accept the need for state involvement, says Claire Tyler

One clear lesson from the general election is that, for the public to understand us, we have to spell out much more clearly what being liberal means, both the sort of society we seek and the notion of individual empowerment.

We must be braver in saying that a philosophical focus on the freedom of the individual isn't the same as being pre-occupied with self. It's about enabling every member of society to flourish, strengthening social relationships and communities, demonstrating fairness and compassion, rejoicing in difference and, at the same time, extending individual freedoms. I think the first line of the party constitution preamble does a pretty good job of distilling our beliefs: liberty, equality and community.

We've made our mark as the party of civil liberties and universal human rights. We've also been traditionally strong on community.

It's our second value we've had more trouble communicating – our commitment to the redistribution of power and wealth where it's needed and the realisation of a more equal society.

These goals are central to modern liberalism. We need to say clearly that high levels of inequality are at odds with a society in which everyone is free to develop their talents and fulfil their potential.

Back in 1942 Beveridge recognised the importance of building a society in which everyone is able to realise their potential. His five giant evils encapsulated the major 'unfreedoms'. They continue today with poverty, ill health, inadequate education and poor living conditions and a degraded environment holding too many back.

Beveridge should also be celebrated for making the case that state intervention to realise the social good does not have to be stifling and authoritarian. We too need to be bold in expressing our commitment to social justice and the use of liberal means to realise it.

There is a classical liberal view that there's an inherent tension between a dual commitment to freedom and equality, that any state intervention involves the sacrifice of liberty.

I'm pleased to say social liberals have progressed from this line of thinking. Simply being left alone isn't enough to achieve genuine freedom – laissez faire economics and a minimal state isn't going to end homelessness, social isolation, discrimination or workplace exploitation.

### AMBITIOUS IDEA

So we need a more ambitious idea of what freedom entails - the ability both to make choices about the sort of life you want to live and contribute to the common good.

When viewed in this way, it becomes clear what a

glaring obstacle inequality is to real liberty – your birthplace, family wealth and social class, should never be the main determinants of your opportunities.

What emerges is a persuasive case for an active, enabling state which equips people to realise their goals.

Looking at individual wellbeing provides a new way of approaching social problems and a framework for developing new solutions.

Wellbeing refers to our happiness, fulfilment, the sense of control over our lives and the capacity to achieve our aspirations. In this sense I feel it is an intensely liberal concept and fits very well with concern for social justice.

The case for an active, enabling government is no less compelling now than it was for Beveridge.

The longer-term trend is one of a widening gap between those on the highest incomes and those on the lowest – the Equality Trust estimates that UK income inequality increased by 32% between 1960 and 2005. Patterns of wealth inequality are even starker, with the wealth of the richest 1,000 people increased by over £28bn last year – enough to fund 20 years' worth of grocery bills for all food bank users.

There is a very damaging and misleading narrative of 'strivers' and the 'scroungers', characterised by those who work hard and fund public services through their taxes and those who choose to live on benefits.

The reality is different. Most of us will rely on the welfare state at some point and get as much back as we put in. The wealthier are likely to benefit more as they live longer.

So while understanding the importance of aspiration, individual responsibility and self help, we need to be bolder in tackling the myth of the deserving rich and undeserving poor.

Thanks to Beveridge, most of us don't face destitution if we lose our jobs, but it's a travesty that more than 900,000 people relied on food banks in 2013-14 and that we still have 2.3m children growing up in relative poverty.

Too many people struggle to make ends meet. One in five of UK workers are on low pay, one of the highest proportions of any advanced economy. It patently isn't right that you can be in full-time work and still unable to support your family without relying on benefits.

It is a similar story with what Beveridge referred to as idleness. Unemployment is historically very low, but this masks a stubborn lack of opportunities for those with a disability or a mental health condition. Young people are also increasingly disadvantaged in the jobs market.

Low overall unemployment also hides the growing insecurity at work with zero hours contracts.

How can you possibly plan a household budget if you have no idea how much money is coming in each week?

The importance of the early years in determining outcomes in later life is well recognised and children from low-income backgrounds face systemic disadvantages. By five, children from poorer families are more than a year behind others in vocabulary and cognitive development. Social mobility depends on getting the early years right.

It's wonderful that we're all living longer and generally healthier lives, but the challenge of how we care for each other in our old age is the biggest in social policy.

We don't tend to use the word squalor much, but there is much to be done to make living conditions acceptable for many people, particularly access to green open space. A basic problem for many is the chronic lack of security in housing and of the supply of affordable housing.

So in updating Beveridge's five evil giants, it emerges that for too many people their wellbeing is perilously low. They are being denied the opportunity for happiness, and that is where we should direct our liberal energies.

As Liberal Democrats we have lived through a serious trauma, but out of that trauma we should seize what Beveridge called the 'revolutionary moment' and fight to make positive wellbeing a national priority.

This is not just the right thing to do. Wellbeing is fundamentally liberal, it's about individual empowerment.

The Office of National Statistics has for the first time looked at national wellbeing, and we have a long way to go. Just over 25% of the population scores well on all of life satisfaction, happiness, absence of anxiety, and feeling their activities are worthwhile.

I suggest a reinvention of the Benthamite mission, with the pursuit of wellbeing for everyone established as an overarching goal of social and economic policy but with the wellbeing of disadvantaged and the quest for social justice clearly at its heart.

The most important determinants of wellbeing are income, employment status, education and housing, so a strong focus on reducing wellbeing inequalities may well be the best way to realise our aspirations for liberty, equality and community.

## GROSS INEQUALITIES

Gross inequalities in wellbeing have a negative impact on everyone and the economy suffers too.

According to research by the Children's Society, the UK ranked 9th out of 11 countries for child wellbeing, only ahead of South Korea and Uganda.

The UK also has the dubious honour of topping the tables for wellbeing inequalities, with one EU study putting us 23rd out of 27. There's a picture emerging which I think it hard to ignore.

In determining our policy priorities, looking through the lens of wellbeing offers a good starting point and a hard-nosed, evidence based framework for identifying where government will be most effective and what interventions will make the biggest difference.

Lack of stable employment has been one of the most recurrent issues in low levels of wellbeing. People who have been unemployed for more than six months have significantly lower wellbeing than those unemployed for less time.

So, let's be bold. I want to propose that the pursuit of stable and secure employment – with decent pay – for

all who can work should be one of the key goals of our economic policy.

This means employment programmes that help the most disadvantaged, rather than the false hope of the Work Programme, which had neither the funds nor the expertise to help those deemed hardest to help.

In 2010 we had a flagship policy to raise the level of the personal tax allowance. It is a huge Lib Dem achievement that took two million out of tax, but raising it further does little to help those at the bottom of the ladder.

We should take a step back and look at where we can make most impact, such as in national insurance.

Aligning the National Insurance threshold with the personal tax allowance of £11,000 would take 1.8m people out of direct tax.

One of the key findings that emerged from a report of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility, which I co-chair, was that character, resilience and wellbeing was the 'missing ingredient' of policies to improve individual life chances.

A growing body of evidence shows how things like self belief, perseverance, resilience, empathy and teamwork are directly linked to doing well at school and at work. These things can be taught and developed.

The group also found that the point of greatest leverage is between the ages of 0-3, especially in the home. So it looked at the links between parenting and social mobility.

There are those who say that any such intervention is an assault on liberty. But the evidence shows effective parenting has an even bigger influence on a child's outcomes than income or class and that sensitively designed parenting advice and support programmes can help parents. To me that's not curtailing liberty – it's making it possible.

While strong relationships with family and friends help support wellbeing at an individual level, at the level of communities trust, empathy and cohesion are vitally important. When these are available, populations are more resilient.

We have paid too little attention to building this vital social fabric and are now paying the price. Disillusion with politics and politicians is at an all-time high, people feel unable to make their voices heard, disempowered and isolated in their communities.

This is absolutely liberal territory and we need to claim it. We need to say clearly that wellbeing and happiness requires participation, engagement, meaningful relationships and empowerment at all levels – whether that is about determining how your personal care needs are met or standing as a local councillor.

My basic argument today is that a wellbeing approach to public policy which goes hand in hand with a renewed focus on the worst off amongst us has benefits for everyone and the sort of society we want to create. It also resonates strongly with our core values as a party.

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This an abridged version of the Beveridge Lecture given by Liberal Democrat peer Claire Tyler at the Social Liberal Forum conference. the full text is on [www.liberatormagazine.org.uk](http://www.liberatormagazine.org.uk)



# PLACES THAT DON'T MATTER

The wave of migrants trying to reach Europe is driven by corruption and poverty in misgoverned African states, says Rebecca Tinsley

It may sound harsh, but some countries don't matter in purely geopolitical terms. However, one of the world's more obscure places, Chad, is emerging as an unlikely player in the war on terror.

This remote and arid nation has made itself indispensable to the international community. Consequently, its leader, Idris Deby, finds himself beyond criticism, despite his record of eye-watering corruption, nepotism, and suppression of human rights.

Nor will Chad be censured for failing to use its oil revenues to improve the dismal condition of its people: Chad ranks fourth from the bottom of the UN's human development index.

Just seven years ago, heavily-armed rebels reached the perimeter of Deby's presidential compound in the capital, N'djamena. Following years of internal unrest, it seemed Deby's less-than-enlightened rule was about to end. Deby, the general who came to power in a 1990 coup, was on the brink of being deposed in the same inglorious manner he had grabbed the presidency. But the French, still manipulating so much politics in Francophone Africa, came to his rescue.

Deby has repaid the debt, sending troops to Mali to support France, where Chadians died in greater numbers than their European allies; and then in the neighbouring Central African Republic. Now, Chadian forces are taking the war to Boko Haram, something the Nigerian security forces have so far failed to do.

Some readers will be old enough to recall when Western powers propped up African tyrants who assured us they were anti-Communist. Hence Zaire's Mobutu, Egypt's Mubarak and apartheid South Africa were tolerated for fear they might be replaced by Moscow's friends.

The new calibration of sheep and goats depends on paying lip service to the war on terror. By putting his troops in danger, by reliably and efficiently policing his region of Africa, Chad's leader has thus inoculated himself against scrutiny.

Transparency International ranks Chad as the most corrupt country on earth, while Freedom House gives Chad its worst rating for political rights. UN statistics reveal that Chad has the highest maternal mortality rate in the world, and 219 children die each day from easily preventable illness.

The vast majority of the population is illiterate, and only one in 10 women have any understanding of HIV prevention. Chad has the highest birth rate (6.9 per woman, compared to a world average of 2.5), and it is the norm for 12-year-old girls to be unsentimentally sold in marriage by their fathers.

## PIGGISH PHILANTHROPY

Despite years of oil revenues, there has been no political will to correct this dire state of affairs. Deby broke his own law, not to mention a promise made to the World Bank, by diverting oil revenues for weapons to keep his regime in power, rather than spending on infrastructure. Forbes magazine, not known as an egalitarian media platform, described this as, "the single most piggish use of philanthropic funds" on earth.

Your correspondent filed this article from N'djamena, a dusty, barren sprawl where the temperature reaches 45C regularly. Each city block has gaping stretches of waste ground covered with litter and human faeces. Aesthetically-challenging poured concrete buildings are surrounded by high security walls, presenting long corridors of blank, prison-like facades to the visitor. The public art decorating its traffic roundabouts could have been sourced from a warehouse in North Korea. On the streets one sees pick up trucks bristling with shoulder launched grenades. It is rumoured (in the absence of a free media everything is rumour) that Boko Haram is lurking just across the Chari River from my hotel, in Cameroon.

With a track record of interfering in the Central African Republic's affairs, it is also rumoured Deby gave encouragement to the mainly Muslim Seleka ('union' in the Sango language) rebels in CAR. Seleka was also backed by the CAR's Muslim merchant class who had been unwisely penalised by President Bozize. Quite why Bozize would wish to alienate the only vibrant sector of his country's economy by forcing them to pay a discriminatory taxation, is a measure of his short-sighted avarice. Seleka overthrew Bozize in 2013 before itself succumbing to internal feuds.

In the meantime, young non-Muslim men whose families had been slaughtered by Seleka formed the anti-balaka rebels ('machete' in Sango), and began ethnically cleansing Seleka and any Muslims (15% of the population) who might or might not have supported Seleka. They also looted everything they could lay their hands on in Muslim homes.

The UN Commission of Inquiry found that 99% of Muslims in the capital, Bangui, have fled, many of them to the grim and remote camps I visited, across the border in Chad. The UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has registered 92,000 people in these camps, where the food ration is down to 800 calories per person. It would make sense to encourage the refugees, many of whom were farmers back in CAR, to plant crops. However, that would mean accepting they are here to stay, rather than preparing the refugees for 'voluntary return', as the UNHCR

calls the process.

Goats, pigs, chickens and cattle wander about what amounts to the main street of the town that has sprung up near the camps. The only vehicles are white four wheel drives belonging to the UN and international aid groups. It is so hot that your correspondent's pens stopped working. There is no electricity except from NGO's generators, and no running water. Aid workers describe it as the worst 'hardship post' on earth, and "much worse than



Somalia." To get to the camps from the nearest airport, two hours away, requires taking a road along which bandits lurk in the bush. Oil workers, mainly French and Chinese, have armed escorts, but humanitarians don't bother: the bandits have concluded the aid workers don't have anything worth stealing.

## MISERABLE UNCERTAINTY

Refugees spend their days phoning CAR, trying to track down those from whom they were separated in the rush to escape the men with guns who abruptly invaded their homes. One woman I met had endured four months of miserable uncertainty before she found her children had been put on a plane to Cameroon. Another woman, a Muslim businesswoman from CAR's capital, Bangui, was not enjoying the company of her fellow camp residents who hail from traditional, conservative livestock herding groups. They believe women "waste their eggs" if they go to school or leave the home for any reason other than fetching water and firewood. The herders complain they have to beat their women even more now the UN has "put ideas in their heads about women's rights".

Meanwhile, Chad earns the gratitude of the international community by welcoming refugees from Darfur, CAR and Nigeria. Having initially miscalculated badly by being seen to back the Seleka rebels, Deby then obliged the international community by sending troops. However, Chad's armed forces withdrew in 2014 after being accused of killing 30 unarmed civilians in a market place.

At the time of writing, Bangui is still tense and dangerous, despite the presence of UN and African Union peacekeepers. In the rural areas (the vast majority of the CAR) there is an absence of any government or security forces. Bandits roam free, terrorising civilians, and fighting to control the diamond business. There is little prospect that negotiations (the Bangui Forum, launched at the beginning of May) will deliver lasting security because few of the combatants are attending the talks, and no one can agree why the rebels are fighting each other, anyway.

At the root of this explosion of violence in CAR is the extreme poverty of a country which offers almost no hope to its young people. The same UN index which ranks Chad as the fourth poorest country rates CAR as the third least developed.

Decades of self-enrichment by its tiny ruling class

means the CAR has minimal infrastructure and the government's writ extends not much beyond the suburbs of the capital and a few other cities. As refugees I interviewed stressed, it is hard to urge young people to get an education when there will be no employment prospects at the end of their studies.

Many young men take note of the extreme wealth of the elite compared to their own limited prospects, concluding

there is no legal way to break the grip of nepotism and ethnic favouritism that determines who succeeds in countries such as CAR and Chad.

Blatant displays of privilege are easy to find: opposite my hotel in N'djamena a vulgar marble palace is being built for Deby's brother, who happens to run the customs ministry. Not all family connections are so mutually beneficial, however: it is rumoured Deby put out a contract on his 27-year-old son, Brahim, in 2007. He was found in a Paris parking lot, asphyxiated by white powder from a fire extinguisher.

Deby's role as regional strongman requires military support from the international community. He also needs to keep the oil flowing, and that means stability in CAR, including access to the vital oil pipeline and other export-import routes (since Chad seems incapable of making anything except honey, according to one caustic aid worker).

Deby also wishes to attract foreign investment to Chad, which is easier if his backyard is free of rebellions. Hence he wants to make sure his own restive southern rebels are not using CAR as a base camp. Rumour has it that Deby has literally bought off the opposition, offering them money, perks or jobs in the Chadian army. Consequently Chad is now more stable than it has been for decades.

For those who wonder why so many Africans risk their lives to cross the Mediterranean, paying a fortune to traffickers, look no further than the hopelessness facing young people in Chad, CAR, northern Nigeria, Eritrea, South Sudan and Sudan. The wave of immigrants alone is an argument for helping Africa to become peaceful and prosperous.

We should also be aware that Saudi Arabia and other Gulf nations are investing millions in establishing outposts of their racist, fundamentalist form of political Islam, Wahhabism.

Their target audience is legion of disillusioned and angry young men in African countries in an impoverished belt reaching from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean. A simple ideology that lays the blame for everything on the West, Jews, women, Shia Muslims or gays is appealing to those who are searching for answers, and a sense of belonging and importance. Don't say we weren't warned.

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Rebecca Tinsley has worked on numerous civil society projects in Africa

# POWER CHANGES IN NIGERIA

A first peaceful change of power between civilian parties shows Nigeria's democracy has finally established itself, says Donald Inwalomhe

The 2015 Nigerian general elections have come and gone, but the aftermath continues to generate controversies in some quarters despite the ruling party conceding defeat to the opposition.

These elections were conducted to select a president, governors for some states, and national assembly and state houses of assembly members.

What appeared to be happening erroneously portrays Nigeria as a country in a state of warfare and hate campaign by various political parties.

Nigeria has 36 states. Boko Haram, killings and kidnapping were high in three of them. Nigeria has six geographical zones but only the north-east was affected.

The apprehension towards the conduct of the election was vividly captured in the Washington Post of 6 January 2015, which commented: "The most immediate threats to the country (Nigeria) are not bullets from Islamic Militants but ballots." What an irony.

In the 2015 elections, the military were drafted in to support the police and Directorate of State Security (DSS) in the maintenance of law and order. The basic problem was a lack of trust in the impartiality of the security forces in furtherance of their professional activities.

The highly anticipated 28 March presidential and National Assembly elections have passed with Muhammadu Buhari emerging as the president of Nigeria in waiting. The elections are further evidence of the defect of the electoral system because from the beginning, there were concerns about the smart card readers to authenticate permanent voters' cards.

When president Goodluck Ebele Jonathan went to his Ward 11, Unit 39 in Otuoke, Bayelsa State, with his wife Dame Patience Jonathan, the reader did not recognise his fingerprint, even after four machines were used. Eventually, he was manually accredited when it was realised that he was not a ghost voter. How can the first citizen and the first lady of Nigeria not be recognised by the card reader? On the other hand, the presidential candidate of All Progressives Congress (APC) retired general Muhammadu Buhari was accredited immediately, after it took the card reader just five minutes to recognise him.

The United States can make all its observations about the disintegration of Nigeria since 1994 but the Nigerian people have the ultimate say about what becomes of our country in 2015 and beyond.

The 2015 general elections have come and gone. A number of implications can be identified that could strengthen our democracy.

The APC, led by Buhari, has won the presidential election, unseating the People's Democratic Party (PDP) that has dominated Nigeria since its 1999 transition to civilian rule.

The election symbolises the institutional change that made the APC's election upset possible. Against considerable odds, INEC, Nigeria's independent electoral commission, played a key role in delivering credible elections. The implications run deep.

While power will be transferred, the PDP has not been decimated. It controls a reduced but significant number of executive and legislative offices while each party has prized senatorial seats from the other's strongholds.

The APC won control of roughly 60% of the Senate and House of Representatives seats and a substantial majority of the state governorships and assemblies. It is therefore well-placed to design and implement new policies and practices. The APC also brings together, for the first time in a formal coalition, political leaders of the core Hausa-Fulani northern states and almost all of the predominantly Yoruba South-West.

Investors' interest in Nigeria will return. Investors have been waiting nervously on the sidelines for the elections to pass and political risk to diminish. They will be encouraged by the passage of the elections, and investment dollars should flow in.

The implication is that the incoming government has the burden of not repeating the failures of the rejected ruling party. Managing this expectation is the major task of the new regime.

## HUGE POLITICAL SPENDING

Another implication is that the elections have shown that there is still need for large scale electoral reforms. It was alleged that more than 4 trillion naira was spent in the 2015 electoral process. The PDP alone was said to have disbursed an unaccounted 2 trillion naira, and the APC was not left out in huge political expenditure.

There was no control of this electoral spending, as billions of Naira were spent on campaign adverts, attracting traditional leaders and political road shows. Nigeria's economy was bled dry, and it would take several months to recover, especially with the slowing offshore inflow.

The electoral law stipulates limits to campaign donations but there is simply no political will of the regulators to monitor political financing.

It can be said that money played some role in dictating outcomes of the voting especially in contests other than that for the presidency.



There is need for the incoming regime to set up clear standards and enforceable regulations regarding political campaign funding. The Electoral Act Section 93 sets the limit of campaign expenses of political candidates, and maximum individual contributions to campaign funds. The political parties are to keep a strict record of money received and their sources, and of its campaign expenses. This provision has been obeyed in the breach since 1999. INEC lacks the technical capacity to monitor political financing and it is not expected to be saddled with such responsibility in a fragile electoral situation it usually finds itself in every election semester. INEC deserves commendation because this is the first time in the history of Nigeria that a ruling party lost an election.

Another implication of the 2015 elections is the obvious realisation that electoral disputes can be de-escalated leading to the reduction of tension.

The concession by President Goodluck Jonathan set an example that appeared to have been well emulated within the political society. Unlike in the 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011 elections, there has not been an avalanche of electoral petitions.

Though many protests and petitions are being filed at the moment, the hateful rejections of election results of previous occasions have not been widely reported on this occasion. In fact, many losing governors and legislators have graciously conceded and congratulated the winners. This is a good development for the polity and our political reputation.

A significant outcome of the election is the impact of the use of IT through the card reader. There was huge apprehension in the run up to the elections that INEC would be unable to manage the massive and sprawling polling locations across the country with its sloppy preparations for the use of the card readers.

The introduction of manual registers in the middle of the polling raised concern about the failure of the card readers system, but the extension of the voting in many areas was a wise intervention by INEC that saved many expected electoral crises.

With the April 11 polls, there was very few and scanty reports of system failures. In other words, the introduction of IT in the electoral process has redeemed the image of our electoral process, and when tested further with mid-term gubernatorial elections coming up next year and in a number of local government elections, INEC will hopefully by 2019 achieve a near-perfect management of electronic voting system.

An area of apparent difficulty that should be a lesson for INEC is in the area of voter register management. The rush for the collection of the permanent voters' cards in the last week of the polling, and the failure of nearly one-tenth of the population to collect theirs to participate in the voting underscores the need for INEC to devise a means of continuous revision and updating of the voters' register.

We need not wait until we are close to election time to start the revision of voters' register. It will be useful to harmonise the voter card biometric registration with the National Identity Card programme, so that there will be an integrated citizens' identification system that will also feed into security intelligence.

## JUMPING SHIP

The instructive lesson of the 2015 election is the realisation of the need for a virile opposition. Unhappily, many members of PDP are already jumping ship into APC. Such political treachery should be discouraged.

Unfortunately, since 1999, the provisions on defection have not been enforced even though many legislators have left membership of the political parties under whose platform they were elected to another party in circumstances not permitted by the constitution, namely the merger of or division in the political party. An MP cannot defect out of his or her selfish interest. MPs cannot do what they like.

It is important that, since APC campaigned on the promises of maintaining the rule of law and increasing good political practices, any breach of the constitution should not be tolerated. Our political society must reduce the electoral impunity in order to give the country the future gains of the considerably successful 2015 election.

The recent defeat of the PDP at both national and state elections did not come to Nigerians as a surprise because the refusal of the PDP to honour the "single-term agreement" led to the party's heavy defeat at both the presidential and governorship polls. The single term agreement meant Goodluck Jonathan would rule for four years and in return stand down, a commitment which he failed to honour.

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# A LIGHT IN THE MURK

## Electoral corruption has been endemic in Tower Hamlets for decades. Now a judge has said the perpetrators cannot hide behind claims of racial prejudice, says Gwyneth Deakins

Among the wailing and gnashing of teeth that followed the general election, many people have probably forgotten that one of the big political stories in the weeks beforehand was the High Court case concerning Tower Hamlets' directly-elected mayor Lutfur Rahman.

Rahman was dismissed and disqualified from office in the judgement of Election Commissioner Richard Mawrey QC after a seven week long election court. Four Tower Hamlets electors had presented a petition to have Rahman's re-election in May 2014 set aside on the grounds that he and his agents had engaged in corrupt and illegal practices contrary to electoral law.

Many casual observers were shocked by the revelations from the case, but hardened old Tower Hamlets hands, including former Liberal Democrat councillors (such as me), without exception said "It's been going on for years", "We told you so" and "So what's new", or words to that effect.

But such cynicism, however justified, cannot be the only response to this case. We should reflect on its implications because it has important lessons for politics in this country in future - particularly in areas with significant minority ethnic communities.

For those wishing to read the judgement in full it is accessible via the 23 April entry on journalist Ted Jeory's blog [www.trialbyjeory.com](http://www.trialbyjeory.com), which also gives an insight into the grime of inner city politics via its running commentary on the case.

The first issue is the use of accusations of 'racism' as a political tool. This subject was debated at length in court as counsel for the petitioners sought to demonstrate that Rahman and his followers had used (false) accusations of racism to undermine Labour's mayoral candidate John Biggs at the 2014 election.

It was amply illustrated how such accusations were routinely and prodigally launched by Tower Hamlets politicians, usually the far left and some in the Bangladeshi community.

This is nothing new to anyone who stood in political opposition to the bloc of Labour, the far left and some Bangladeshi groups in the last 35 years.

Moderate Labour figures such as Biggs had to perform contortions to avoid accusations of racism not only in public but within the foetid atmosphere of internal Labour party machinations.

### ABSURD ALLEGATIONS

Judge Mawrey has at last recognised the nature of the Emperor's clothes on this issue and acknowledged the absurdity of such accusations. Unfortunately, during the Lib Dem administration between 1986-94, we were plagued by accusations of racism from the start. The whole 'liberal' establishment, including the press and many Lib Dems, unquestioningly bought into this

analysis without any critical examination of the facts. It is a perception that persists to this day in some quarters.

The court case judgement well illustrated the corrosive effect of the persistent use of 'racism' accusations on the conduct of public affairs.

For not only may directly 'racist' actions be condemned (rightly, if they are precisely that), but also actions which adversely affect any members of a minority ethnic group may be described as racist, and motivated by racism, even though they affect a wider group of people than those in question.

From the same thinking, anyone who opposes a self-declared 'anti-racist' must thereby necessarily be a racist; and anyone whose words or actions are cited with approval by the EDL or their ilk must thereby automatically be a racist.

Mawrey demolishes this garbage, and indeed points to episodes of racial abuse from Rahman's own supporters and the skew of his grants programme towards Bangladeshi groups.

Would that there had been someone with his intellectual honesty to challenge the thought police 22 years ago.

He also highlighted the failure to challenge the malpractices in Tower Hamlets politics. This is closely linked to the failure to challenge the definition and interpretation of 'racism'.

The corrupt and illegal methods highlighted in this case were largely practised within the Bangladeshi community, and this has been going on for years. However, as with the Rotherham child abuse scandal, no-one has been willing to say so for fear of being labelled a 'racist'.

Mawrey, having presided over an election court in Birmingham where similar malpractices involved some members of Asian communities, had no such compunction. His concluding paragraph states: "Events of recent months... have demonstrated what happens when those in authority are afraid to confront wrongdoing for fear of allegations of racism and Islamophobia... The law must be applied fairly and equally to everyone. Otherwise we are lost."

If such activities had been conducted in a white community (as to some extent they were in pre-1980s Tower Hamlets), it is doubtful whether they would have been allowed to persist.

Confronting corruption and electoral fraud where it is associated with a particular community is essential not only for the health of politics generally but in the interests of the many people in those communities who are not involved with the corruption. They need support, and not simply to be assumed incapable of integrity because of their ethnic identity.

Of course the great and largely unspoken truth

is that the Labour Party benefited from the bloc voting, electoral fraud and corruption in Tower Hamlets for many years. That is why they had no interest in investigation of the problem. One of the High Court petitioners, Andy Erlam, says Rahman was a crisis created by Labour and that it was in the Labour party where he learned his dirty tricks.

This brings us neatly to shenanigans in the Labour Party. Why did Labour not challenge Rahman's election in court, and why it was left to four private individuals? In fact Erlam says that Labour actively tried to block the election petition and Biggs was a reluctant witness.

They feared that their dirty washing would be laundered in public - as in fact it was. One of the most astonishing revelations was that when Labour's National Executive Committee decided that Rahman should not be Labour's mayoral candidate in 2010, they offered no reason for doing so and gave Rahman no opportunity to answer the accusations that were the basis for his removal. He was replaced by Cllr Helal Abbas even though Abbas had come third in the selection process, behind Biggs. It was alleged that if they removed Rahman they did not want to be seen to do so in favour of a white candidate. The perpetrators of this carnage of natural justice, described by Mawrey as "by any standards utterly shameful" included such luminaries as Harriet Harman, Angela Eagle, Jack Dromey and Dennis Skinner. Truly such people are not fit to run the country, and even Mawrey applauded Rahman's decision to stand as an independent against this stitch-up.

What does this case tell us about the powers of elected mayors? One of the aspects of Rahman's administration that came in for serious criticism by Mawrey was his use of the council's grants system to reward/bribe his supporters. This was a blatant misuse of his authority - yet the methods he used to manipulate the grants system were all legitimately within his power.

He used "all the decision-making powers that were legally possible" (judgement, para 2.112). So we may conclude that presumably any elected mayor could use these powers to the same ends.

Has Greg Clark, the new secretary of state for communities and local government, and an enthusiast for directly-elected mayors, read that paragraph? Or Tony Blair, who gave us directly elected mayors and increased postal voting?

## ELECTIONS MANIPULATED

The scope for manipulation of the electoral process was exposed. Postal voting has now become accepted, but it still provides opportunity for wholesale vote-rigging. All the evils predicted by critics of recent electoral reform, and more, were manifested in Tower Hamlets. Again, not new but more widespread and more efficiently organised than before.

Also worrying was the reluctance of the police in Tower Hamlets to respond to requests from voters for protection from intimidation at polling stations.

*"Confronting corruption and electoral fraud where it is associated with a particular community is essential not only for the health of politics generally but in the interests of the many people in those communities who are not involved with the corruption"*

In addition, Mawrey tackled the misuse of religious influence to manipulate voters, using a venerable and little-known piece of legislation to do so - but quite right too. Will election legislation and the rulings of election officers be responsive to the findings of this court? A cynic might think that only when Labour were the losers rather than the beneficiaries did anyone take the problems

seriously.

I suspect complacency still lurks in many town halls and there are plenty of elected representatives with a strong personal interest in ensuring that bloc votes in minority ethnic communities are not examined too closely.

It's not all over. Now that the election for a new mayor has been held, and Biggs has attained the office which the Labour apparatchiks no doubt wanted all along, press and public attention has been diverted to other things.

It is assumed that now all will be well. Biggs is clearly fundamentally different from Rahman. However, he will have obligations and expectations to meet from various groups in Tower Hamlets, including the Tories who backed him in order to get rid of Rahman. Will he be able to do this fairly?

The networks of corruption and influence have not gone away - as already pointed out, the electoral and other malpractices in the borough were carried out on behalf of Labour for many years before Rahman came along. They are unlikely to abandon them altogether in future. Erlam claims that the latest election was not as free of fraud and intimidation as many people seem to assume.

The Labour party in Tower Hamlets itself is as riven with vicious infighting as it ever was, and Biggs is heartily despised by the far left whose narrative is that Rahman was a fall guy, dethroned by the establishment for daring to challenge it.

Rahman himself will not go away; although his party is splitting, he still commands support and once his period of disqualification is over he could re-stand as mayor. So the scandal-watchers of the local authority scene should still keep an eye on Tower Hamlets.

Finally, what happened in Tower Hamlets is happening elsewhere. There is a tendency to see Tower Hamlets as a unique location populated by lunatics, untypical of any other council in the country.

The Lib Dem administration of 1986-94 suffered from that perception. Yet clearly, as evidenced by Judge Mawrey's experience in Birmingham, large-scale electoral malpractice is present elsewhere, and unless rigorously suppressed it will continue.

It needs to be challenged without fear or favour.

Mawrey recommends several changes to election law, including the reform of the election petition system, to make it fit to deal with 21st century circumstances. It is sincerely to be hoped that the Law Commission, which is looking at these issues, pays heed.

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Gwyneth Deakins is a Liberal Democrat councillor in Redbridge and was formerly a councillor in Tower Hamlets



# IGNORING THE EVIDENCE

## Why is cannabis for medical use still criminalised leaving sick people in pain, asks Kelly-Marie Blundell

As the Psychoactive Substances Bill works through the House of Lords, a number of amendments have been suggested which, quite appropriately, call into question the UK's entire approach to drug policy.

While the Liberal Democrats have always been committed to an overhaul of drugs policy, there is an area which our peers have championed and the party should continue to - the legalisation of use, possession and supply of cannabis for medicinal purposes.

Current Liberal Democrat policy is for a thorough and radical approach to decriminalisation. It was adopted in 2011 and stated: "Drugs are powerful substances which can have serious consequences for the individual user and society in general; and that it is therefore right and proper that the state should intervene to regulate and control the use of such substances as it does the consumption of legal drugs such as alcohol and tobacco and both prescription and over-the-counter medicines."

Lord Paddick leads on justice and home affairs in the Lords for the Liberal Democrats and has argued strongly the legalisation of cannabis for medical purposes: "There can be absolutely no justification for seriously ill people, prescribed medicine by a doctor, to be forced to become drug smugglers.

"We aren't talking about fake prescriptions for those wishing to get high. We are talking about properly prescribed doses of pain relief for those with serious conditions."

As a former assistant commissioner in the Metropolitan Police, Paddick is not your typical advocate of drugs legalisation. But this simply adds weight to the cause.

Yet the UK continues to criminalise those who use cannabis for medicinal purposes, largely due to complex legislation and ultimately a lack of clinical trials on a drug that many sufferers of devastating conditions rely upon to relieve pain.

The Labour government from 1997 continued to mix messages on cannabis, moving it from Class B to Class C in 2004 and back to Class B again in 2007, ignoring the Advisory Panel on the Misuse of Drugs. Eventually cannabis was moved to Schedule IV of the Misuse of Drugs Act, from which we are to infer it has no medicinal or therapeutic benefit.

The problem is, the few clinical trials conducted do show medicinal benefit, which is why decriminalisation for medical purposes should be policy.

While cannabis was classified as Class C, companies could look at clinical trials. A botanical extract called Nabiximols was produced, brand name Sativex, which was initially to tackle pain and damage experienced by people with multiple sclerosis.

GW Pharmaceuticals has researched impact of cannabinoids through sativex with trials focussing on multiple sclerosis and later neuropathic pain,

rheumatoid arthritis, and cancer. Each trial continues to show "reassuring safety profile of Sativex and provide further evidence of long-term efficacy". Despite this and subsequent evidence, cannabis was changed back to Class B and so hampered medical trials.

As a Class B drug, medical trials are severely restricted. However, they continue abroad. We now have a rather ludicrous position in the UK where Sativex is available, but no NHS trust will fund the expensive production, and doctors are informed they prescribe at their own risk. And when you cannot get a prescription, or the medication, where do you turn?

To illustrate this ridiculous situation, Michelle Ann X took part in the television programme Benefits Britain, screened in June.

Michelle, who suffers from multiple sclerosis, was on the original MS clinical human trials for GW Pharmaceuticals' Sativex.

Until the trial, Michelle was unable to undertake full time work and side effects from her prescribed medications were close to confining her to her wheelchair. Then the treatment worked and Michelle became one of the cases which helped the medication get approved as an effective treatment option for MS patients. Despite this, Michelle was subsequently denied Sativex due to lack of funding.

Forced back into a wheelchair-bound life of pain, Michelle reasoned she would have to continue to consume cannabis illegally. She began growing her own, identifying strains that benefitted her.

However, having then appeared on Benefits Britain, she was arrested and charged for possession and production of a class B controlled drug.

The United Patients Alliance works for patients seeking to use cannabis to reduce suffering from a range of conditions. These patients are forced to either live in unnecessary pain or risk becoming, or dealing with, criminals for their medicine and risking a criminal record.

Many of the 10 million people identifying as disabled suffer from these conditions and more. Yet, despite medical evidence to the contrary, cannabis is still class B and medical trials are severely restricted.

In many other countries there has been a range of successful clinical trials for many conditions, and for the UK to continue to ignore this evidence is simply irresponsible and arguably cruel.

The Liberal Democrats are well known for their open and responsible approach to drug policy and the decriminalisation of cannabis for medicinal purposes.

Moving it to Class C, allowing more clinical trials and removing criminalisation for possession and production could enhance millions of lives.

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Kelly-Marie Blundell was the Liberal Democrat candidate in Guildford at the May general election

# BANNED FOR TOO LONG

## Lester Holloway calls on free speech grounds for an end to the ban on Louis Farrakhan visiting the UK

It is almost three decades since the Thatcher government banned Nation of Islam (NoI) leader Louis Farrakhan from entering Britain on the grounds that his visit would spark “civil disorder”, despite him not causing physical disruption anywhere during four decades in public life. The same pretext is still used to exclude him.

In that time Farrakhan has joined forces with respected US civil rights leaders and mainstream politicians in organising a Million Man March.

He enjoys a warm relationship with figures such as General Colin Powell who is happy to be pictured with him and has leading political figures and Jewish community leaders.

The only country he is banned from is the United Kingdom. At the time of writing a petition on Change.org calling for the ban to be overturned has topped 2,000 signatures.

Many grassroots African and Caribbean activists who are not Nation of Islam supporters want the ban overturned.

There is simply no evidence that letting Farrakhan in would cause civil disorder.

In 1986, when the then home secretary Douglas Hurd first imposed the ban, there was no evidence of this either.

There had been widespread uprisings in black communities, sparked by police brutality and the ‘Sus’ laws. It was clear the government feared Farrakhan’s appearance would reignite tension in these areas.

They misunderstood the purpose of his planned visit; it was not to incite more riots but to calm tensions and begin the healing.

His record in 37 years as NoI leader has been to inspire community rebuilding among black communities, not violence. Not just in words but in deeds. The NoI has opened shops and businesses on both sides of the Atlantic to provide services lacking in the inner cities.

Had Farrakhan stepped on British soil in 1986 he would have delivered a message of hope based on self-organisation and knowledge of self.

The vision of an organised and inspired black community probably kept Thatcher awake at night and the image of straight-backed young black men all standing tall in identical dark suits and red bow ties must have seemed like a hostile army to some.

It is non-violent movement doing good works and diverting young black men from crime and despair into disciplined and motivated citizens.

Farrakhan has never, to my knowledge, suggested anyone should throw a pebble let alone riot.

As time ticked away the reasons given for keeping the ban in place changed, at least in the public debate.

In the early 2000s it shifted from being a threat to public safety to accusations that Farrakhan was anti-Semitic.

Various quotes from Farrakhan’s articles, books and speeches were used to substantiate this claim, which the NoI contend were plucked out of context. But I can see how some of these quotes could be seen as anti-Semitic. The line as to what constitutes anti-Semitism is drawn much lower than the test for anti-black racism, and even the hint that someone could be harbouring anti-Jewish sentiment must be avoided.

In the past Farrakhan has frequently crossed this line, which is highly regrettable.

However the contexts in which his comments were made are rarely mentioned by his critics.

All the remarks I have seen are clearly made as part of an analysis of power and economics and how this has, and continues to, impact negatively on black people.

He has referenced companies and organisations that he accuses of attempting to destroy the black community.

The problem begins when he mentions that some high-powered individuals happen to be Jewish.

Such controversies are now quite dated. The man is 82 and has mellowed with age.

And he has happily engaged with Jewish leaders across the world to explain what he was trying to say.

It is clear he is no longer makes the kind of comments that have stirred controversy.

More importantly, anti-Semitism is not the official reason given for upholding the ban, which remains “public disorder.”

If his critics want the ban upheld on grounds of anti-Semitism let the evidence be tested by the courts.

I am not a member of the Nation but have long believed that the ban is illiberal and restricts free speech.

Moreover, it has sent a message to Britain’s black communities that they are being unfairly denied a visit by a figure that has a lot to say to them.

There is a sense that the ban is an attempt to ‘control’ black communities and discourage popular self-organisation.

Surely if Farrakhan was regarded as being an anti-Semite then mainstream Democrats and Republicans would have refused to meet him or participate in the NoI’s Million Man and Million Family marches?

As a Liberal I believe that you don’t have to be a particular fan of Farrakhan to consider the ban on him entering Britain to be wrong.

That was the case put by Labour’s Sadiq Khan, then a civil rights lawyer, who unsuccessfully appealed against the ban.

I would rather see an army of suited, disciplined, conscious and smart young black men than an army of disillusioned and intellectually unconscious youths shooting and stabbing each other.

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Lester Holloway is a member of Ethnic Minority Liberal Democrats and former news editor of The Voice

# TIME TO TALK

Fran Oborski argued in *Liberator* 372 that the Liberal Party's continued existence was pointless. Roger Jenking says it fills a worthwhile role and has an overlap with the Liberal Democrats

For both Liberals and Liberal Democrats, this is a time of crisis. It would be easy for one to gloat and the other to sneer. Liberal Democrats won eight seats in the General Election. The Liberals put up a pitifully small number of candidates.

Most Liberal Democrats do not think of the Liberals at all, some do not even know a Liberal Party exists. To a minority they are an irritant, to a small minority where the Liberals have a presence, more than that. The latter, they think, spend too long reading John Stuart Mill, are purist, unrealistic and probably misunderstand liberalism anyway.

To some Liberals, the small number of Liberal Democrats who started the party in 1988 and are still in it, sold out their principles. Those who have joined since are 'technocrats'. If they hold any ideology at all, it is based on a vague 'centre' ground and unthinking internationalism.

To hold any sort of dialogue would too many in the larger party be a waste of time, to some in the smaller, a process which leads to being swallowed up. And it is true that re-unification is impossible and, arguably, not even desirable as we move into a multi-party democracy and inevitable electoral reform.

But there was a dialogue in the past. Most of us in the Liberal Party know or know of Liberal Democrats for whom we have great respect. Liberals like myself read *Liberator* and are members of the Liberal Democrat History Group - of which you do not have to be a party member to join. We respect and wish well, the Social Liberal Forum, Liberal Left and the *Liberator* collective.

I hope that those Liberal Democrats who do know some Liberals think the same way. Perhaps the SLF and LL, pre-occupied with radicalising their party, might give a little time to see if Liberals have anything useful to say.

The point is that 1988 saw a split which was just as untidy as it was asymmetric. The idea that both groups have of each other as more 'right wing' cannot both be true. In the crucial economic sphere, Liberals couldn't accuse Kennedy or Cable of not being of an egalitarian persuasion.

But there are genuine differences. For convenience, I'm putting them into three groups.

In general the Liberal Party 2015 manifesto was more radical and certainly more heterodox than that of the Liberal Democrats. Generally on things like civil liberties, decentralisation, defence and housing, the Liberals were more adventurous. Take two specific examples. One is the Liberal Democrats' lack of a leasehold reform policy. The second might sound trivial but the party not vetoing Pickles' diktat to local authorities on parking fees - which was an act of extraordinary and authoritarian centralisation - is

again inexplicable.

In terms of economics, Liberals respect the Lib Dems' achievement of bringing more people out of the tax system, of the introduction of the pupil premium and their wish for higher property taxes for the rich.

But as inequalities grow, more decisive action is needed. The Liberal idea of universal inheritance, a sum given to everyone at 25 years of age would have to be funded by a significant tax increase, logically from a large hike in inheritance duty. The Lib Dem attitude to this would be a good indication of their radicalism on economic equality.

It is sometimes felt that Liberals are reckless on the economy. But no Liberal wants to see tax money wasted in paying national debt interest. It's right to aim to eliminate the annual deficit and narrow the long term debt. Likewise government money should not fund ultra-high salaries in the public sector. But the Coalition's policy on austerity was counter-productive as well as unfair when it became clear that the poor were taking the main hit.

And, finally, the biggie. Liberals support a European common trade area and many would be in favour of continent wide consultation in foreign and defence policy. But most have grave reservations about the EU to the extent of voting 'no' in the coming referendum unless there are much deeper reforms than Cameron has in mind. Does that make them want a nationalistic 'Little Britain'?

No - and this is clear if we take some of the emotional language out of the debate. If parish or neighbourhood control is tier 1 administration and world government tier 7, then that of Europe is tier 6. Both Liberals and Liberal Democrats parade their belief in localism. The notion that a tier 6 administration should be able to impose something because it seems a good idea at the time is inherently and profoundly anti-localist - especially when there is such a democratic deficit in that tier's structure.

So there are obvious differences in the world view of the Liberal and Liberal Democrat parties. But there is an overlap, common history and some mutual respect. Just as candidates in an election normally rub along with each other and avoid personal insults, so the two parties can oppose each other without gratuitous rancour. And some cross-fertilisation is not impossible.

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Roger Jenking is a member of the Liberal Party



# LORDS AND LUCRE

## Liberal Democrat Federal Finance and Administration Committee chair Peter Dunphy answers his critics over donations policy

The functioning of party committees in the Liberal Democrats has been under the spotlight. Questions over accountability and transparency have increased. There have been well publicised investigations into party fundraising and a re-emergence of ‘cash for peerages’ allegations.

I would like to address some specific issues and offer some practical proposals, including some raised in Liberator 372 by Katherine Bavage.

In the absence of information a conspiracy theory develops. With limited information dots are joined that create a false picture. An example: In Katherine’s piece she states: “The party’s policy on accepting gifts and conflicts of interest is not shared publicly, nor the job description of the chair of FFAC.”

The former is very widely published – to the Federal Executive, Federal Finance and Administration Committee, Liberal Democrats Ltd (LDL)(formerly the trustees), all party staff involved in compliance or fundraising, the Electoral Commission and anyone else who wants it.

In relation to the latter there is no secret job spec. No party officer has a job spec. Each has only a brief remit defined by the constitution – a very public document. The lack of more detailed specs is a failing. The same can be said of the remits of the party committees which are often sketchy with overlaps and gaps.

Donations information is publicly available on the Electoral Commission website and reported quarterly in the press. I would also recommend [www.partyfunding.uk](http://www.partyfunding.uk).

Katherine states that she is “not aware” of any declaration being made to the FE of FFAC member donations. Any FE member could have made her aware that I did indeed make this clear when standing for election. Sal Brinton is afforded an ‘excuse’ to be a donor – in that she was a parliamentary candidate. But Katherine suggests that “on the other hand” my “generosity stands out”. If Katherine had dug a little deeper (or given me a ring) she would have discovered that my donations have been made over a 15 year period. I was a parliamentary candidate three times, agent in Waltham Forest 1990-08, helping the party go from three to 20 seats, a Lib Dem councillor, by-election groupie and fundraiser for the 2008 and 2012 London campaigns including funding a staff member. For the first 19 years as an activist from 1982 I made no donations at all. When I started to earn well from building a business I also helped the party financially. I see no reason why this should disqualify me from office when there has been absolute transparency throughout.

The role of the FFAC and our position on this has never been secret. We have a role in ensuring that all donations are acceptable – in accord with PPERA

guidelines and a responsibility to the party to not accept a donation that may bring it into disrepute, including any with strings attached. According to a 2014 audit by the Electoral Commission we perform this role very well.

Peerages are suggested by party leaders, and appointed by the Queen on the advice of the prime minister. The role of vetting nominees, including weeding out ‘cash for peerages’ lies with the House of Lords Appointments Commission. The identity of candidates being scrutinised is confidential.

The FFAC (like the FE) has no role in, nor notification of, leader’s peerage recommendations. We discover who our new peers are at the same time as the general public. There is no procedure for any party body to scrutinise, or object to, a peerage. There is a ‘Chinese Wall’ between donation scrutiny and Lords’ appointments.

A comprehensive Governance Review is to take place over the next 12 months led by Sal Brinton and the FE. I would like to see, and will promote (not speaking for the FFAC or any other member):

- ☛ A thorough review of Lords appointments injecting more democracy and transparency into the process. The Greens and the SNP have demonstrated that we do not have to follow the discredited conventions of the Labour and Conservative parties.
- ☛ Comprehensive role specifications for party committees and office holders.
- ☛ A requirement for all party officers and committee members to maintain an up-to-date declaration of interests, including donations, to avoid conflicts of interest. I do not however believe that having made donations should in itself disqualify someone from office.
- ☛ A ‘Freedom of Information’ policy for party bodies with the presumption on full transparency unless otherwise required (such as a personal staffing issue or a legal matter where publication may create prejudice). Smaller committees would make this easier to manage.
- ☛ A streamlining of the functions of the FE, FFAC and LDL and greater ‘buck stops here’ clarity on compliance, risk management and corporate governance.

I would encourage all party members with concerns relating to governance to engage in the debate.

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Peter Dunphy is chair of the Liberal Democrat Federal Finance and Administration Committee and writes in a personal capacity

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**Baghdad: City of Peace,  
City of Blood**  
by Justin Marozzi  
Allen Lane

British Arabist and traveller Gertrude Bell once wrote in a letter to her father “no-one could possibly know what Baghdad was like in the time of Harun al Rashid”.

This book is the best possible illumination for anyone who assumes that Baghdad is a just romantic setting for the stories of the Arabian Nights or more recently horrific sectarian violence. Justin Marozzi masterfully combines a strategic panorama of Baghdad, from its founding in 762AD while allowing the voices of its residents to share their lives and observations.

Marozzi’s meticulously researched but ethereal scholarship provides the characters of Baghdad with the scope to command the pages and tell their stories of this city - not only the Caliphs, rulers and invaders – but the poets, storytellers, artists, scientists, scholars, architects and mathematicians.

Much of the most colourful and enchanting narrative is in the early chapters of the history of the Abbasids, where Marozzi wittily recounts famous and playful tales including those of incest, scatology and provides a 10th century recipe for Nabatean chicken.

The book takes us on a journey through thirteen centuries of the history of Baghdad from the design of the city by Caliph Mansur, invasions by Mongols, Ottoman Sultans and Persian Shahs.

The golden decade of the 1950s when Baghdad was perceived as the most progressive Arab capital before the rise of the Baathists is an elegant exercise in nostalgia. The arrogance and brutality of Saddam Hussein and the subsequent 2003 war is captured with alarming accuracy and pitch perfect analysis.

Baghdad’s diversity is deftly explored. The commercially thriving Jewish community was 80,000 strong before the First World War – now the remaining seven or eight individuals are too few to muster a minyan to read the Torah in public. Christians too have suffered persecution and are fleeing as the rise of ISIS defines more acutely the Shi’a/Sunni demarcation that has been so prevalent since Baghdad’s foundation.



# REVIEWS

Sadly this book is the closest most readers will get to Baghdad and like most westerners, Marozzi has done his interviews and exploration of its streets and occasional cemeteries wearing body armour. He provides a glimpse not only of a largely forgotten Baghdad, but one visitors are now largely unable to appreciate from the confines of the green zone and the risk analysis culture of the security companies.

Marozzi concludes by quoting a retired diplomat who lives in Baghdad: “You have to wonder if the good Caliph Mansur, if he had had the slightest foresight of the city’s bloody future, would have built his circular seat of power here. The cycle that sees Baghdad lurching between mayhem and prosperity has been long and gory, but of course we must have hope”.

Susan Simmonds

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**Freeing the Innocent:  
From Bangkok Hilton  
to Guantanamo**  
by Stephen Jakobi  
Book Guild Publishing  
2015 £17.99

This is the autobiography of the founder of Fair Trials Abroad and also the story of that organisation (though the author makes clear he has not been actively involved for nearly a decade).

Jakobi writes: “This book is mainly a chronicle of victims and rescue attempts.” It includes short sections on many well-known international cases starting with the arrest of two Birmingham teenagers for smuggling drugs in Thailand in 1990 (Karyn Smith and Patricia Cahill), through the Greek plane spotters, the British nanny in America, Louise Woodward, and Liverpool cause célèbre Michael Shields (jailed in Bulgaria).

Many are cases famous from the media of the 1990s and 2000s. The book is well written and above all an honest and an interesting account. Jakobi documents the many failures and far fewer successes. He always gives credit to his staff, trustees, volunteers, partners, funders and others who help.

I recommend the book highly for four reasons: it’s a good story, well written; it reminds us of the importance of the right to a fair trial and how often this is not respected in the modern world; it is a good book for journalists and for campaigners because a lot of the content is about how to run campaigns; and the author makes some important observations about the quality of European justice and the right to a fair trial.

The book unusually praises both politicians and the media as much as it condemns them and tells an interesting story, chronicling important cases, and dealing with important legal principles.

The author has been a Liberal since hearing Jo Grimond speak at Cambridge (and a committed but unsuccessful Parliamentary candidate). Former MEPs Graham Watson and Sarah Ludford, and Lord Kirkwood, all get good mentions, but Jakobi is fair and critical of politicians of all parties as he believes they deserve it.

He is positive about Labour’s Mo Mowlam, Baroness Scotland, Louise Ellman, and Robin Cook and Jack Straw, sometimes, about Conservatives John Bercow, Anne Widdecombe and others.

The European Union gets a lot of unusual praise and recognition – especially MEPs for their support, but also the institutions. They came to the rescue with grants. So did the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust. Jakobi though strongly criticises the European arrest warrant in implementation and

practice but believes that with proper safeguards it is a vital measure. I agree.

Families feature compassionately throughout. Maajid Nawaz and Moazzam Begg are two cases included. Nawaz the individualistic and outspoken figurehead of anti-Islamic extremist group Quilliam, has found himself pilloried as he has been a high profile Lib Dem parliamentary candidate.

Begg's situation as a Guantanamo detainee I knew about before hearing his father speak very eloquently at a Liberal Democrat conference, and I recall the motion that Azmet Begg and Jakobi spoke on at that conference was unanimously supported.

The cases are not all high profile. Football supporters are often the victims – unfairly targeted by corrupt or lazy police and justice officials. The United Road Transport Union come across well as actively supporting their members detained right across Europe, and helping Fair Trials Abroad.

I've already recommended the book to contacts in the media interested in criminal justice as well as those who actively work on fair trials issues.

Kiron Reid.

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## 1984 by George Orwell (play) Robert Icke and Duncan Macmillan (dirs)

Orwellian concepts like 'doublethink', 'newspeak' and 'room 101' have entered the language, but when the year 1984 came and went with none of what Orwell described having happened, some must have wondered at the book's continued relevance.

With totalitarianism now confined to obscure corners like North Korea and Eritrea is Orwell's work of more than historical interest?

I've read that sales of the 1984 rose sharply after Edward Snowden's revelations of state snooping, and clearly most of the technology Orwell foresaw is now with us.

This may then be an opportune moment for the theatre to revisit 1984's story of a dystopia, where citizens' every move and thought is

watched and controlled, overseen by Big Brother, the ominous and omnipresent leader of the party that controls the state.

The story of Winston Smith's creeping disillusion with Big Brother and his work in the Ministry of Truth (where he earns his living 'unpersoning' those of whom the regime disapproves) and his forbidden and doomed affair with Julia are told with an unsettling production with striking visual and sound effects, blinding flashes of light combined with a cacophony of sounds from shrieking sirens to pulses of deep vibrations.

Winston is arrested and harrowingly tortured (I'm told audience members have been known to need medical attention while watching) by two lines of silent, white-coated torture workers against a background of drilling, bright flashes of light and plunges into sudden darkness.

The play shocks, but so does the subject matter, and it indeed still has much to say. In a nice touch, it runs for 101 minutes. 1984 is on in London until early September, and in Nottingham and Bath this autumn.

Mark Smulian

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## The Establishment by Owen Jones Penguin 2015 £8.99

Are you suffering from post-election lethargy syndrome? Unsure if you can pick yourself up and return to the fight against a triumphant Tory party backed by capital, the media and a dominant pro-austerity narrative? Then visit your GP and see if you cannot get Owen Jones' book 'The Establishment' on prescription.

It is not that the book reveals much that will be new to anyone on the left who has been paying attention to the dramatic changes in our politics and society since the 1970s. But seeing the full enormity of the scale and nature of those changes collated and analysed is truly motivating to begin the fight back immediately.

Jones' concept of The Establishment is not the caricature of key walks of life being dominated by a privileged and closed cohesive class group that consciously (and often conspiratorially) act in their mutual interests. Rather, he stresses the role of

a hegemonic narrative which achieves the same ends without the need for conspiracy – or even conscious understanding of what is happening.

Gramsci may have got there before him but, fortunately, Jones is much more readable. (With one exception: he is truly obsessed with the word 'outrider', meaning a group or individual whose role is to propagate or defend the dominant ideology, either wittingly or unwittingly. This is especially the case in the first 50 or so pages which are very tiresome but the rest of the book makes it worth persevering).

Jones documents the rise and triumph in the UK of the neo-liberal narrative. He traces it back to Popper, Hayek and Friedman. But what really impresses him is how their ideas – originally seen as totally beyond the pale even within Conservative circles – were preserved and promoted by a small band of zealots (Madsen Pirie and the IEA get particular mentions) until eventually they succeeded in replacing the more collectivist/ societal post-war consensus.

He describes this as 'shifting the Overton window'. (This describes the boundaries of discussion or policies that are considered mainstream/ non-extreme and so determines the ground on which 'respectable' political debate falls). Jones clearly feels that, to date, the left has totally failed to articulate, defend and then advance the coherent anti-austerity narrative that is ready and waiting for them to pick up and run with.

The analysis is insightful. But the true 'active ingredient' in this particular medication is simply the reminder of the scale and diversity of what the Tories and 'New' Labour have done, and what the left urgently needs to fight. Almost every page contains a reminder – the revolving doors between government and corporations; politicisation of the civil service and the police; demonisation of the trade union movement; cover-ups such as Hillsborough and Orgreave; the contrast in the tax treatment of major corporations and the attacks on the benefits system; and so on.

Read the book. Consider it as medication. I promise it will raise your blood pressure and have you campaigning again.

John Leston



## Sunday

After Divine Service at St Asquith's a bevy of elderly ladies gather surrounds me. "When is the Reverend Hughes coming back?" they demand to know. Now, I find it best to keep on the right side of this element of the fairer sex – in my experience they are generally armed to the teeth with duck-handled umbrellas – but what can I say? Everyone's favourite padre disappeared on missionary work among the tribes of the Upper Welland Valley shortly after the debacle of the general election and not a word had been heard from him since. I have an awful feeling that someone has shrunk his head.

## Monday

The telephone is brought to me and on the other end of the line is someone telling me what a fine fellow Norman Lamb is and what a poor specimen Farron is. Lamb, it transpires, is in favour of people being allowed to end their own lives and of equal marriage. Farron, by contrast – or so I am informed – is Fundamentally Unsound.

I draw a long breath: "I have no doubt that what you say is true Grant, or whatever your name is, but I would question what is has to do with the leadership of the Liberal Party. Are we really intending to fight the next election under the slogan 'Vote for us and then top yourself'? I know the results in May were dreadful, but surely they were not that bad? As to equal marriage, the current Lady Bonkers and I are very happy. The only chap I would want to marry is Alan Beith and he is spoken for by a charming woman who was an MP in Dorset for a number of years. I bid you good day."

## Tuesday

Mind you, Farron can be Rather Hard Work. This morning, when I pass by St Asquith's to make sure that no more gargoyles have fallen, he stops me to ask why I insist the choirboys have rifle practice every week. What a question! He wouldn't be asking it if a snap by-election were called. I cast a soulful look towards the country west of Marston Trussell, where the Revd Hughes is probably even now simmering gently, surrounded by onions and bouquet garni.

## Wednesday

Do you know Alex Carlile? He was at one time Liberal MP for Montgomeryshire before being replaced by Lembit Opik – the general view in Welshpool and Caersws was that the latter brought some much needed gravitas to the role. Yet Carlile's career has prospered in recent years and I meet him this morning while strolling by the Thames at Westminster. "I hear you've been

# Lord Bonkers' Diary

asked to serve on the committee that is going to review freedom of information legislation," I say brightly. He looks at me suspiciously: "Who told you that?"

## Thursday

One of the tasks I have taken on in recent years is editing Wainwright's West Country Marginals. A new edition is published after each general election, and with that in mind I recently

dispatched an assistant to those parts to sniff out the lie of the land. Today I received his report:

"At Bridgwater and Newton Abbot, Liberal clubs lie in ruins. Bright with buddleias and rosebay willowherb, they are the haunt of feral cats and truant children. Statues of Jo Grimond have been toppled in Redruth and Combe Martin. They threw stones at me in Chewton Mendip and Langton Herring."

I fear the new edition will need considerable revision. As to Wainwright's Midland Second Places, I fear it will be a slim volume indeed this time.

## Friday

A fresh breeze whips up the white horses as my launch powers across Rutland Water. I like to keep an eye on my oil rigs, and there have been reports recently that the feared Rutland man o' war jellyfish has been sighted close to shore, so you will often find me aboard. Today all is well, so we moor up early for a lunch at the Bonkers' Arms.

Later I take to the air – or at least my Patent Focus-Delivering Drone does. What with the membership of all parties in historic decline, I reason that we shall have to embrace the latest technology to get the Liberal message across. (This has long been my view: I was, I believe, the first man to employ Bakelite in a parliamentary by-election.) In all honesty this afternoon's trial reveals a few teething problems, but Mr Patel was Terribly Nice about it and I shall, of course, pay for any repairs needed to the thatch on the village shop.

## Saturday

A fellow with a bone through his nose presents himself at the Hall. "Don't tell me," I cry, "you have brought me the Reverend Hughes' shrunk head." "Au contraire," he replies, "the Holy Man has sent me here to pick up supplies of Shuttleworths and Cow Gum. He has converted us all to Liberalism and told us that we must start campaigning for next May's election."

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