

# liberator

*It's the great Lib Dem  
Bournemouth beach  
clean-up!*

*Could they run  
a whelk stall too?*

- 🗳️ Look left to move ahead - David Howarth
- 🗳️ Time to kill off trident - David Grace
- 🗳️ Housing policy falling down - Alex Marsh

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# COMMENTARY

## A QUESTION OF POWER

The Liberal Democrats meet in Bournemouth after having been slaughtered for participating in a coalition with the Conservatives.

A generation ago, the Liberal party met in Margate having been slaughtered in a general election for having participated in a pact with Labour.

If the party cannot work with another party nationally without it ending with the sort of kicking it got in May (and indeed in 1979), can it somehow vault into power without this intermediate stage?

If it cannot do either of those things, can it ever exercise power nationally? If it cannot, what is it for?

Behind all the talk about a Lib Dem fightback, winning ward-by-ward, developing policies from Liberal principles and absorbing the welcome but surprising influx of new members, this is the question that will not go away and which no one has yet adequately answered.

Some parties spend their whole existence as a glorified pressure group, whose presence and occasional surges of support forces larger parties to heed their concerns.

The Green party and Ukip work like this and it's not an entirely pointless thing to do. Indeed it was pretty much the Liberal party's role from its mid-1950s revival until it became a more formidable concern in the 1980s.

Going back to that now is, again, neither ignoble nor pointless. Most people who have been around the party a while even know what to do - pick your target seat, pick your issues so you shove one other party out of the way and then take on the remaining one as its main opposition, or destroy a complacent 'safe' seat, then repeat the trick again and again helped by a few lucky by-elections.

Success along the way will deliver control of some councils and even assemble enough pressure sometimes to score political victories nationally. Its one way of doing politics and it's not in itself 'wrong'.

But is that all the battered Liberal Democrats can hope for? Tim Farron clearly has bigger aspirations and his start in choosing campaign themes and encouraging activity around these has been promising.

Even if the result of the Labour leadership election turns out to have favourable consequences for the Lib Dems, and even if Farron's campaigning energy and political sense successfully revive the party, it will still, if it gets anywhere, one day again face the question of should it enter a coalition or pact.

The answer may well be the same as in 2010 - that it would have no realistic alternative to doing so and would be derided by the public for refusing.

And unless it somehow, in an improbable set of circumstances, secured electoral reform and solid slate of identifiably Lib Dem measures it might well be

slaughtered yet again at the end of it.

The only way round this, as *Liberator* has at length argued, is to secure a core vote. Parties with core votes can take the most awful batterings and revive, as the Tories did after 1997 and Labour after 1983. They also have the clear 'selling points' enjoyed by the Greens and Ukip.

Former MP David Howarth has suggested the party should target the "tolerant centre and centre left" for its core vote. The late Simon Titley often argued that young urban professionals and those with 'drawbridge down' attitudes were the most promising places to look. One can add to those the remaining Lib Dem vote among poorer people in some rural areas and the still substantial vote in some university towns.

Opinions may differ over exactly where a core vote should be sought, but the 8% exposed by the general election is pitifully small, and a precarious base on which to build anything.

How tactically and politically the party gets there is another debate, but building that core vote ought to be its strategic goal.

## WHAT YOU'RE IN FOR

New Lib Dem members at their first conference at Bournemouth may find the whole thing a surreal experience.

It's unlikely their lives will previously have brought them into contact with people who esteem the food provided at fringe meetings as a delicacy, demand they sign emergency motions, think the 'reports to conference' are informative or claim that (no matter what the subject under discussion) the answer must be land value taxation.

Nor will they have seen - let alone heard - the like of the Glee Club. They will be unaware that it is a sound rule of thumb that anyone wearing an item of party-branded clothing will be unhinged and best avoided. And nor will they know that - as they eagerly await the leader's speech - they about to be fleeced for their life savings in the financial appeal.

But they will discover that, at least sometimes, the conference really does make policy, that they will start to make enduring friendships with people from around the country and will be joining a party where, for the most part, people actually like each whatever their disagreements. Welcome aboard, you are in for an interesting ride.



# RADICAL BULLETIN

## CAPITAL OFFENCES

Like the citizens of some communist state, London Liberal Democrat members have been invited to choose from a shortlist of one for nominations for the London mayoralty candidate.

That candidate is Caroline Pidgeon, and it's not her fault that the indignity of running against 'reopen nominations' has arisen.

Pidgeon is a well-regarded London Assembly member and for many will be a welcome mayoral candidate.

It seems though that the powers that be in London region also recognised her merits and tried rather too hard to ensure she got the job, fearing that a hustings campaign within the party would see rivals attack the platform on which she proposes to stand, so damaging her planned campaign before it starts.

There were originally five other applicants to be mayoral candidate. Four of them, Brian Haley, Teena Lashmore, Marisha Ray and Paul Reynolds did not make the shortlist, but the fifth did, former Lewisham councillor Duwayne Brooks.

Friends of some other candidates say the atmosphere in the shortlisting hearings was unsatisfactory, with Pidgeon being warmly received while they were subjected to interviews that fell on the hostile side of 'tough'.

So did the shortlisting committee take too much on itself instead of trusting members' judgement to choose their candidate?

Haley stood in the mayoral selection four years ago, and is hardly likely to have become less experienced in the interim.

The other three were all thought sound enough to be parliamentary candidates at May's general election and Ray has fought a parliamentary by-election.

With a shortlist of two, Brooks then withdrew citing a professional commitment as a temporary advisor on stop and search powers to the police and crime commissioner of Northamptonshire.

That appointment was announced on 18 August the day before Brooks pulled out saying this new commitment left him without time to campaign.

Brooks has though stayed in the race for the London Assembly list, where only those in the highest positions are likely to be elected and so some intensive campaigning would be needed over the same period to secure a decent placing.

This has led some to wonder whether Brooks had found an opportune way out of a mayoral contest in which he would have been left as the token opponent of an officially favoured candidate.

The list of 16 London Assembly candidates appeared very late. Murky rumours circulate of appeals and threatened legal challenges, although London region has said the delay was not caused by someone successfully appealing to be included.

Selections for the London assembly constituencies are still to come. Judging by the experience of local parties in Lambeth and Southwark, these will give a new meaning to 'wider franchise'.

An outraged email from Dulwich & West Norwood chair Keith Fitchett to London region noted that the first official list of members sent omitted roughly half the 1,000 known to be in the two boroughs but included people from as far afield as Banbury, Batley, Cardiff, Mid-Worcestershire and Tunbridge Wells, let alone those from other parts of London.

A 'corrected' list contained only 10 from elsewhere but still omitted about half the 1,000.

After the exchange of 130 emails on the subject Fitchett restrained himself to asking: "Why have we not been told where the problems lie and what is being done to resolve them?"

## THE SOUND OF SILENCE

Liberator is happy to make waves but it's rare that we do so by accident.

Tony Greaves' article in *Liberator* 373 stated that he had been banned from contributing to the Liberal Democrat Voice website. This was only a side issue in an article about something else, but when it appeared LDV's editor Caron Lindsay responded by issuing four tweets stating that Greaves had been banned for rudeness to LDV volunteer staff.

She said Greaves had called LDV volunteers "mad" and "pathetic" and she had banned him until he apologised.

This though gave no clue as to what Greaves had wanted to put on LDV in the first place, or why it had refused to run it thus sparking the dispute.

So baffling was the piece that it attracted a near-unprecedented 171 comments.

Liberator understands that the original cause of the row was that Greaves wanted to criticise Ryan Coetzee, the party's strategy director in the two years up to the general election.

This was rejected not because of the argument made as such but because Coetzee was a staff member and the site had decided that party employees should not be criticised no matter how powerful.

Whether Coetzee himself ever claimed this privilege is unknown. Chris Rennard, while campaigns director and later chief executive, would have treated with contempt the idea that political criticisms of him should be banned.

The dispute then snowballed. Greaves sent an angry response to his piece not being run, LDV demanded an apology, he refused and was banned and there matters rest.

## AN OPEN BUNKER

"There will be no cabal and no bunker", Tim

Farron has said of his leadership. A welcome statement indeed and even more so if he can really stick to it.

Past party leaders have always had a coterie around them - even Paddy Ashdown, who unlike others was personally approachable.

These cabals have comprised old personal friends, key staff members and a number of perennial hangers-on - usually those rich enough to spend their days lurking around a leader's office to which they donate and making themselves useful until they become part of the furniture.

It reached an extreme with Nick Clegg's 'bunker' who were derisively referred to as 'the Clegg children' by irreverent MPs.

Farron has said that he wants to move his office out of parliament and into party HQ, though this may be a move born of necessity as the party's reduced numbers have seen it lose most of its office space.

Those likely to inhabit it include Ben Rich, Farron's leadership campaign chief, who is doing three months as chief of staff to oversee the process.

Natasha Kutchinsky, who was researcher to former Sutton MP Paul Burstow, is doing policy for Farron and Kate Creagh (formerly Heywood) is likely to have a key role alongside Jo Foster, former Welsh party chief executive.

Farron also relies a lot on his team in Westmoreland, from where Paul Butters has done much of his media operation.

Since those at the nerve centre of the public affairs industry are unlikely to remove themselves to Westmoreland very often that could indeed be a way to avoid the hangers-on.

## WHO'S IN, WHO'S OUT?

The Daily Mail reported in August that the House of Lord Appointments Commission had refused to allow former Yeovil MP David Laws to become a peer because of his involvement in an expenses scandal in 2010.

Laws resigned after only 17 days as a minister when it emerged he had claimed £45,000 for rent when he was living with his partner, contrary to the rules on MPs' expenses.

Nick Clegg restored him as a minister in 2012, but the lords frown on that sort of thing.

It should surely have been obvious to Clegg that Laws' conduct made it impossible for him to become a peer and that the nomination would serve only to humiliate him when he was duly rejected.

Was this among factors that delayed the dissolution honours list, which normally comes out soon after a general election but appeared only in late August?

Tim Farron in July named his shadow cabinet, which of necessity contained many people who are not MPs.

Notable among these names were former MPs Lorely Burt and Lynne Featherstone and Watford elected mayor Dorothy Thornhill, all of whom later duly gained peerages.

There were also peerages for Alan Beith, Malcolm Bruce, Menzies Campbell, Don Foster and Andrew Stunell, all long-serving MPs whose elevation few will seriously dispute.

With them were former MEP Sharon Bowles and, slightly surprisingly, former Richmond councillor Shas Sheehan.

The remaining peer was Jonny Oates, Clegg's former chief of staff, who joined a cornucopia of honoured former Clegg staffers.

Gongs went to Clegg advisors and donors Ian Wright, Richard Duncalf, and Duncan Greenland (though the latter has a long record of service on party committees), Clegg bag-carrier Matthew Hanney and to three activists all of whom by a most remarkable coincidence are from Sheffield Hallam.

Clearly in no other constituency in the country did anyone render such meritorious service to the party.

Danny Alexander, Vince Cable and Annette Brooke are to be touched by the Queen's sword, as is Anthony Ullman. Who?

Mystery solved! According to the Electoral Commission he donated £47,00 to the party in (wait for it) Sheffield between March 2014 and June 2015, plus £20,000 to central party funds.

## PAY DISPUTE

Lib Dem peers had to pay a chunk of their attendance allowances (their only pay) into a fund to support their staff costs during the Coalition, since the party lost its access to opposition group funding when it entered government but neglected to negotiate anything in its place.

Back in opposition some 'Cranbourne money' - the lords' equivalent of the commons' 'Short money' support for opposition groups - may flow again.

Peers were though were startled to be told that they had to keep paying their contributions in part so the party could pay allowances to lords leader Jim Wallace and chief whip Dick Newby. Both received salaries while in government but now do not.

The two are popular and are widely thought to both do a good job. But peers less well off than they resent having to contribute to their colleagues' pay.

There is a concession that some peers based a long way from parliament will not contribute as they must meet London accommodation and living costs, while others contribute instead to their local parties.

Some are concerned though that they have been told part of their contribution will find its way by an unexplained means into party campaigning, implying the contribution has been set to generate a surplus above the actual needs of the lords group.

## MERITS OF OPPOSITION

Liberal Youth lost its conference representative places in August due to 'administrative' reasons, and other suffered the same fate.

Federal Conference Committee was told that the deadlines for voting representative notifications, brought forward due to the accreditation process, would "not be a problem" this year and that there would also be time to grant voting status to the significant number of new members coming to conference. Only there wasn't.

Others were also disenfranchised leading to a situation so indefensible that the party eventually stopped defending it, with president Sal Brinton intervening to extend the representative registration deadline to 7 September.

Brinton blamed the security accreditation needed during the Coalition and said: "Now that we are no longer in coalition, we do have more flexibility." There's a silver lining then!

# LOOK LEFT FOR A ROUTE AHEAD

Chasing Liberal Democrat voters who defected to the Conservatives in 2015 is bound to fail because of their illiberal outlook, but the party might be onto something with those who shifted to Labour or the Greens, says David Howarth

The shock of election night is now slowly wearing off. We have a new leader, 20,000 new members and a surprising sense of optimism. But politics requires more than hope. It requires clear-eyed realism about the situation we are in and what we need to do to escape it.

A party that has suffered a near-death experience might feel a sense of elation just from the fact that it still lives, but we need to move on from light-headed relief to the serious and difficult work ahead.

The first step is to analyse what happened in the 2015 general election. Various attempts to do that are in train, but they suffer from trying to make inferences from the pattern of votes cast rather than from what individual voters did.

For that we need to be able to compare what the same voters did in 2010 and 2015. The only available dataset that is large enough and long-running enough to allow us to do that is the British Election Study. Admittedly all surveys have problems, as opinion pollsters found out in May, and the BES is no different – for example its online sample has picked up too few non-voters and so when it comes to using it to look at differential turnout we might need to be cautious. But the BES does have data on how 28,969 voters said they voted both in 2010 and in 2015. That allows us to do a switch analysis at national level of the type many campaigners will be familiar with at local level, but with the enormous advantage of also having demographic, attitude and opinion data on the same people.

## SIMPLE AND STARK

So where did our vote go? The story is simple and stark. Of our 2010 voters, only 30% stayed with us. 30% left us for Labour, 17% for the Conservatives, 9% to the Greens and 9% to Ukip. In Scotland, the result was even starker: we retained only 20% of our 2010 vote, losing 43% of it to the SNP and 24% to Labour. In the other direction we managed to attract some previous Conservatives, about a third of the number we lost, and also a small flow from Labour, about 12% of our loss to Labour. Counterflows from the Greens and Ukip, however, were minimal. (Those trying to reconcile these figures with actual results should note that there was a large outflow from the Conservatives to Ukip – about 12% of their 2010 vote).

In held seats we did somewhat better, retaining 52% of our vote, and 55% in seats where the Conservatives were second. Also noteworthy is that in held seats where the Conservatives were second that the

counterflow from the Conservatives was almost as great as the outflow, whereas the counterflow from Labour was smaller than in other seats. In these seats, we lost 19% of our 2010 vote to Labour, 5% to Ukip and 5% to the Greens.

So why did we lose so many seats, especially to the Conservatives? At one level it is simple – the anti-Conservative coalition we had carefully assembled in seats across the south and west of England (and the south west of London) crumbled, with progressive voters deserting to the left and a small number of anti-political protest voters jumping to Ukip.

A more subtle interpretation is that the ‘new centrist’ voters Nick Clegg claimed would ride to our rescue were not entirely non-existent – they were the voters who flowed to us from the Conservatives – but their numbers were not enough. They offset no more than a third of our losses to the left and we would have lost many seats even if the only movements had been those two. What turned defeat into a rout, however, was that we also lost more votes to the Conservatives than we gained from them. The new centrists were outnumbered by new Conservatives.

What can we do to win these voters back? The BES finds that the switchers from us to both Conservatives and Labour already contain people who regret their votes and who wish they had voted Liberal Democrat. But the numbers so far are very small, worth between 0.5 and 1 percentage point to national vote share, perhaps just enough to take back Cambridge but nowhere else. Getting more of them back requires understanding who they are and what motivated them to desert us.

As one might expect, those who left us for the Conservatives and those who left us for Labour and the Greens differ in attitudes about economic issues such as deficit reduction and taxation.

In both cases they are more similar in attitudes to voters of the party to which they have defected than the average Liberal Democrat voter. Both groups of switchers, for example, are more anti-immigration than the average Liberal Democrat. But both groups of switchers are still nearer to us than the average voter of the parties to which they have gone. Both sets of switchers are, for example, significantly more positive about the EU than the voters of the parties to which they moved.



Four other facts stand out about the switchers:

- On non-economic issues, for example on the environment and climate change, equalities issues (ethnicity, gender and sexuality) and on crime, switchers to the Conservatives are decidedly illiberal whereas switchers to Labour and the Greens are decidedly liberal.
- Conservative switchers still feel rather friendly to the Liberal Democrats. They were less negative about Nick Clegg than the electorate as a whole and less negative about him than other Conservative voters. They are less inclined to say that they were 'angry' with the Liberal Democrats and less inclined to say that they felt that politicians were not listening to them. Switchers to Labour, in contrast, were significantly more negative about Nick Clegg and significantly more likely to say that they felt both anger towards the Liberal Democrats and ignored by politicians in general. (That effect is perhaps connected to the fact that defectors to the left were more opposed than the electorate as a whole to increases in tuition fees and tended to be younger, whereas switchers to the Conservatives had mixed views on fees and are older).
- More than half of the switchers to the Conservatives agreed with the statement that it is better 'that one party get more than half the seats in parliament so it can govern on its own' as opposed to the statement that it is better 'that every party's percentage of seats in parliament is the same as their percentage of the vote', Labour switchers, in contrast, were of the contrary opinion, with over 70% supporting proportional representation.
- Switchers to the Conservatives were statistically significantly more economically optimistic, both about their personal financial position and the position of the country whereas switchers to Labour were significantly more economically pessimistic on all counts.

Taking these facts together shows what a difficult road lies ahead. The Conservative defectors are from our point of view emotionally in a better state than the defectors to the left, who feel angry and ignored by us. But the illiberal non-economic positions taken by switchers to the Conservatives (and even more so by switchers to Ukip) makes chasing their votes a very unattractive prospect. In addition, even if going for ex-2015 Conservative votes were politically plausible there is another very big problem.

The inclination of Conservative defectors to single-party majority government combined with their economic optimism suggests that their main political motive was to hold onto their economic gains and to fight off any perceived threat to them from the left. Their motives for voting Conservative, therefore,

*“The bonds of trust broken during the coalition years will not be restored by policy announcements and campaigns alone”*

will remain strong for the foreseeable future.

## **COALITION MIRAGE**

The EU referendum might provide an opportunity to speak to them about an issue on which they prefer our view to that of the Conservatives, and it may well be that more of them will come to regret voting Conservative as they realise that they voted not

for the real Conservative party now in power but for a mirage created by the Coalition. The difficulty is that any prospect of the Conservatives losing power will mean that most of them will stay with the Conservatives.

The defectors to Labour and the Greens, however, also provide no easy route back. Their political views are no particular bar. On non-economic issues they are entirely in line with where the party sits and their inclinations to the centre-left on the deficit and taxation are entirely compatible with where Tim Farron stands.

But their anger towards the party and their feelings of being ignored by it are very big problems. The bonds of trust broken during the coalition years will not be restored by policy announcements and campaigns alone. We need to find ways of showing Labour and Green switchers that we respect them, understand why they are angry and are listening to them.

Constantly trying to prove them wrong by pointing to the emerging evidence that we stopped a series of evil Tory plans is likely to be counter-productive. Angry people rarely react well to claims that their anger is not well-founded. They will hear nothing but whining self-justification. In any case many of them will work it out for themselves. Instead we need to talk to, and to be seen to be talking to, people who might be expected to be angry with us and to have felt ignored by us – nurses, recent graduates, people who run food banks, victims of the bedroom tax and many others.

The fact that Tim himself opposed many of the policies that made these voters angry will help, but it is not enough by itself. Their anger was aimed not just at Nick Clegg but at us all. Meeting and diffusing that anger is a task not just for Tim and the party's new spokespeople but for us all. It will not be a pleasant experience, but it has to be done.

---

David Howarth was Liberal Democrat MP for Cambridge 2005-10

# HOUSING POLICY FALLS DOWN

Tim Farron has made housing a Liberal Democrat campaign priority. Alex Marsh says government policy will squeeze poorer people out of affordable homes

The half-steps and missteps taken by successive Westminster governments in the name of housing policy over the last two decades have not added up to a coherent programme to deliver decent, affordable and secure housing for all.

For more than a decade a policy preoccupation has been the shortfall in new housing supply relative to that required in the light of continuing growth in household numbers.

New construction numbers may have been in the right territory just prior to the 2007-08 global financial crisis, but after 2010 they took a nosedive. They have yet to fully recover. It is half a century since the private sector alone has come close to providing properties in the volume required.

A second, related concern is affordability and access. The global financial crisis led to a substantial mortgage market contraction and tightened lending criteria. The Coalition's Mortgage Market Review further raised the bar for households trying to demonstrate they can service a mortgage. The mortgage market has subsequently eased, but the major challenge for prospective purchasers is finding a larger deposit.

Fewer households can get the money together. Many are therefore remaining in private renting for longer. In high pressure housing markets landlords are able to charge high rents relative to incomes. So the chances of amassing a deposit recede further. We are also seeing increasing incidence of sharing and overcrowding in the face of high housing costs. The relatively favourable tax treatment of buy-to-let landlords over the last few years has allowed them to outbid potential home owners, who then become prospective tenants.

## REMARKABLE TRANSFORMATION

We have witnessed a remarkable tenure transformation over the last decade. The proportion of households buying or owning their own home has dropped sharply. The proportion of households renting privately has grown rapidly. We see a clear age effect. The proportion of younger people entering home ownership has dropped substantially. We are now reaching the stage where outright home owners - typically older households - outnumber those buying with a mortgage. Conversely, private renters are becoming more diverse. In particular there has been growth in longer-term renting by families with children.

Recent policy has been geared towards helping households afford housing at inflated prices, rather than seeking to lower prices to within reach of

households on typical incomes.

This strategy may be sustainable in the short term. But it leaves many households praying there won't be an interest rate rise. The recent switch to focus on development of discounted starter homes might represent a partial change of strategy. Yet it leaves housing supply structures fundamentally unreformed.

In the private rented sector plenty of broadly positive policy noises have been made. But there is little momentum to address the worst aspects of the sector - poor management, poor quality, outright illegality. Local authorities have a range of powers to enforce against poor landlords. But they face ever tighter resource constraints, as well as the problem of what to do with households displaced if the worst private accommodation is closed down.

In the longer term fewer households entering home ownership will mean a future in which fewer households are outright owners in older age.

This has two major implications. First, rather than experiencing a significant reduction in housing costs in retirement a larger proportion of households will have to continue paying rent, reducing income available for other purposes, or will need assistance to continue paying rent.

Second, it means that asset-based welfare policies, which assume households can access accumulated housing wealth to pay for welfare services such as long-term social care, are going to become even more wrong-headed than they already are.

While much has been changing in the private sector there has been greater policy focus on social housing, particularly since the Conservatives formed a government in May 2015.

It is not hyperbole to say we are facing the end of social housing as we have known it. Organisations that provide social rented housing will no doubt continue to exist. But what they will be doing is less clear.

The Coalition government started the process of unravelling social housing. This is partly a matter of housing policy. But it is just as much a matter of welfare reform. The so-called 'bedroom tax' grabbed the headlines but was probably not the most significant change.

A key move was reforming the funding of new housing association development. Reliance on private lenders was increased. Social housing rents were pushed higher to deliver an income stream to service the debt. Landlords were encouraged to convert relets from social rents to higher 'affordable' rents to increase revenue further.

The change in funding approach meant that housing associations that continued to develop became more



heavily indebted, while more tenants would require assistance from housing benefit to pay affordable rents and higher rents meant deeper benefit traps.

Reductions in the generosity of benefit uprating would mean that over time the gap between rents and housing benefit assistance would increase. The introduction of an Overall Benefit Cap at £26,000 did not initially affect a large number of households. But it embedded the principle of a cap - that could subsequently be tightened - and broke with the principle that households should have access to sufficient assistance from the social security system to achieve a minimum standard of living, given their location.

The arrival of a Conservative government in 2015 accelerated the direction of travel. The Overall Benefit Cap is to be reduced to £23,000 in London and £20,000 elsewhere. This now affects a significant number of households, typically families with children. It has implications for tenancy sustainability, rent arrears and debt management. The chancellor's emergency budget junked policy announced in 2013 and imposed rent increases of 1% below inflation on social landlords, thereby significantly reducing their projected income streams and ability to develop new properties.

The Government has resurrected its Pay to Stay proposals - that is, those whose earnings are over a certain amount will be expected to pay market rent rather than sub-market rent for their property - even though this addresses an issue of limited significance in practice and the policy's administrative overhead is considerable. Young people's access to assistance with rental costs was radically curtailed.

The sector may have been able to cope with these changes, although the restriction on rent increases placed a question mark over many existing business plans. But layered on top of these changes are proposal to extend the Right to Buy (RTB) to housing associations and the proposal to force local authorities to sell off high value properties. The receipts from the latter are supposed to compensate for the discounts offered on housing association RTB sales.

## **SPANNER IN THE WORKS**

These policies have inserted a major spanner in the works. Just about all housing association business plans and asset management strategies will need to be rethought.

In some areas it will become impossible for local authorities to build new properties for social rent because any new property will immediately be classed as 'high value' and hence immediately be for sale. Several housing associations are considering deregistering from the Homes and Communities Agency in a bid to free themselves from regulatory requirements. At least one major housing association has declared it will no longer build conventional social rented housing. Instead it will focus on shared equity housing and intermediate/market renting. Other associations are radically scaling back their plans for new development in the light of the erosion of their asset base. If maximising the supply of affordable homes is a serious policy aim then these sales policies appear entirely counterproductive.

This cocktail of changes has destabilised the social housing sector. Some argue this is the whole point. The new financial environment will force mergers and

acquisitions so that in a few years time there will only be a small number of very large housing associations left. The presumption is that the survivors will be more efficient.

Policy is generating major challenges for housing organisations, but more importantly we need to recognise the impact on households.

Poor people are finding their budgets under even greater pressure. If they are up to date with their housing payments they are going without elsewhere. Evidence continues to emerge indicating that significant numbers are relocating in search of cheaper accommodation. It appears that processes of spatial sorting by income are well under way.

While some might consider these changes desirable from a fiscal perspective, the assessment should be holistic rather than in terms of housing costs alone. Households lose contact with formal and informal support networks. Population mobility and instability can have major impacts on public services. Low income households are doubly disadvantaged by incurring higher commuting costs from more peripheral locations. Or they occupy substandard or overcrowded accommodation to remain near centres of employment. These effects need to be weighed in the balance.

We are starting to see some of those who might be styled the 'winners' from this process - better off people living in expensive areas - querying whether allowing homogenous and segregated neighbourhoods and cities to displace mixed communities is, on balance, beneficial.

An important underlying point here is that the Westminster government spends plenty on subsidising housing. But most of it doesn't go to 'subsidised' social housing or freeloading tenants. A sizeable chunk ends up in the pockets of developers or private landlords. It is less about delivering affordable housing for residents and more about delivering more generous returns for asset owners and investors. We may think this is a good thing. We may think it is a bad thing. But we should at least recognise the situation for what it is.

And we equally need to recognise that what is happening in the housing market is influenced by broader socio-economic currents and policies - be it globalisation, labour market change, change in the income distribution, the impact of quantitative easing, turbulence on stock exchanges in the Far East.

For housing policy to move forward it would benefit from revisiting fundamentals. We need to rediscover why affordable, secure accommodation is an important foundation upon which to build a life lived well.

We need to recognise that government spends plenty of money of housing, but it is not necessarily spending it effectively. We need to think holistically about the way the housing market operates - the complex interplay of factors that have brought us to our current predicament. And then we might be better placed to contemplate the sorts of radical reforms that are required to deliver a housing policy fit for the twenty-first century.

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Alex Marsh is a member of the Liberal Democrats and professor of public policy at the School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol. He blogs at [www.alexarchives.org](http://www.alexarchives.org)

# ANOTHER RIGHT TO BUY

## It's time to extend right-to-buy to private tenants who could afford it, says William Tranby

In March 2014 the Economist published an article that spelt out the growing generation gap in terms of home ownership.

Young homeowners were described as fast becoming a disappearing species. The percentage of those aged between 16-24 living in houses or flats they owned had dropped from 36% in 1991 to just 10% in 2012. Those only slightly older were also having difficulties getting on the property ladder. Home ownership had dropped among the 25-34 age group from 67% to 39.5% in the same period.

And since 2010, the number of middle-aged homeowners has started to flatline too. Only among pensioners does home ownership still appear on an upward trajectory.

Why should this matter to Liberal Democrats? Well, as Liberator has argued many times through its contributors, the party needs to build a core vote by identifying those people most likely to be attracted to our basic beliefs.

Various commentators have told us in recent weeks that those most likely to be sympathetic to our aims are younger people, those with a university education, and those who work as professionals, especially in the public sector. They are attracted to our commitment to human rights, our internationalism, and are worried about climate change. They also support good public services.

What the Liberal Democrats have never been good at is putting forward a policy programme of positive material benefits to our likely core voters. Labour and the Tories have no such qualms about manipulating the market place to benefit their core voters. It is time we were more blatant about it.

Many of our potential core voters are likely to be trapped as private renters unable to save up for the deposit for a first purchase. The significant drop in homeowners in the under-40 age group is due to spiralling house prices that are set at too many multiples of potential buyers' gross incomes.

But there is an emerging trend that many people are paying rents that are higher than the equivalent mortgage payments would be on the properties they occupy. They are in the dilemma of paying a high rent but cannot afford to save for a 10% deposit on an equivalent property.

Which brings me to my proposal. If the Tories can extend the right to buy to housing association tenants (but at a discount and with no guarantee of replacement homes being funded) then we should consider extending the right to buy to those renting in the private sector, under certain conditions.

Those paying rent but who can obtain a 100% mortgage offer on the property they occupy from a recognised bank or building society, where the mortgage payments would be the same or less than their rent, should gain a legal right to buy

the property. In these circumstances the test of affordability would be met and should satisfy the mortgage providers.

Any valuation could be established by the average of values estimated by the mortgage provider, an estate agent nominated by the buyer, and another nominated by the landlord. The property would be sold at an agreed market price, so the landlord would not lose out, unlike the housing associations, who will do under the Tories' proposed scheme.

The effect would be to moderate both house prices and rents. Landlords would become wary of putting up rents above the equivalent mortgage cost in case they lost their properties. With more genuine applications for mortgage funds, and a consequential increase in the number of properties becoming available to purchase, the situation of too many buyers chasing very few properties would be relieved and this would also help to moderate property prices.

A number of buy-to-let landlords would decide to move out of the business because their returns would diminish. This would help to correct the generation gap that has emerged in recent years which saw older people investing in property as an alternative pension option.

Not everyone currently renting and being able to afford the mortgage payment would want to claim the right to buy of course, because the property may not be an attractive longer-term proposition for them.

I am aware that my proposal makes no contribution to the need for more housing generally, but the chancellor's recent gifts to first time buyers to help them with deposits has cost the Treasury money, and helped to drive up prices even further, while my proposal requires no government subsidy while having a moderating effect on house price inflation.

Thomas Picketty established in his book *Capital* that the current trend of concentrating capital assets in older age groups was increasing across the West. To ease the potential generational tension progressive parties need to regulate markets to offer new ways for younger generations to gain assets.

My proposal would make a modest impact on this problem, and would be attractive to the very cohort of voters who are attracted to us for more altruistic reasons. So why not help them in their pockets too?

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William Tranby (aka former Camden councillor John Bryant) is a member of the Liberator Collective

# TIME TO DITCH TRIDENT

## Expensive, useless and a pointless distortion of defence spending, so will the Lib Dems finally oppose Trident, asks David Grace

For the fifth time in eight years, Liberal Democrat conference debates Trident this autumn.

If the media covers the conference at all (doubtful) this motion will attract their jaded attention. Many years ago (1956) Liberal Party policy was that nuclear weapons should all be put under the control of the United Nations!

Ahhh, bless! Since then, there have been many, more pragmatic policy positions. In the mid-1980s when Trident was going to replace Polaris, Paddy's idea was to keep Polaris but put new engines in the submarines.

In 1986 when David Steel and David Owen lost that loving feeling over nukes, they proposed la bonne idée of the eurobomb, which our 1986 conference quickly buried in the sands of Eastbourne. In 2007 Ming's radical approach was – wait for it - reduce the number of warheads and postpone a final decision for a few years.

He lost the debate in parliament against warmonger Blair but won by a mere 40 votes at our conference when we last came close to rejecting nuclear weapons.

Nick Clegg shyly and almost silently changed our position to “no like-for-like replacement for Trident”, burying the change in a pre-manifesto document in 2009. At the Ministry of Defence, Nick Harvey put some bones on that skeleton, setting up a government review of alternatives. He also forced the Tories to postpone the ‘main gate’ decision on Trident until after the 2015 election. Like so many LibDem ‘achievements’ in coalition, we delayed the Tories for a few years but didn't stop them.

Finally in 2013, Nick Harvey sold to the leadership, to me and to conference in Glasgow the ‘contingency posture’ under which future subs would sail without nuclear warheads but Britain would keep the capacity to reload them in the contingency of a deteriorating global situation. I supported the idea hoping to tempt the Labour Party to peer over the top of the pro-nuclear trench it has been hiding in since 1983.

Clegg meanwhile sacked Harvey and gave Danny Alexander the job of selling the policy. He was so hopeless that everyone thought our policy was to reduce the number of submarines, but he totally failed to get across the concept of not carrying nuclear warheads, a great step down the nuclear ladder. Anyway, both Tories and Labour remain entirely wedded to the full Monty Trident replacement.

Of course the issue, like so many others, was absent from the general election while we wittered on about heads and hearts.

If you have not already heard all the arguments about nuclear weapons and Trident in particular, I can only assume you have taken refuge in a nuclear bunker and are waiting for it to be all over. In case you have, here's a quick summary.

**The ethical argument.** No ethical basis exists for the use of nuclear weapons which would kill millions of innocent civilians. The ethical argument for keeping nukes is the belief that their existence deters others from using theirs. This depends upon a contradiction: we won't use nukes but enemies must believe we will.

**The environmental argument.** The use of nukes would have disastrous and persistent consequences for the environment.

**The non-proliferation argument.** The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is a bargain between Nuclear-Weapon States, who promise to negotiate in good faith to get rid of nukes, and Non-Nuclear Weapon States, who promise in return not to develop them. The UK is not keeping its side of the bargain.

**The military/strategic argument.** Trident cannot be used for war-fighting. Nukes have not kept UK and its territories free from attack nor has lack of nukes exposed others to attack. Our defence requires better conventional forces. Trident is a bad use of scarce resources.

**The independence argument.** Trident is dependent on US co-operation for nuclear weapon designs, leasing and servicing of missiles, launch codes and mid-course corrections. Why do we follow US foreign policy ?

**The insurance argument.** Britain is more secure from direct threat from foreign states than at any time in history. If Trident is insurance against unanticipated threats to national survival, we are paying a high premium against a highly unlikely risk.

**The financial argument.** New submarines would cost £20bn (capital), £75bn (capital and running costs). We could spend that money on conventional defence or even to fight against famine, disease, poverty and environmental disaster.

Now that we have tried five years of policy based upon sounding like the two biggest parties, perhaps we should take the chance to say what we believe, to follow our principles and the evidence, to say goodbye at long last to Britain's “expensive, useless and dangerous” nuclear weapons (not my description, the words of a retired general).

Or perhaps Tim Farron will persuade us to give in to the caution of the old guard and live up to the words of a very, very senior MoD civil servant who told us: “You should get rid of it, but like the other parties, you don't have the guts.”

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David Grace is chair of Liberal Democrats for Peace and Security



# FOLLOW THE MONEY

## If the Liberal Democrats want more diverse candidates they should offer cash and petrol, not quotas, says Sarah Green

Positive discrimination is back on the agenda for the Liberal Democrats. That was perhaps inevitable with a parliamentary party made up of eight white men. It seems that Willie Rennie, the leader of the Scottish Liberal Democrats, is also worried that his team in Holyrood will look similarly male and pale after the elections next May.

He has therefore launched a working group to draw up proposals to address gender parity for future elections. This will consider all options including: all women shortlists, making gender a part of the party's electoral strategy and quota systems.

It is worth reminding ourselves that the party made significant progress in getting women selected in held and target seats for the 2015 general election. And what I've not seen crop up in these debates online or in the media is the success of the Welsh Liberal Democrats in achieving gender balance.

Back in 1999 the first Welsh Assembly achieved gender parity - mostly through the positive action measures of Labour and Plaid Cymru.

But the Welsh Liberal Democrats also had exact gender parity too, with three male and three female assembly members elected without using any form of positive discrimination. Moreover, when Mike German stepped down as leader in 2008, the contest that followed was between two formidable candidates: Jenny Randerson and Kirsty Williams. The Welsh Party at one time had a female leader, president and chief executive. So if at a federal level the party feels it has to 'do something', I'd suggest taking a look at the experience in Wales to see what can be learned.

However, the sad truth is there is no quick fix to our diversity deficit. In the short term Tim Farron's team of spokespeople is a good start and a great example of thinking creatively. And it will be no great surprise if any by-elections in the coming parliament are used to address the glaring diversity issue. Beyond that there are no obvious solutions.

If the road back is going to be a long one, perhaps the party should consider shifting to a model focused more on building seats. That would mean diverting some of the resource traditionally used for target seats to supporting local parties and candidates willing to commit to (and invest in) a 10-15 year plan to win their seat.

Whether we are talking about a development seat or a target seat, I've yet to meet the candidate that wasn't out of pocket on the back of an election. To my mind, this is the biggest barrier for candidates from under-represented groups. Addressing it is central to achieving a more diverse group of parliamentarians.

So while the positive action debate rages, I hope the federal, state, regional and local parties look at what other steps can be taken to encourage and support those from under-represented groups to stand for election.

And I don't mean training and mentoring (both of which are important and essential), I mean cash.

At a state or regional level, other parts of the country might consider following the lead of Dominic Mathon in London who has set up an Access Fund for those standing in the upcoming GLA elections. This is a fund dedicated to candidates for the GLA. Where is this money coming from? In this case Dominic has set up a crowdfunding website and anyone can donate. It is a wonderful initiative and one that isn't detracting from existing fundraising efforts for the GLA campaign. Indeed, wouldn't it be wonderful if there was a national fund for candidates to apply to?

At a local level I'm sure there are plenty of examples of local parties that have supported their candidate in imaginative ways to enable them to stand. For example, offering to subsidise federal conference places so that a candidate can speak in debates, raise their profile and access the training and networking opportunities.

I know of local parties that have arranged for their candidate to stay with a local party member so they didn't incur accommodation costs and another that loaned their PPC a car. In both instances it didn't cost the local party a penny - the spare room was lying empty and the car was on a driveway not being used. So how about we collate and share such information and make such support standard practice? I'm not suggesting we pay our candidates a salary, but that we look for ways to ease their burden using the resources already available.

If we want a more diverse group of parliamentarians we should face up to the fact that some groups are currently excluded because the costs associated with standing are just too prohibitive. Offering a full tank of petrol might be a better route to a more diverse parliamentary party than yet another conference motion about quotas.

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Sarah Green is a member of the Liberator Collective

# AMERICA TRUMPED

## Republicans are mesmerised by Donald Trump's populist campaign. Is he a Democrat plant, wonders Dennis Graf

The Republican party is in turmoil and moving even further to the right.

It's no longer our fathers' centre-right Republican party and seems more radical than conservative.

Radical proposals abound. For example, the Reverend Mike Huckabee (that's his real name and he's a serious candidate) suggests that he would place the Supreme Being above the Supreme Court. Presumably he would be the channel. Huckabee contends that abortion should be illegal under all circumstances, even if needed to save the life of the mother.

None of the other nine people sharing the recent Republican nominee debate stage strongly disagreed. To Huckabee, life starts at the moment of conception and this collection of cells is entitled to all the legal rights of any citizen. Huckabee suggests that the military might enforce this.

Traditionally, the Republican party selects as its standard bearer a prominent member of the establishment, men such as Bush 41 and Bush 43 or Bob Dole, the one time senate leader. Mitt Romney was typical. John McCain was somewhat unpolished but he came from a prominent military family. This year, the first choice of the establishment is the third Bush, Jeb. People used to call him "the smart Bush brother" though most of us now doubt that.

Jeb has been running a weak, uninspiring campaign lacking any charisma. He reminds one of a branch bank manager.

Fortunately for him, he's probably going to run against Hilary Clinton, also a disappointing campaigner with a reputation for being dishonest. Only 37% of the electorate thinks that she's honest and trustworthy. Decades of character assassination have taken their toll.

All of the other candidates in both parties - 20 or so - are being eclipsed by Donald Trump, a multi-billionaire who is a world class narcissist loaded with charisma.

Trump is unique. The rules of political behaviour apparently do not apply to him. Many suspect that he doesn't really want to be president. If so, what does he want?

Clearly he loves the fame and adoring crowds. Maybe he wants to change history or, at least, American politics. He loudly and clearly says what most Americans believe - that the system is rigged against them and that the rich control the politicians. Trump says that he used to be one of these plutocrats buying influence but he claims that he now is different, so rich that he cannot be 'bought'.

Trump seems able to connect with the lower income white people who usually vote Republican. He routinely says things which are unnecessarily offensive and sometimes completely preposterous. For example: illegal immigration is a big issue here. Trump recently demanded that that all illegal immigrants - probably

15-20 million people - be deported. To where? The Mexican border?

Even logistically, this would be impossible and incredibly expensive, but the Republican base of white working class voters don't question Trump. Any immigration reform is going to be very difficult; the Democrats like the present system because they believe that these people will eventually vote their way and the Republicans like it because it now provides cheap labour.

There is a widespread lack of respect for both political parties and supporting Trump is, if nothing else, a way of expressing contempt for the political class.

It's hard to see a path that Trump could take to the nomination. His negatives are still very high and he seems to have hit a ceiling of around 30%.

Trump ran for president several times in past election cycles but dropped out fairly early. These efforts were widely considered a publicity stunt for his television programmes.

He was thought something of a joke and as fodder for stand up comics. This time might be different. People now have to take him seriously since he's tapped into something and he's running well ahead of everyone else in the polls. Trump is a former supporter of Democratic causes and there are more than a few who suggest that he might be a Democratic 'plant'. Clearly, he's not good news for the other Republicans.

Trump has been a television personality for many years and he speaks well and understands the media. He's a great salesman with a gift of media manipulation. He can be mesmerising.

He's consistently entertaining and obviously very intelligent. He claims to be a first rate negotiator in high stakes real estate; he might well be but it's questionable whether this would translate to international diplomacy.

It's difficult to know where to place Trump in today's Republican party. He has been inconsistent though this is common there.

Most Republicans want to destroy our old age social security system; Trump says he wants to strengthen it. He also wants to maintain the Medicare system for people over 65. No details, of course. These are wildly popular with virtually all older voters though not with Republican leaders.

None of the other dozen or so other Republican candidates would dare take these positions since keeping them unchanged would require raising taxes on the well off. Most Republican officeholders have taken an oath not to raise taxes. Ever.

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Dennis Graf is Liberator's American correspondent

# BROKEN FROM BELOW

## Margaret Lally reports on the devastation caused by Nepal's two earthquakes and the most effective relief methods

On 25 April an earthquake of 7.8 magnitude struck Nepal causing enormous devastation and loss of life in 14 out of the country's 75 districts. On 12 May, another earthquake measuring 7.3 struck resulting in further damage and loss of life. The total destruction of both earthquakes was 8,604 dead, 16,808 injured, 488,789 houses were destroyed and 267,477 damaged. I visited the country recently and this article tells you a little about what I found.

As one of the least developed countries in the world, life in Nepal was already very tough for most people. It is 145 out of 187 countries on the UN Human Development Index. A whole third of the population live below the poverty line. Infant mortality rate is 41/1000 (5 for the UK); 50\1000 children under 5 die each year (5 for UK); life expectancy at birth is 67 (UK - 80). The majority of Nepal's population live in rural areas and are subsistence farmers. Whilst the provision of basic services such as water, health and education has improved, access is very restricted for many because of the difficult geography and poor infrastructure. The armed struggle and political upheavals of the last 20 years combined with lack of resources has held the national government back from making real progress. There is little capacity at local government level; staff are often inadequately trained and performance can be poor.

The recent political history of Nepal is virtually impossible to follow but here is a very brief summary:

- ☛ 1995 - the formal start of the Maoist revolt which dragged on for more than a decade and killed thousands
- ☛ 2001 - Many of the Royal family were killed in shooting spree by drunken Crown Prince Dipendra who then shot himself. His brother was subsequently crowned king. After years of insurrection the monarchy was abolished in 2007 and a republic declared.
- ☛ 2007 - The Maoists joined the new interim government winning a lot of seats in the 2008 elections. They quit and rejoined the government, however, a number of times over the next few years. During this period the country was often in chaos and the armed struggle continued.
- ☛ A key task for the government was securing support for the new constitution. Critical to this was agreeing the boundaries and voting rights of the different regions. Nepal has a very diverse ethnic make-up with some groups, and also women, traditionally being discriminated against. The make-up of the voting constituencies provided an opportunity to either reinforce this discrimination or seek to rebalance it a little.

To date it has proved impossible to get the constitution agreed.

- ☛ 2013 - Elections for a national assembly which would rewrite the constitution ended in a political deadlock as no party won a majority. In early 2014 the Nepali Congress Party – the country's largest political party - secured parliamentary support for the election of its leader, Sushil Koral, as Prime Minister. He is still in position.

### DEVASTATION AND THE RESPONSE

The Nepal government was, thus, ill-equipped to deal with such a major humanitarian disaster. Terrible as the earthquake was, however, it could have been much worse. If, as anticipated, the epicenter had been in the densely populated Kathmandu, rather than 81 km northwest of the capital, it would have killed hundreds of thousands and closed the airport to foreign aid. Deaths were also reduced by the fact the earthquake took place at the weekend when schools and offices were closed. Previous preparations, particularly in strengthening buildings, appeared to have paid off in Kathmandu. Although some parts, particularly the historic Durbar Square, many of the city's glass and concrete structures remained standing.

But the devastation was still horrific particularly in the villages. I helped distribute aid in Sinduphulchowk district, in the Kathmandu valley and was shocked by the scale of the destruction. Over 90% of houses in the villages have been destroyed. There was barely a building of the beautiful old dry stone walled Newar and Taman houses remaining. All the stones and slates were just piled up in a jumble with sometimes the remains of furniture sticking out. The beautiful green lush landscape was dotted with the blue tents provided by aid agencies – finding a safe space to build a shelter amongst all the rubble was a challenge. Farmers had lost not just their homes but also their means of livelihoods because animals, food stores and tools were buried amongst the rubble. Many of the schools had been destroyed or badly damaged. The villagers had very, very little to begin with and that had been taken away.

There was substantial help from India and other countries, as well as relief agencies, but the initial distribution of aid was slow, did not reach some of the worst affected villages and got bogged down with government bureaucracy. There were specific concerns about whether or not the government would tax international aid. After evacuating the injured the key priorities were to provide temporary shelter before the monsoons, food, and access to clean water. The government did an assessment of which houses had been destroyed and issued affected individuals with an ID card which entitled them to aid including



a small cash grant. Providing grants quickly after a disaster with minimum assessments is an effective response but the money is only useful if individuals can reach a market to spend it in. For some people in isolated villages that was just not an option. The ID card was also a passport to other aid and delays in its distribution caused frustration as well as suffering.

Many of these villages are difficult enough to reach at the best of times but with some roads still blocked from the earthquakes and other roads getting blocked due to the monsoons it became much more difficult. Landslides were a regular occurrence and I saw some aid workers clearing rubble with their bare hands. Some parts of the country could only be reached by helicopter which could only fly if the weather conditions were right.

Nevertheless things were happening. I distributed aid in one village of around 4000 people where 34 people died, about 200 were injured some requiring a helicopter to Kathmandu and most houses destroyed. As well as hygiene kits, bedding and seeds the villagers were provided corrugated galvanized iron sheets (CGIs) and toolsets so they could start to build more robust shelter themselves to replace the tents and tarpaulins. A temporary learning centers have replaced the flattened school and, despite the devastation, education is still continuing. Farmers are starting to plant rice and trying to harvest the maize. Plans for recovery were being developed including “cash for jobs “ programmes whereby villagers would be paid for reconstruction work in their villages (traditionally they would build what they needed themselves without any help).

The patience and stoicism of individuals who had lost everything was humbling. They were keen to know what they were getting next and when but made no complaints about having to wait in line or about what was provided. Transporting the items provided (particularly the CGI sheets) back up the hills to where they lived was hard, back breaking work for many of the villagers particularly the elderly but they worked together to help each sometimes managing to share transport.

## BREAKING THE CYCLE

It will take years to rebuild better what has been lost and there is still the danger of more severe earthquakes. Nepal must not go off people’s radar as often happens after a disaster. But we also have to recognize that some of the remotest and poorest parts of the country were not actually affected by the earthquakes and there is a danger that aid they need will be diverted to those areas which were impacted. For instance in the mid-western region, in the remote mountain villages of the Mugu district there is extreme poverty, difficult terrain and access to basic services is limited or non-existent. Few development NGOs are



willing to work here as it is difficult and expensive to manage successful projects. UN data for Mugu shows that 60% of the children under 5 are stunted and up to 20% underweight; although 74% of the population depend on subsistence agricultural, only 5% of the land is cultivable and most of it (89%) not irrigated. Only 8% of households are food secure.

In order to break that cycle of absolute poverty there has to be an integrated approach to aid which tackles the multi-faceted problems. But we need to understand better the evidence of what combination of inputs is most likely to work. Effective health care can enable more children to survive and go to school; it can also help women limit their families; healthy adults can generate a livelihood. Education provides more choice and empowers individuals; it is particularly important that girls are encouraged to go to school – good toilets are important here! Providing households with seeds, animals, knowledge of good husbandry and follow up support may enable them to both stay healthy by producing nutritious food and have produce which they can barter. Over time it is hoped that an empowered community can lobby for better services and individuals move out of poverty

What can Liberal Democrats do? Even if the national elections, which are planned for November, finally lead to the constitution being agreed it will take some years to build local government capacity and reverse years of ineffectual administration. Foreign aid will still be necessary. On this score it was Michael Moore’s Private Members Bill which committed the previous and successive governments to meeting a target of 2% international aid, and DFID has been a major donor for Nepal. Our Parliamentarians need to continue to use their influence to ensure that aid continues to be directed to Nepal, and that it is distributed to agencies who apply those funds to programmes for which there is evidence to show they work, and also that they use approaches that empower and build the community’s resilience to future disasters.

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Margaret Lally is a member of Islington Liberal Democrats. The views expressed here are her own

# WELL, TIM...

## Liberator asked a number of party figures for their advice to the new Liberal Democrat leader. Here's what they said

### **ADRIAN SANDERS, LIBERAL DEMOCRAT MP FOR TORBAY 1997-2015**

I think Tim knows that the party is on life support in the intensive care unit of UK politics, so some advice should be reserved for those who expect more than he will be able to deliver in this Parliament, and that is to be very, very patient.

The reality of our position is easily overlooked when most of our conversations are with each other. Recovery is going to take a great deal more than opinions posted on social media platforms. It will take blood, sweat and ink, working with people in their communities over time to enable them to take and use power over their own lives.

I'm sure Tim recognises the scale of the task ahead. If he doesn't we may as well give up any pretensions of being a national major political party and content ourselves as a small political interest group sustained by the occasional council by-election win and periodically meeting up to give ourselves a pat on the back for persevering.

The enormous task ahead is to rebuild a relationship with an electorate who are going to take a long-time learning to trust us again.

While there is a small core liberal vote out there, and Tim needs to ensure the party does everything it can to cultivate and grow it, our primary way back will be through community politics, building relationships house by house, street by street, ward by ward, council by council, and constituency by constituency.

It was through community politics and campaigning that the party was built pre-Clegg to more than 73,000 members, thousands of councillors and outright or coalition control of local spending across large parts of the UK, 12 MEPs, 62 MPs and millions of supporters.

But community politics in a society of fractured and multi-faceted communities cannot restore our fortunes alone. We also need a distinctive national Liberal message communicated through integrated campaigns.

Tim will remember that it is campaigns that win votes while policies can give people reasons not to vote for you.

He should therefore pick those policies that lend themselves to campaigns and campaign to win support for them. Our reform agenda lends itself to this with potential campaigns in favour of a written constitution, a Bill of Rights, PR, party finance and House of Lords reform. Other campaigns will be in reaction to events or bubble up from the grassroots.

Future campaigns will need to be designed with materials and support so they can be run by a lone activist given our weakness on the ground now in many areas.

Above all, the biggest danger we face is to build up hopes and let people down again, so my final and crucial advice to Tim is not to try and be all things to all people, but to just be himself.

### **FLICK REA, LIBERAL DEMOCRAT COUNCILLOR, CAMDEN**

Please could you pay some attention to London? In particular to the 2016 London Assembly and mayoral elections.

In your time as president, you never managed to attend a London conference - we hope we'll see you at the next one. London faces very difficult elections next year - we have not performed well in recent years partly because we can't seem to manage Londonwide list elections, partly because of the hugely efficient and powerful London Labour party and partly because few senior people in our party seem to care about London.

As a Region, we have the largest membership but it sometimes feels as if we are campaigning in a huge black hole. If you can do something to ensure that the party takes the elections for London mayor and assembly seriously, ensures the campaign is properly resourced and inspired, it would do a great deal to assist the fightback.

Please come and visit all corners of the region where there is still a flicker of campaigning for Liberal Democracy. It is sad to contemplate that only a few years ago we controlled or shared control in almost a third of London. And now we are reduced to 118 local councillors and control of just one borough. In five boroughs we have one lone Councillor who survived the tsunami of 2014 struggling to survive with no other local election in sight till 2018. This is why the London elections of 2016 are important.

### **KIRON REID, LIBERATOR COLLECTIVE, FORMER LIVERPOOL COUNCILLOR**

Tim, remember Paddy Ashdown's advice to the Young Liberals and Young Liberal Democrats: "Don't follow leaders, they'll only let you down".

Build support for the ideas of Liberalism, for your principles and the party's policies but not as following you as a leader. Stick to principles and let them be your guide, as always up until now. A friend commented to me the other day on your inherent decency. A friend who has also known you 20-plus years. Let that instinct be your guide - it's worked damned well until now. When 'advisers' appear, or appear in a hurry, or re-emerge, counselling a quick route to political success or advantage, think back to those principles. Think who those advisers have said the same kind of words to in the past, and what they have said and done before.

Usually if there is quick fix to electoral popularity being proposed it won't work or it won't last. However if there are two options for party policy or voting, one is likely to get more votes and the other isn't, and neither offends any key Liberal principle, then take the one that gets more votes. Keep in touch with members on the ground and people outside of the Westminster bubble as much as you can, as Paddy often did. And take time to relax and enjoy with your



family representing a truly beautiful and friendly constituency.

## **GEOFF PAYNE, EVENTS ORGANISER, HACKNEY LIBERAL DEMOCRATS**

For my advice to be meaningful, I will have to assume that Jeremy Corbyn will be elected leader of the Labour party, which at the time of writing seems the most likely outcome.

There is no doubt that if that happens, the old Lib Dem leadership under Nick Clegg and Danny Alexander would relish attacking Labour as it shifts to the left. However what has become clear is that there is a huge activist base in the UK that has been longing for a political leadership that opposes austerity.

If opposing austerity is a sensible option – just for the sake of argument – then reducing the budget deficit by an economic stimulus makes possible a number of things; reversing the cuts in local government, restoring fairness to the welfare state so that people are not made destitute by the bedroom tax or harsh benefit sanctions, nationalising the railways which are natural monopolies anyway and are hugely expensive as run in the private sector and a whole number of policies that left of centre Liberal Democrats will happily support.

Although Tim Farron was at pains during his leadership campaign to defend the Coalition – he had to keep the party united – there is no doubt that he speaks a different language to the previous leadership.

In talking about an activist government he has started to signal a change of direction for the party.

Corbyn is galvanising a new membership base for Labour far greater than the remarkable surge for the Lib Dems that took place after the general election. Partly this is because Labour is the bigger party and it is believed in a better place to challenge the Tories, and partly because Jeremy is much clearer in his opposition to austerity. Tim, I suspect, would be far happier attacking a Blairite style Labour party for their sell out policies on immigration and benefit cuts than the ‘fiscal indiscipline’ of Jeremy Corbyn. The danger now is that he might engage in ‘oppositionalism’, opposing for the sake of it, and sounding less progressive as a result.

The weaknesses in Jeremy’s position is that he does not have the support of his parliamentary colleagues, and he will probably open the door to more unsavoury elements of the hard left (his friend Tony Benn tried hard to keep it open in the first place) and he is frankly not of the calibre to be a credible leader of the party. We might benefit if things go wrong, but we can’t rely on it.

## **TEENA LASHMORE, GENERAL ELECTION CANDIDATE, BETHNAL GREEN AND BOW**

We are struggling with our leadership and equality. This is epitomised by Chanel 4’s Cathy Newman’s piece: Eight white men in a room: Life inside the bleak Liberal Democrats. This was posted on 26 August and sadly, it is not new news.

We aspire for equality and our constitutional preamble makes this clear: “... in which we seek to balance the fundamental values of liberty, equality



and community ...”

The word ‘equality’ should see every BAME, disabled, LGBT+, woman and white working class person running to the LibDem’s ballot box!

We are struggling with equality in positions of leadership. This is fundamentally because we have limited reference points and because we cannot look to others to see success. Therefore, we have to create that success. We have to create that Lib Dem image of equality – and you are the person to trail-blaze.

To our credit, we don’t allow the ‘race equality paralysis’ to stifle internal and external debate. For example, we have Ethnic Minority LibDems (EMLD), a progressive tool constantly acting to push our party to achieve better equality in our policies. We also have LGBT+, disabled and women SAOs striving to do the same.

We know you are committed to equality but sit on a political pedestal surrounded by democratic process, policies and procedures, and although we do empathies with those constraints, we also want you to trail blaze equality and release us from our political and public shaming.

We know you agree that it is illiberal to have a party that calls for equality but fails to deliver. It may feel like your hands are tied but we ask you to see them as ‘cuffed’, containing some wriggle room around your wrists with the opportunity to deliver better equality in positions of leadership.

You have the London GLA mayor elections, and assembly selections coming. These candidates have a range of skills and all would do a good job – hence they have all been short-listed. And if all are ‘equal’ in skill, which candidates would demonstrate our party’s movement to visible equality?

You have that responsibility to demonstrate party leadership and you have been given the opportunity.

Embrace social media, embrace print and television too and undertake personal interviews with the GLA candidates and then come out and publicly declare support for candidates that you feel reflect diversity and also have the skills to do the job. This requires no constitution, policy or procedure change. It requires leadership for equality. It is your job as the party leader to demonstrate leadership.



# BECOMING THE PROBLEM SOLVERS

There is too little serious debate about political problems including housing, the environment, the economy and immigration, yet liberal solutions are at hand, says Alan Sherwell

The dust has settled, so what can we learn from the election and what is the way forward?

Most importantly, the late Simon Tittley was (as I always thought) right that the biggest problem for the Lib Dems was a failure to build a meaningful core vote. At 8% its way below what we should get if people understood what we are for.

Secondly, we must learn from the past but we must not re-debate it. Whether it was right (as I think), or not, the Coalition happened and there is nothing to be gained from arguing whether it should have.

Similarly, Nick Clegg gracefully left the stage. So what do we achieve by debating (at least publicly) what he did well and what he should have done better.

Thirdly, as Simon and many others have said ad nauseam, you cannot campaign for the balance of power and you cannot position yourself relative to others, if you want to create an identity.

It seems that many Tory voters wanted the Coalition to continue but they couldn't vote for that. They had to elect an MP and weren't prepared to risk the opposition winning nationally. Similarly, while it is true that we have more economic nous than Labour and more heart than the Tories, it was clearly demonstrated by this election that that does not constitute a reason for voting for us.

That we had the most efficient campaign ever organisationally and the worst result for a generation confirms this.

## DEMONSTRABLY WRONG

The problem was the message not its delivery. Indeed, Tony Greaves' criticism of phone banks and targeted messaging is demonstrably wrong, since that is precisely the technique that the Tories used successfully to crush us (*Liberator* 373).

So also with Focus; the principle of the regular newsletter remains as valid as it was when David Evans and Cyril Carr had the idea in the 1950s. The problem arises when Focus loses its Liberalism and simply becomes a councillor action-sheet that could be put out by anybody.

So, though we must continue these tried and tested techniques and develop new ones, they are of little value unless the message is right.

The Coalition is still in voters' minds, so some of the message must follow from that. The "country before party" and "we stopped the Tories doing this" lines are fine so far as they go and no one can accuse us of being a party without experience of government any more.

But why haven't we made more of the positive things that our ministers did (apart from pupil premium and the tax threshold) - Steve Webb's pension reforms

and Vince Cable's tenure at BIS for example? Indeed, during Vince's time there, the fall in unemployment was the fastest ever outside periods of economic boom. Why did we not make more of that?

Enough of the past, what of the future? I write before the new Labour leader is known but you are reading it after. So I am not going to speculate on that save to say that the result will destabilise Labour to some extent. We share few of front runner Corbyn's policies but we do match his outrage with this Government in a way that other Labour candidates do not seem to, and that will affect the way we present ourselves. Also, it will encourage the Tories to campaign once again on fear.

Fear, as pursued by Farage and the Tories, is the aspect of negative campaigning that is most damaging our political system but it is only one aspect. Mindless insults like Corbyn supporters calling the others Tories don't help either. Campaigns that are simply about power are damaging too. The argument (for Labour) against Corbyn is not that he is unelectable but that his policies are wrong, won't work or both. Play the ball not the man, as Simon Tittley often said.

The big gap in political debate is about values and principles. I believe that many voters are potentially receptive to a positive values led approach. This is easier to say than to do.

It is much simpler to say that Iain Duncan-Smith is evil than to explain that his policies will not work, but you can't change many minds simply by abuse. So we need to show that our policies and responses to issues are not straws in the wind but rather a logical result of a basic philosophy – something that Tim Farron is very good at.

We have an opportunity to do this because there is little public debate or even serious analysis about consequences of different methods of tackling agreed problems.

Take the deficit. Leaving to one side Labour people in denial about it, there is pretty universal agreement that it need tackling, if only because spending zillions of pounds on interest payments is bonkers.

It is dangerous to take a comparison between household and national budgeting too seriously but the basic division between revenue and capital is valid. If you regularly borrow money to buy food, then you are in trouble but if you borrow it to buy a capital asset (house, car etc), then that is no great issue. After all, you have the asset to fall back on if in financial difficulty.

Osbourne's approach seems to be to cut with little clear purpose and no underlying strategy except advantaging some Tory voters. Tax credits do subsidise

employers by allowing them to pay lower wages. This was justified at the bottom of a recession but a lot more difficult to justify now. However, just removing them would seriously harm low paid workers. So the minimum wage needs to go up in parallel (quicker than is proposed).

That leaves the employer out of pocket. Osbourne tackles that by reducing corporation tax. This benefits precisely the wrong employers – those that are making significant profits. Those at the margin (often small businesses) gain nothing. It would be far better, if money to reduce corporate taxes is available, to use it to reduce the employers' National Insurance contributions – thereby actually helping the employer to fund the necessary wage increases.

An extreme example is the care industry, which survives on minimum wage employees. They deserve better pay but, if this puts the company out of business, then the clients and workers suffer. Saying that customers have to pay more is no solution (except at the upper end) as there is already a crisis in the cost of care for older people and poor families and local authorities generally cannot pay more.

The Tories are just playing a numbers game but we can derive an economically responsible liberal position from first principles.

Tax credits need to go and the minimum wage needs to rise. This has to be done progressively in a way that smaller companies can afford. There also needs to be parallel consideration of any socially essential services that will suffer additional pressures as a result. Care in particular needs a thorough review. We cannot justify paying derisory wages to care workers but that cannot be tackled in isolation.

Similar lack of analysis afflicts energy policy. Green subsidies were easy to cancel, subsidies for other fuels less so but was any thought given to the consequences?

Again the blues are playing with numbers when we need to be concentrating on global warming. Though actually most necessary actions should be done whether we believe in global warming or not.

Reducing energy consumption frees up spending power and brings down company costs. Renewables are growing massively almost everywhere – including China and India (usually seen as the bad boys). The UK had a lead in these areas; we are in danger of losing it to the real detriment of our economy.

Add to that the Tory obsession about wind turbines (I can see the tallest in the country from my bedroom window and most local people think that it is a dramatic monument to technology).

So why don't we relax the planning rules on turbines rather than fracking? While we are at it, make it a requirement that all new houses are fitted with solar panels. It is cheaper during installation and, in a time of housing shortage, it won't put up the price to the buyer.

*“The Tories are just playing a numbers game but we can derive an economically responsible liberal position from first principles”*

## **BONKERS PLANS**

Housing is another area where economically prudent but Liberal policies could have a major impact. Virtually all initiatives from help to first time buyers to bonkers right to buy plans merely shuffle the pack. Money could painlessly be saved by scrapping these schemes, getting rid of the tax advantage of buy to rent (it looks as if that may happen)

and putting the effort into building the houses that we need where we need them. That means taking on the 'no homes after mine' brigade, but it must be done.

On immigration, Government actions are illiberal and counter-productive. Eight million UK residents were born abroad but that includes citizens whose mother was out of the country at the time (Boris Johnson), spouses of Brits (Mrs Farage), people who fought the Nazis and didn't want to go home after the war (the first Polish immigrants) and so on.

The Tories go for the easy targets – foreign students (who help finance our universities and take home goodwill for our country), skilled labour for our commerce and so on.

But it isn't about numbers, and almost every EU country is taking many more refugees than us, it is about attitudes.

Liberals welcome people who add value to our country, people fleeing persecution and people to whom we owe something. Tim Farron has rightly condemned the Government over Calais but even more shameful is the treatment of Afghan interpreters. Even many dyed-in-the-wool Tories recognise we are indebted to folk who put their live on the line to work for the British Army and that debt must be repaid.

Guy Verhofstadt, the European Liberal leader, has been excellent on this (as he was on Greece) calling for a pan-European approach. That has to be right. Greece, in particular, simply cannot afford the burden of being on the front line of receiving refugees. Others have criticised him for trying to increase the power of the EU but, while he may want to do that, that is not what he is arguing for. The basic Liberal approach would be to get the affected countries together even if there were no EU.

Of course, dealing satisfactorily with these refugees is vital but it is not an end in itself. We have to work with others to end the reasons that they are fleeing; remembering that, so far as Calais is concerned, the vast majority are not from Iraq and Syria. That deserves an article of its own. There are others better placed than I to write it.

Suffice it to say, there is a massive need and a massive space for a Liberal agenda.

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Alan Sherwell is a former chair of the Liberal Democrat Federal Conference Committee

# A MATRIX FOR POLICY

## Liberal Democrat policy making pays little attention to who the results are aimed at, says Tom Paul

What is the point of policy? Well, we should ask the question. After all, it seems some bright spark felt able to distil the Liberal Democrat manifesto down to three words: ‘Decency, Stability, and Unity’.

As one man noted to me as we stood at the back embarrassed at the election ‘rally’ in Bermondsey: “...if stability and unity were what I wanted, I’d vote Tory”. How prescient.

It is pretty clear now that vast numbers of voters have no idea what we stand for. To tell our story, the story of liberalism, we need far greater alignment between our words and our actions. We must “walk the walk” and “talk the talk”, and policy is fundamental to this.

Currently the big set piece policy papers are prepared at the behest of the Federal Policy Committee (FPC), which will determine a title and invite applications from party members to join a working group.

An FPC-appointed chair weeds through applications and recommends working group membership. The working group then engages in a set of consultation meetings with external parties and draft policy which, subject to FPC tinkering, will be proposed to conference for approval.

I’ve now been part of three working groups. And I’m convinced the system needs a radical overhaul.

First, let’s look at what the process does well. Talented, experienced, opinionated: name any walk of life or sector and you’ll find a gang of party members who are sector experts and willing to put time in to tell the liberal story. The working groups system succeeds in drawing on this talent. Some central coordination is essential. FPC, with its direct mandate from party members, has proven able to control the process, manage disputes and appoint chairs. Ultimately, we have people who know what they are talking about drafting our policy.

But there are some major drawbacks. Rarely does the all important question get asked: “will this policy help us win elections?” It is all too easy to discuss our pet subjects and lose sight of the bigger picture. Sector experts do have a tendency to be small ‘c’ conservative when it comes to their own sectors. It sometimes takes outsiders to challenge the experts. In my experience there’s always a set of relatively minor policy issues which all parties agree on.” It should be a lot easier for campaigners to take policy documents and translate them into messages for voters.

We are making policy in silos, and much of it comes out worthy but dull. It’s time to refresh our policy making processes. We must not ditch the experts, but it’s time to bring in some greater challenge and creativity.

I believe we need a mechanism for drawing on the party membership to give input and challenge the policy working groups. Crucially, this needs to happen

while the working group is deliberating and drafting. Many such mechanisms could exist: from online surveys though to public meetings. And we need to find something which fits with the resources available. So I don’t claim to have the answer – but I do have one particular idea to share.

We are faced with overlapping interests. On one axis we have the policy area (for example, taxation, housing, environment, economy, housing etc) and on the other axis we have our target audience (for example, retirees, public sector workers, young families, students, business, minorities, men, women). We currently produce policy really just down one axis, and rarely stop to think what it might mean for our target audiences. A notable exception in my experience is ethnic minorities, where policy working group members have made a conscious effort to interpret and challenge from minority perspectives.

Matrix structures are applied all over the business world, and provide a framework for managing overlapping interests. Under this structure we would retain the policy working groups and augment this with another set of groups drawn from party members with a particular interest in or knowledge of our target audiences (let’s call them policy consultation groups).

The consultation groups would have a mandate to throw ideas at any or all the working groups, and to give feedback on ideas from them. The consultation groups wouldn’t be writing much down: this is creative space for groups of party members who don’t mind making lot of suggestions, only some of which stick. Accountability for policy, however, would be clear: the policy working groups would continue to take responsibility for drafting and proposing to FPC.

Well run, and with keeping bureaucracy to a minimum, the matrix approach could keep the working groups focussed on aligning with the ‘story’: what does the policy say about liberalism and the Liberal Democrats?

Never again should we let the messaging get so far divorced from the policy. No more the unholy trinity of Decency, Stability and Unity. We must ensure our policy says who we are; to the people we need to tell.

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Tom Paul is a member of Bromley Liberal Democrats and has sat on three policy working groups



# LLOYD GEORGE BETRAYED

## Complicity in Coalition welfare cuts destroyed a proud liberal tradition. Can Tim Farron recover it, wonders Ruth Bright

Badly written 1980s soap operas with dreadful reviews was sometimes ditched when a character woke up and the series had all been a dream, all the actors could resume their places and forget the ridiculous character contortions and absurd plotlines they had prostituted themselves for.

If only it could be like that in the Liberal Democrats. If only the last five years had been a dream and the fallen characters could resume their places. The party has been traumatised by the coalition, yet for what is now the fourth party to rule out coalition in the future would be a nonsense. We need to survey the wreckage before we can perhaps consider working with a larger party again.

The Tories' years of post-Thatchericide agony and Labour's continuing paroxysms over Iraq surely warn us what happens to parties which allow wounds to fester. Are we really expected to give Nick Clegg a standing ovation, listen to some sentimental twaddle about how we made a difference and then get on with our lives?

Tim Farron's acceptance speech as leader was inspirational stuff but it is not as simple as picking a ward and getting on with it. We now have about 70 first and second places. This creates targeting dilemmas not faced since the 1950s. More dangerous though than failing to sleuth the psephology is relying on new party members, many of whom will not stay, to give us new hope or relying too much on the ground that might open up with Labour veering to left.

The last coalition cruelly showed an ideological vacuum that we have to address. We must not be soggy Syriza or pale Podemos but we have not been ourselves for years; we have been Tory lite. The Tory party does what it says on its tin. In coalition we also did exactly what it said on the Tory tin, just with no caffeine and disgusting tasting artificial sweeteners.

Early in the coalition Julian Astle wrote (in phraseology that seemed to come straight from *The Thick of It*) of the alchemy of coalition fusing the best of Tory and Lib Dem thinking.

A 'midas touch' that resulted in our near extinction. We were on appalling opinion ratings for years, losing more than 700 seats in 2011 alone. It is simply ludicrous for Clegg to blame it all on a last minute reaction against the SNP when we had been hovering around 8% in the polls for years and when he fanned the flames of middle England's fears by talking up the SNP as one of the extremes the sensible Lib Dems could balance out.

Let's give ourselves a break from self-flagellation about tuition fees and look instead at welfare. Look at the good we did – the pupil premium and raising the tax threshold, and what else? Its no good complaining about bad Tory stuff where we reluctantly acquiesced. We completely failed to listen to seasoned local government campaigners who warned that the

bedroom tax would not achieve its goals. We love to accuse Labour of losing its moral compass on Iraq but welfare was our domestic moral test and we failed it.

There were no dramatic pictures from the frontline but we let the most vulnerable cohort of people down, who have been able to rely on Liberals speaking up for them for more than 100 years.

In Jerry White's book *20th century London* there is a powerful picture of a class in the same school in Bermondsey in the 1890s and the 1930s. In the 1890s the class is a ragged bunch. The 1930s version is by no means rich but the pupils are comfortable and respectable in their dress and demeanour. T

here would have been many factors in that improvement. But one was the safety net brought in by Lloyd George, not yet a welfare state but sickness benefit and unemployment benefit. This was our heritage 100 years ago. A party that gave the poorest people dignity. None shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity.

Of course the situation is not the same but it is a heritage we should draw on proudly. We have jeopardised it by including children's benefits in the welfare cap, increasing the danger of children sinking into poverty. When Clegg talked of Alarm Clock Britain it did not help a single person back to work, just fostered a divisive 'us and them' nonsense of workers versus shirkers.

There is much hand wringing about food banks, but most of our MPs supported new delays in claiming which left newly unemployed people without benefits for at least a week. The sanctions regime can also leave people relying purely on charity in a way reminiscent of the world before Lloyd George.

The Tories cannot be blamed for all of this. The 2015 LD manifesto offered the odd review and tweak but differed little from the coalition recipe.

The thoroughly welcome turnabout on welfare instigated by Farron helps give us back our identity but will it be credible when we were conniving at such different policies a few weeks ago?

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Ruth Bright is a former Liberal Democrat candidate for East Hampshire

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# RECOVERING CREDIBILITY

## Liberal Democrats must work to recover their place at the top table of progressive politics, says Simon Hebditch

There has been much debate since 7 May concerning the causes of the Lib Dem's catastrophic decline in support at the general election. We should not minimise it. If we look simply at parliamentary representation, we have been reduced to a farcical level which will take at least 10 years to recover – assuming everything goes smoothly. There is also going to be a long haul back for local authority representation and the European Parliament.

So, where do we start? Tim Farron's election as leader is a tonic. We might see a return to the centrality of campaigning on the issues that count and he is clearly able to enthuse the troops. But we need a long period where we regain the trust and confidence of the electorate, and activists across the centre left in particular.

We have to re-establish a reputation for campaigning on the social justice issues of the day – regardless of whether this automatically helps our electoral fortunes or not. There has been too much calculation around as to whether we assess where the electorate sits at the moment and how we can change our policies to accommodate that positioning. Surely, we should set our policies based on our values and then seek to persuade the electorate that we are worthy of support.

Labour shares this problem as illustrated by their leadership campaign where the old establishment grandees tried to move heaven and earth to avoid a result which they thought, in their wisdom, would make Labour unelectable by definition.

I am well aware that different parties are perceived as the 'enemy' depending where you happen to live in. But for me it is obvious that the Tories, with their appalling economic and social programmes, constitute the principal force of conservatism – the polar opposite of liberalism. Therefore, in terms of campaigning and resisting the current government over the next five years, we must find a common alliance with other centre left political parties and, just as importantly, with a range of campaigning organisations.

A progressive alliance of such forces needs to work together both nationally and locally on social justice issues across the board. We can't simply expect to recover our political credibility by concentrating on projecting our tribe above all others. We need to construct alliances with the Greens, the progressive elements of the Labour movement and, for example, 38 Degrees, the trade justice movement, the 'end austerity' movement and various campaigning civil society organisations.

But we cannot simply campaign in a policy vacuum. Over the next two years, we need to refresh and refashion our own policies and objectives. The following areas are simply examples and not in any specific order of priority.

First, the economics of austerity have been a fundamental mistake and we need to shift our focus. As Keynes showed, when nations are in economic difficulty it is public investment and spending that lifts them out of the doldrums. If you follow the commentaries of many distinguished economists in the press, they have illustrated the utter foolishness of the current Conservative approach which, unfortunately, was backed by leading Lib Dems in the coalition.

Most important of all, there is no evidence that imposed austerity actually works in terms of cutting deficits and debt levels. Greece has been put through the wringer and has no chance of meeting the fatuous aims of the EU creditors.

Second, what has happened to the post-Scottish referendum debate about a new constitutional settlement which would work towards creating a federal structure comprising the four nations of the UK?

No steps have been taken to create a constitutional convention. Nothing has been learned from the referendum campaign. Surely, Lib Dems could take the lead in discussing with others the setting up of a peoples convention which could come up with detailed proposals about this alongside electoral reform and the abolition of the House of Lords and its replacement by a directly elected senate.

Third, housing remains one of the crucial issues facing this country. The well being of people is infinitely bound up with their homes or lack of them. We should be able to ally with others over both the measures necessary to raise the building level to at least 200,000 a year and to control both the rises in house prices and rents in the private sector. Has the party talked in detail with Shelter, for instance, about the policies needed to deal with housing shortages and growing homelessness?

There are any number of other issues which we should address in a radical way – climate change, social security and welfare, foreign policy and defence. But to do any of this, we need to reclaim our place at the top table of progressive politics. At the moment, we are seen as irrelevant.

Finally, we should concentrate on campaigning around the country and ignore the everyday inanities of the Westminster system. Ignore the rubbish of PMQs. Get out onto the streets.

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Simon Hebditch is a member of the Social Liberal Forum and was a founder of Liberator

# FROM MP TO INTERLOPER

When he lost his seat in May, Adrian Sanders little expected he'd be received at the heart of the Tory establishment

I remember reading somewhere that there is nothing as ex as an ex-MP. That's not how it feels but clearly the platform that allowed one to advocate beyond the parochial interests of the constituency has gone, and I certainly miss it.

But life goes on and as I keep telling people I've spent the past 18 years worrying about losing my seat and now it's gone I've nothing to worry about. Well, apart from finding a job to pay the bills after the resettlement allowance runs out.

The most frustrating experience is the number of people who tell me they didn't vote for me but were really upset I lost!

I can't leave the house without at least one person approaching me with this now all too common and incredibly irritating greeting. I suppose people mean well, but losing a seat is a little like a bereavement and we all know how difficult it is to find the right words in such circumstances.

One of the things I've been doing, apart from responding to the hundreds and hundreds of letters, emails and calls following 7 May, and the most unpleasant task of the redundancy formalities for my wonderful staff who are having to seek new employment through no fault of their own, has been some voluntary work on diabetes issues.

This has taken me to some strange places in my capacity as president of the Parliamentary Global Network for Diabetes – a position I vacate in December at the bi-annual forum in Vancouver that along with a small group of volunteers I have been trying to raise funds for.

This is how I arrived at the Carlton Club. I was on time but my host was running late. I was allowed in and directed to the downstairs bar where under the portraits of former Tory prime ministers and Conservative figures from past centuries I mused at the fact that I am still banned from all nine Conservative clubs in Torbay.

This was for suggesting in a local paper article after visiting Paignton Conservative Club, at the invitation of the Royal British Legion, that a former Torbay Tory MP would be pleased to see his photo was on the wall as he always wanted hanging. The pro-capital punishment views of the late Sir Frederick Bennett lost on the humourless controllers of access to Conservative clubs in Torbay.

Anyway, there I was in the most conservative of Conservative clubs wondering whether that other great club, the one in Whitehall Place, would be so liberal as to invite someone into the club rather than wait in reception for their host. Probably not was my guess, based on my experience of turning up at the National Liberal Club without a tie some years back and told I couldn't come in. Surely the Carlton Club can't be more liberal than the NLC!

A diet coke was ordered from the bar and brought to my table when a second thought occurred to me. Two of my visits to London since the election have been to meet one of the Conservative Party's most generous funders and now for a meeting in the Tory party's holy of holies.

My host arrived and we moved to the upstairs lounge where I was surprised to see Ukip's Neil and Christine Hamilton enjoying afternoon tea. They knew my host as he had been in Parliament in the 80s when he and Neil sat together on the same Conservative benches.

Neil introduced himself to me and I explained who I was. "Ah so we are both interlopers here" was his reply. I didn't have the heart to tell him that we had in fact met once before, very briefly on my first day as an MP. I'd just met Martin Bell, the man in the white suit who had defeated him, when he got out of a lift with a box of his belongings. Reminding him of that day would only bring back some memories of the same exercise that was still fresh in my mind from a few weeks before.

We adjourned to a quiet spot and got on with the purpose of meeting which was to talk to some possible sponsors of our bi-annual forum - the same topic that had brought me to London earlier to meet a very wealthy potential funder of the gathering.

Afterwards I visited the gents and remembered the tale about the Tory grandee who used to visit the National Liberal Club to use the facilities on his way to the House of Lords. On one occasion the doorman challenged him to ask if he was a member to which he replied, "You mean it's a club as well!"

I was tempted to say the same of the Carlton Club but resisted. I've probably been banned from enough Conservative clubs for now.

---

Adrian Sanders was Liberal Democrat MP for Torbay 1997-2015

## WIT AND WISDOM

*It's a year since the death of Liberator Collective stalwart Simon Titley and many of his articles are now gathered on*

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# STICKING PLASTER FOR SERVICE CRACKS

The voluntary sector is being left to take up the slack of cuts in public services while its own funding is reduced and the Tories try to silence its criticism, says Mathew Hulbert

Our charity, voluntary and community sector is near to saying, “no more, no further, we’ve taken enough. Up with this we will not put”.

David Cameron, who time and again has professed his belief in and support for a Big Society, is leading an administration which is seeing many charities go to the wall or face severe financial difficulties.

Due to his Government’s cuts the third sector is being asked to do more and more for less and less.

As Cameron and his even more ideological chancellor George Osborne continue to shrink the state at an alarming rate or, to be more precise, get local authorities to do their dirty work for them, charities and the voluntary sector are being asked - no, told - to take on what was once tasked to taxpayer-funded authorities.

Whether it’s youth services, libraries or numerous others the voluntary sector is being made to take on so much but with virtually no additional support, funding or staffing.

Quite where government - both local and national - expects these charities to find the capacity to do all of this extra work is beyond me.

I work for a charity and am on the board of a number of others.

It is precisely because I care for this field of activity so much that I feel compelled to campaign more widely for the third sector to be given a break and allowed to do what it does best.

Our sector is there to add value, to be there with the knowledge, expertise and practical know-how on a range of issues that is often only found within charities.

To provide services which are not the preserve of statutory agencies.

It is not there to take over whatever services government decides it can no longer be bothered to provide.

In its publication *Community and Voluntary Services in the Age of Austerity* the trade union Unison, of which I’m a member, sets out just how devastating the impact of cuts and little support has been.

In the foreword, general secretary Dave Prentis writes: “Workers, Unison members, are the lynchpin of these services.

“But they are increasingly bearing the brunt of austerity as they work longer hours, for less pay, in more difficult conditions and with less support.

“Their reservoir of goodwill is being exhausted as they struggle with intolerable levels of stress and the everyday effort to provide for their families.”

He goes on: “This report lays bare the impact of austerity on services provided by the community

and voluntary sector and on the workers for whom providing a service is not just a job, but part of a deep personal commitment to the people they support.

“It is a wake-up call for politicians and society at large that workers in the community sector are reaching crisis point, and it is time to take notice.”

## VEILED THREAT

There’s another truth too, which many charities are wary about speaking out about, which is the not-so-veiled threat by government that if charities do speak out on these matters and, whisper it, dare to criticise the present administration they may find they’re not receiving their latest grant, or getting that next contract, or big donors may stop picking up their phones.

As the Unison report states: “Our members told us that service users were suffering, but they were worried that some charities were reticent about speaking out.”

Many charities are now financially reliant on contracts from the public sector, but commissioners think twice about awarding a contract to an organisation that might highlight problems with them.

Some politicians have also condemned charities that raise awkward issues, saying they have a ‘political’ agenda.’

Or, as a former Tory minister for civil society Brooks Newmark (whatever happened to him), put it just last year: “We really want to keep charities and voluntary groups out of the realms of politics.

“When they stray into the realm of politics that is not what they are about and that is not why people give them money.

“The important thing charities should be doing is sticking to their knitting and doing the best they can to promote their agenda, which should be about helping others.”

What patronising twaddle.

While I wouldn’t expect charities to be particularly party political, it is - or at least should be - well within their scope to speak up and out without fear or favour on behalf of their service users and the issues and challenges they face and, yes, if that means being critical of government policy they should do so in the clearest possible terms.

In the foreword to the National Council for Voluntary Organisations’ *Financial Stability Review*, its chief executive Sir Stuart Etherington has both good and bad news.

He writes: “Charities play a vital role in improving our society and make a huge contribution to the UK economy.

“They are the biggest builders of social capital and provide crucial support to people and communities across the country, often those that are hardest to reach.”

“In economic terms alone the voluntary sector as a whole (primarily charities) has a gross value added of £12.1bn per year with the economic value of UK volunteering estimated at over £23.9bn, to say nothing of the social value they also add.”

Etherington continued though: “Voluntary organisations have demonstrated great resilience in the face of major changes, including a £2.3bn fall in income from government contracts and grants since 2009/10.”

“Their attempts to adapt have however often been self-sacrificial, especially for small and medium sized organisations.

“In trying to do more with what they already have, such organisations have eaten into reserves, cut investment in their own capacity, reduced expenditure on training and frozen staff salaries while staff have increased their working hours—all to avoid reducing the support they provide day-to-day.”

## **CAPACITY CRUNCH**

His review’s key findings included that smaller charities in particular are not benefiting from the economic recovery. They are experiencing a ‘capacity crunch’ that limits their ability to adapt, or to even engage with funder programmes designed to improve their sustainability.

Government grants were at an all-time low, the review found, and foundations have a growing role in the adaptation of the sector as one of the few remaining providers of unrestricted funding.

Surveys of the sector show consistent year on year rises in demand for services, but the detail of this demand is not routinely collected or published across all parts of the sector.

The review also found that the use of reserves to cover operational costs is leaving the sector in a fragile position. Without a significant and sustained improvement in its funding environment, the sector could experience a delayed impact from the recession.

Charity governance expert Leon Ward, a trustee with Brook and Plan UK, speaking to me for this article said: “The charity sector obviously has numerous challenges; from understanding the role they play in the commissioning landscape to the witch hunt around charity fundraising.

“Government has to understand its support function around maintaining a strong, effective and credible civil society.

“Charities are doing more and more of the government’s work for the public and organisations need to be prepared for the challenges that come with that.

“Government could also do with being a bit less guided by the media around issues like charity chief executive pay and, as they do in all other sectors, understand that charities have to compete

*“The voluntary sector is not there to take over whatever services government decides it can no longer be bothered to provide”*

to attract the best talent to manage what is a risky and complicated business.

“Of course, charities should not be exempt of criticism but the scale needs to be rebalanced.”

I agree with Leon and hope the Government will heed his advice.

I have to admit the symbolism wasn’t good when the new minister for civil society Rob Wilson was the

only ministerial announcement not made by Downing Street following the Tories election victory in May.

His appointment was made public by the Cabinet Office, to whom he answers.

I’m sure that the Lib Dem’s principal spokesperson for the voluntary sector and social enterprise, Baroness Liz Barker, will be a powerful advocate for our sector and our cause.

We can help her by supporting our local VCS organisations and lobbying MPs and local councils to ensure civil society in our country is properly funded and supported.

In a speech to Georgetown University in Washington former American president Bill Clinton said “One of the great good news stories of the turn of the century and the early 21st century is the explosion of the non-governmental movement.”

He went on to say, “I have reached a firm conclusion, that 21st century citizenship requires every thoughtful person to try to do some public good even if they’re in private life.”

Our government here in the UK should be making it easier for people to do just that, not ever harder.

We Liberal Democrats, who are so rooted in our communities, must be firmly and resolutely the voluntary sector’s champions.

---

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

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# TESTING TIMES

## The constitution preamble and ideas from Vince Cable could be the criteria against which to judge policy, says Peter Watts

In *Liberator* 372 we were advised by Roger Hayes to “Laugh and have fun”. *Liberator* had it’s on our failures in leadership, over-targeting, vapid sloganising, broken pledges, lost trust.

However, I don’t know what all the fuss is about. Since I joined the party’s predecessor (possibly after I first stood for parliament), we’ve gained an MEP, have acquired bus-loads of peers, been in government, put some of our policies in to law, even increased our MPs by a third and, self-evidently as I’m now a member, our organisation has grown enormously. And we’re renewing ourselves – again.

Less entertaining but more uplifting, you also published requests to recall our values. Yes, “None shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity” is a bit hair-raising. If we mean that, it threatens revolution. Meanwhile, our quote might not go far enough. I offer an additional element, a fusion of Descartes and Carlsberg: “I think, so I know I’m probably only partly right.”

After the emergence of political and then economic liberalism in the 19th century, and then social liberalism in the twentieth, perhaps we need to think a more ‘participative liberalism’ in the twenty-first. That would require more democratic control of information and probably changes to political mechanisms and institutions – but produce even more uncertainty/instability.

*Liberator* then got in to nitty-gritty politics for today; Vince Cable’s plea for “a wider progressive purpose of constitutional reform; a liberal approach to civil liberties; anti-nationalist and internationalist; and with a modern fusion of social democracy with market economics”, cited in Trevor Smith’s article.

With a Tory overall parliamentary majority from only 24% of the adult population, he has a point. However has anyone an idea on how to bring about this break with fissiparous tribalism?

Telling the Greens (probably rightly) that their views are correct but not an over-arching political philosophy might not help. Similarly, a Labour leadership contest, seeking a strategy to recover their core vote rather than a philosophy for the needs of the whole country (and beyond), is not the propitious moment suggested by Michael Meadowcroft. Anyway, such a suggestion from almost annihilated Lib Dems invites the Mandy Davies retort.

However, Cable’s agenda seems to be a good starting point, even if it might have arisen from the needs of the defeated rather than of the country, Europe and the world. Does it withstand wider scrutiny?

One of the joys/losses of being old and decrepit is that I now read more, and more thoughtfully; perhaps seventy serious articles and books on politics and economics in the last couple of years. No, not just the review.

With Thomas Piketty, as I’m not an economist or any other sort of academic, I had to read all 577 pages - twice, reduce them to seven pages of notes and then summarise on one side for my local constituency executive.

The range ran from Wilkinson and Pickett, Hutton and Stiglitz, through Howarth and Pack to, for instance, Pankaj Mishra’s recent long piece on IS and extremism. Before some rightist sympathiser harrumphs about Guardianistas, my list included Tories such as Mount, Hilton, Kruger and Stewart. I touch on the list not as ‘authorities’. Since Bush and Blair, falling back on ‘gods’ has not seemed politically sound, particularly for Lib Dems who appear to think for themselves rather more than in the other parties.

All I can say is that I have been struck by the near-unanimity with which they unconsciously backed the thrust of Vince’s point. Accepting that we all risk seeing evidence for our prejudices, the writers indicated the same clutch of major issues facing our society: public frustration at political processes and especially exclusion from them; the unbalanced distribution of power, resources and economic activity, and decreasing democratic accountability; the widening income and wealth gap to the point of social danger; climate change – (but few discussed extremism, especially of the town hall sort we have).

I suppose a possible next step might be to re-examine our main policies, testing them against the yardsticks above; fighting “poverty, ignorance and conformity”; Vince’s headings; the four points above. Then drop those which fall short?

Logically, if we’re to reach out, we ought also to check the main policies of other parties against the same tests. And then? Perhaps a possible test-bed might emerge in the constitutional area. If Scotland has lessons for us, it was two things: that public engagement, even in things constitutional, is possible and useful; and that top-down proposals, like the Tories’ EVEL, are the opposite of the first point above. A national constitutional convention, fed by local cross-party input which we should help organise, might start our revolution.

And me? I’ll learn to blog. Liberalism has developed well over a couple of centuries but it’s under pressure now. If we have to engage, change minds, especially reach the disillusioned, then people like me need new methods.

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Peter Watts is a member of Berwick Upon Tweed Liberal Democrats



# CHEAP AND CHEERFUL

## Political parties promise to spend money on services but ignore massive benefits which could be achieved for free, says Rob Whewey

Successive governments concentrated on services for 'customers' - paying for provision rather than focussing on what needs to be achieved.

They also rely on 'stakeholders' who deliver services who, surprise!, recommend their own paid-for solutions.

The approach to childhood obesity illustrates this. Government listens to people who offer stomach stapling, drugs, expensive therapies etc. When the chief medical officer for England suggested children needed pills to prevent rickets she was encouraging stakeholders to take government money. If children play outdoors they get exercise as well as sufficient sunshine to prevent rickets for free.

Parties subscribe to neighbourliness ('Big Society', 'Working Class Solidarity', 'Community Action') but ignore what would cost little to implement.

We are disabling our children. Lack of fitness is caused by children being unable to play outside their homes as they did every day for countless generations. This exercise is free and without adult instruction or supervision.

Roads have become more dangerous and parents have understandably kept their children indoors.

Benefits extend to parents. Where children play out there is more neighbourliness. Parents talk about "keeping an eye out" for each other's children.

A solution is there. Street Playgrounds (play streets) are in Road Traffic Regulations 1984. The name should be changed to 'home streets' as they are not playgrounds and should be for all not just children. Their purpose should be to encourage healthy lifestyles and neighbourliness.

Children and young people have traditionally played outside their homes. As was always the case they sometimes appear to be a nuisance, however the vast majority are just ordinary children and have as much right to be in the public realm as any other age group.

Councils should have a strategy of mediation. By bringing people together to talk things through, reasonable agreements can be made. A much more positive approach than threatening sanctions for actions which are not criminal.

Street parties are a regular predictable feature of our heritage and give opportunities for community action.

It is an indictment of successive governments that none have had the wit to prepare a simple document setting out the dos and don'ts of having a street party. It would encourage people to organise events without the problems that the last round of street parties encountered.

Police are retreating from the lost property function yet it gives an opportunity to promote and value honesty, particularly to children.

A better approach would be to have lost property

at the heart of the high street similar to the current charity shops run by volunteers but with a uniformed presence.

There should be an opportunity for a letter of thanks to be sent, without the details of the child being revealed. A letter could be sent to a child's school and read out in assembly so that children could see that honesty is valued. Items could be sold to help pay for the service.

To encourage healthy lifestyles we can make bikes easier to use. Standard bicycles should be fitted with integral lights. With modern technology it should be easy to guarantee that these would last up to 10 years. Bikes have enough wobbling, rotating and braking to power a modern system.

Children today are more environmentally conscious than previous generations but litter increases. As a child I knew that bottles could be taken to the shop and exchanged for money - so bottles went back to the shop. Supermarkets decided on throw-away bottles, so people throw them away.

Bring back the deposit on drinks containers. Things like batteries could be part of the supermarkets points reward system. Get points for taking them back.

We are probably the best connected country in the world but debates about EU, and immigrants are expressed in terms of 'Britain alone against foreign countries'. I worry about the effect this is having on our children as it gives constant reinforcement that foreigners are to be feared and distrusted.

We are members of very significant international organisations (UN, Commonwealth, EU, NATO) and in a position to play a leading networking role. English is the international language.

Children can differentiate between myths and facts. When political leaders speak it appears to be facts. Surely the fact we should be giving out is that it is better to work with all our friends in other countries rather than constantly implying that we're the only country that is right and all the others are wrong.

The suggestion that we leave the European Court of Human Rights is instructive. It's like Manchester United leaving the football league because of a couple of dodgy refereeing decisions. If there is a problem with the court then it will be a problem for other countries as well and we should work with them to sort it out.

The same approach can be seen in the EU. If there are things wrong it is certain they will be wrong for other countries as well. Whether we stay in or come out we will still need to work with other countries

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Rob Whewey is director of Children's Play Advisory Service and a former Liberal candidate - [www.childrensplayadvisoryservice.org.uk](http://www.childrensplayadvisoryservice.org.uk)

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## FARRON AND RELIGION

*Dear Liberator,*

Commentary in *Liberator* 373 raised important issues about personal religious commitment and politics. The same issues have been debated extensively, with repetition, in the Liberal Democrat Christian Forum. I'm concerned we're unconsciously redefining Liberalism.

I've understood a basic aspect of Liberalism, in line with Voltaire and John Stuart Mill, to be that you may have all sorts of views on what's right for someone to do, but you don't employ state or non-state coercion to stop them making the choice you think is wrong unless their action will hurt others.

So the illiberal attitude is not to think something wrong that others think right, but to try to suppress their actions or their defence of their actions.

Take an example of religion-based morality much less fraught than gay rights versus Leviticus. I think gambling is wrong – at least, gambling through pure chance. That's my gut feeling, but also the tradition of my religious group. I oppose the state actually promoting it, as under Tony Blair, but I wouldn't dream of banning gambling, only regulating it to reduce damage to society.

Suppose Tim Farron does believe, as a matter of personal morality, that gay sexual intercourse (not gay sexuality) is wrong.

I'd completely disagree and think less of him. I'd understand how hurtful that stance could be for gay people. I'd think he was taking a brief reference in the Bible out of context. I'd point out that worshipping graven images got a far worse press, that the Bible contains dietary rules modern Christians don't generally consider binding and that St Paul tells slaves to be loyal to their masters. The Bible is not an instruction manual.

But if he does take this mistaken view, does that make him illiberal – or is he illiberal only if his political actions impose his personal morality? I'd suggest the latter. Even Oliver Cromwell said he would not "delve into any man's conscience". That takes us to Tim's

# LETTERS



votes on gay marriage, where he seems to have a defensible argument and to take some positions in line with gay rights.

So can't he just say "none of your business" but answer questions about his votes and speeches?

You're probably right: some people will suspect "a leader suspected of basing his opinions on divine inspiration". That quote encapsulates a common misunderstanding.

Some think religious people make major decisions either by looking up the right answer in a holy book or by responding to a voice telling them what to do.

The former is long short of universal, and in any case, many important issues aren't directly covered in any holy book. The latter is rare. What most of them do is to consider the issue much as non-religious people would, but starting with values influenced by their religion: for example, a Sikh will (should) remember that all people are equal and a Christian (other than some Calvinists) that no-one is irredeemably evil.

Their consideration may include something called prayer, a kind of focussed meditation. This can help uncover hidden hopes and fears. If Tim Farron makes decisions this way, I see no problem provided he also listens to other people.

There should be nothing frightening about people basing decisions on their values, whether religious or secular-philosophical in origin.

Would an atheist humanist becoming active in the party be told, "We understand you believe deeply in reason and science, a favourable view of humanity and opposition to religious indoctrination. That's fine in the privacy of your own house, but please keep these beliefs of yours separate from your politics"?

Simon Banks  
Harwich

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## LESSONS FROM THE COLLAPSE

*Dear Liberator,*

The appeal of Jeremy Corbyn, especially to younger voters, is not that surprising if recent developments are understood. Years of colourless politics always come to a skidding halt. Thatcher followed Callaghan; Blair followed Major (the Grey Man); the Coalition followed Brown to be followed by Cameron, a Tory who out-Thatchers Thatcher. And, of course, there is the astonishing Scottish referendum outcome led by the SNP's Salmond and Sturgeon and increasing support for the Green Party. Elsewhere in Europe there is the electoral success of Syriza and Podemos.

The SDP/Liberal Alliance showed the strong appeal of the new by topping the opinion polls in late 1981 and early 1982 by a wide margin with a 50% showing - up to twice the level of support shown for the Conservatives around that time.

The Falklands changed all that, of course, but for a brief period in the sun a left-leaning Liberal Party, in partnership with the rather more centrist SDP (anyone remember the 'Soggs' as they were christened by the more radical Liberal activists?) grabbed the attention and support of the public.

Similarly, in 1979 Tony Blair swept to power as a reaction to the long years of Tory government which had laid the foundation stone for the corrupt and incompetent financial sector and the collapse of 2008. Regrettably, Blairism not only failed to reverse neoliberal attacks on the essential public services but compounded them with policies such as public-private partnership.

So what are the lessons for the Liberal Democrats? Despite the wholesale opposition of the party establishment, a left of centre leader has been elected. So, that's a start. The forthcoming

conference would be well advised to begin the process of setting out a platform of radical left of centre policies in tune with the zeitgeist and to ditch the utterly uninspiring triangulation of the Clegg era with electoral reform being top of the agenda.

Such a move would reignite the energy of those on the left of the Liberal Democrats and help to return the party to campaign mode. Decisions about the party's relationship with others on the left also need to be thought through as a matter of urgency, especially if Corbyn becomes Labour leader. Relationships with the SNP and the Green Party also have to be re-evaluated.

Finally, I believe it a distinct possibility that all three current main political parties could see breakaway groups being formed in the not too distant future. Labour, in the event of a Corbyn victory, the Tories over the proposed EU referendum and the Liberal Democrats with a possible exodus of those most committed to economic liberalism.

Les Farris  
Somerset

## ARRESTING POLICIES

*Dear Liberator*

I have been delivering Liberal leaflets, then Liberal Democrat ones, since 1973, which is 42 years, and I have seen Liberal fortunes ebb and flow. I hope the theory that at each revival the Liberal fortunes flow further up the shore is correct. May I then be allowed to make some suggestions which could encourage that revival?

Firstly it is vital to act quickly. The Tory honeymoon will be over in a year and the electorate will look to the most attractive opposition party, Labour, Ukip or Lib Dem. We must be there first.

We will need some arresting policies. How about flat taxes? Here the basic rate of tax is the same for everybody and most allowances are abolished.

The advantages are as follows. The threshold is set so the poor pay no tax. National income is increased by greater productivity and investment. Resources spent on armies of expensive lawyers, accountants and tax collectors can be redeployed. Due to simplification

tax evasion and avoidance can almost be eradicated, so increasing the tax take. All groups benefit and while the taxpaying rich may do well their tax-avoiding and tax-evading neighbours will be caught, to the benefit of all. Vince Cable states that flat taxes can be regressive unless the threshold is carefully set, so this will need attention.

Also we should create a sovereign wealth fund, and in tandem, fund the state pension. This will generate considerable resources which can be invested via the private sector and so boost the national economy.

Let us as well be bold on airport policy. There should be an advertising campaign with the theme, "Is that journey really necessary?" paid from airport taxes.

Second homes abroad are excellent things but owners, while staying the same time there, should stay for longer periods and so reduce the number of flights. Also I know that many business trips are unnecessary and with a different culture they can be cut down. We should build a new airport well out in the Thames estuary, served by a first class rail system. This will take the pressure off the existing London airports, catch the eye of

the world and provide a solution for the next millennium.

Finally can I make a comment on the make-up of the party? In the last parliament we had a fine set of MPs. They all deserved to win their seats again. With the benefit of hindsight some decisions in government would have been different but to enter the coalition was right. We put country before party, but then had to fight an election from a tactically difficult position. In the short term we suffered but we may prosper in the long term.

Credit must also be given to the stoical party workers who in good times and bad deliver the message on the door step.

But I have a word of criticism for the middle-ranking party officials. We have become extraordinarily bureaucratic. You cannot build a liberal society with bureaucracy. It is an enemy of liberalism and should be reduced to a minimum. Originality and individualism must be encouraged. We are seen as bland. Let our talents run free. Then we will capture the imagination of the electorate and be rewarded at the polling stations.

Patrick Streeter  
Bethnal Green

## 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'?

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**The End of Apartheid,  
diary of a revolution  
by Robin Renwick  
Biteback 2015 £16.99**

Robin Renwick was privileged in his diplomatic career to have been involved with Rhodesia 1978-80 and ambassador to South Africa 1987-91. He was therefore involved in 'interesting times' and as a central player, his account of events is important. In particular, he causes us to reassess Margaret Thatcher in a more favourable light, and to see Nelson Mandela as the man rather than the icon.

On Rhodesia, we felt that Thatcher was determined to get a solution at Lancaster House, and that Lord Carrington, her then foreign secretary, was more sceptical of the chances. This was reflected in a *Liberator* article at the time, when I think it was a ZAPU activist that I'd interviewed. Mugabe was clearly a problem, even then, though the extent to which was less known.

Mandela – very much more the team player, and loyal to that team, even when in doubt and aware of the need to bring them round to another way of thinking – goes up even higher in our estimation.

I won't go into the story further, the book is important for understanding the events that it covers and will have you gripped until you reach the final page.

Stewart Rayment

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**Rifugio, Christians of the  
Middle East  
by Linda Dorigo &  
Andrea Milluzzi  
Schilt 2015 £29.95.**

Over the past few years we have heard of exotic Christian communities across the Middle East, invariably at some point of crisis. There are even religions that we have never heard of – Yazidis, in this multi-ethnic terrain, and we fail to realise that Islam doesn't only divide in Shi'ite and Sunni (and indeed Sufi), but is equally fragmented within those.

The introduction reads like a paraphrase of the opening of Herman Hesse's *Journey to the East*; the blurb states: "The birthplace of Christianity lies on the Iranian slopes from Mount Ararat to Mount Lebanon,"

Not Bethlehem? not Jerusalem?



# REVIEWS

I find that interesting, since the three great monotheistic faiths forget to acknowledge their debt to the fourth, Zoroastrianism, of which the Yazidis are perhaps, a relic and to be cherished for our understanding of those other faiths. What insights might be gained, especially since Islam maintains that the other Peoples of the Book have lost their way?

At first I thought that some of Linda Dorigo's photographs were out of place. Even as an amateur I take between 4-5,000 photographs in an average year, many of these taken in haste, one becomes aware of sensitive environments – commonly churches. We are told: "As a reporter and a photographer...we were walking on tiptoe. Linda took photos only when the presence of the camera would not have broken the bond of trust."

Thus revisiting I come to respect the emptiness in some cases, the odd angles in others, and the sense of urgency of the blurred image – this last aspect extrapolating the fragility that these communities invariably find themselves under in present times.

The Armenians, the Copts of Egypt, the Palestinian Christians, the Maronites of Lebanon, are perhaps best known, but we now address ourselves to those of Syria, Iraq and Iran – Assyrians, Chaldeans and others.

Behind the photographs, Milluzzi explores the problems these communities face, not least to resort to emigration in the face of persecution. We hear a lot about the loathsome attacks of fundamentalist Islam, but Israel's fundamentalists are just as bad.

Earlier in June a fire was said to have started in several places around the Church of the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes, in Tabgha, Galilee. Traditionally, the church marks

the site where Jesus performed the miracle of the feeding of 5,000 people with just five loaves of bread and two fishes. It is a modern-day church, built in the 1980s over early Christian remains, including a set of Byzantine mosaics depicting the loaves and fishes. Fortunately they were not damaged in the fire. Hebrew graffiti painted on the outside of the church invoked biblical passages calling on the faithful to destroy the 'idols' of pagans. This is not an isolated event, and Milluzzi chronicles the stresses that these communities live under at a personal level.

However, away from power struggles we see ordinary people trying to lead their lives across boundaries.

There was even, recently, some good news as the semi-autonomous Syrian Kurdistan around Rojava tries to set itself up as a multi-ethnic, multi-faith polity, fighting ISIL and Assad simultaneously, but in the knowledge that neither Turkey nor Iran would tolerate them as an independent state.

Stewart Rayment

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**How Adam Smith  
can change your life,  
an unexpected guide  
to human nature and  
happiness  
by Russ Roberts  
Portfolio Penguin 2014  
£14.99**

This seems quite a promising title, especially given the tendency of the right, libertarians in particular, to cite Smith selectively. But it has been argued by Liberals, at least since the time of Thatcher, that Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* is at least as important as his *The Wealth of Nations* – rather in the way that

Machiavelli's Prince is balanced by his Discourses.

Smith is at the root of social Liberalism. Books of political economy are very much of their time, despite the universals they may contain, on which basis I have only ever dipped into Smith's works, though quote both of them fairly regularly.

Roberts is on the faculty of the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, a well funded and high prestige academic think tank. It's well known for its predictable right wing advocacy.

It's my impression that most of the people there worship at the altar of the free market and would probably be identified with the Chicago School of economics. Roberts, indeed, has been a populariser of the market system approach and he's quite good at it. Is the discovery of the Theory of Moral Sentiments a conversion of the road to Damascus?

Can Smith's, or Roberts' book make you happy? Not in the first instance – it makes you miserably aware of your own shortcomings (and I thought Malthus was the prophet of the dismal science). However, if as a result of that awareness you act upon it, you may begin to feel better.

Stewart Rayment and Dennis Graf

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## **The Fall of the Ottomans** by Eugene Rogan Allen Lane 2015 £25.00

Eugene Rogan is author of the celebrated *The Arabs*, and it was natural that he might turn his attention to the Ottoman empire, not least because his Oxford lectures cover the same. Following his earlier book, Rogan, in what is primarily a military historian, calls upon Turkish and subject sources, hitherto unfamiliar.

In 1914 the Ottoman empire might be seen in terminal decline, having lost three wars in the previous three years, losing most of its remaining European and North African territory in the process.

Yet Edirne had been recovered in the Second Balkan War and the kudos that this delivered the Young Turks might have heralded a new start. The First World War put paid to that, though again, not immediately obviously. The

Ottomans might have joined the Entente, but were unable to gain territorial guarantees from the French about Russia's ambitions; as is well known, the British seizure of Turkish ships sealed their fate and allied them with Germany.

Militarily, both sides suffered from politically driven strategies, invariably stretched and under resourced, but Ottoman armies won Gallipoli and performed well in Mesopotamia and Sinai for much of the war. Their army in Hijaz was bottled up rather than defeated; there is a tendency to down-play the role of the Arab Revolt, but Rogan makes clear some of the difficulties that Faisal was operating under and presents Lawrence in a more sympathetic light. Kut, not Singapore, should rate as the first major defeat of the British by a non-western European army, Gallipoli notwithstanding.

On the dark side, the Young Turks conducted their war brutally; the Armenian and Assyrian genocides, similar massacres and deportations of Greeks and of Arabs whose loyalty was questioned. One might add the treatment of the citizens of Kut and British and Indian prisoners of war after its fall to this.

Focussed on the military front, Rogan ignores diplomatic activity which might have made his book more rounded.

Cecil Bloom reckons that archival materials on Lloyd George's overtures under Kerr and Zaharoff are now available (the *Journal of Liberal History*, spring 2015). Indeed, focussed on the Ottomans and Arabs as it is, Rogan's references to decision making in Whitehall, Paris and Delhi give a sense of their detachment from the theatre; evil schemes, little grounded in reality.

Much of our motivation was the fear of revolt amongst the Muslim subjects of the British and French. This proved to be little warranted, but one can feel echoes of John Buchan's *Greenmantle* throughout. In a riposte Rogan writes: "Even a century, later the Western world has yet to shake off the belief that Muslims might act in a collectively fanatical manner. As the 'War On Terrorism' ... has demonstrated, Western policy makers continue to view jihad in terms reminiscent of the war planners from 1914 to 1918."

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## **Coastlines the story of our shore** by Patrick Barkham Granta 2015

I was born on a coastal estuary, and now live in a seaside town, about a mile from the shore, though when the Conqueror landed that may have been less than 100 yards away. Even the part of London that I once represented had powerful associations with the sea. So the words 'coastline' and 'need to preserve' was enough to review this book.

The frontispiece told me the scope of the book, the National Trust's Project Neptune.

Within all of this is a story of conservation, specifically of the coast, but of the National Trust in general, how it was set up, its battles, some of them on-going, but particularly in the context of Project Neptune. The story of Brownsea Island, in Dorset, is in particular a story of the on-going needs to manage nature conservation.

Prior to launching Project Neptune, the Trust surveyed the coastline, casting it as "developed beyond redemption, coast temporarily or semi-developed (such as caravan sites) and unspoilt land that the Trust might hope to buy".

After only a few years of deindustrialisation, the Trust may have reconsidered some of these categories – the colliery wastes of Easington, County Durham, for example. However, as Barkham's interlocutor points out, the "surveyors' fear of shack development was not simply class snobbery... caravan sites proliferated... and what began as a wooden shack soon became a permanent brick dwelling, quickly surrounded by other houses".

We must be constantly vigilant and cannot leave it to those appointed to make the decisions for us alone, for the task is too big, the pressures too great. I would point to the despoiled coastline of Connemara, ostensibly one of the most beautiful parts of Ireland, if anyone wants to question the value of planning.

Stewart Rayment

## Tuesday

Despite my advanced age – enquire at the Liberator stall at Bournemouth about the cordial sold by the Elves of Rockingham Forest if you would emulate me – I have always made an effort to keep up with the Young People. Today I attend the Oakham premiere of a film I helped finance: ‘Straight Outta Nick Compton’. It tells the story of an opening batsman who is unjustly treated and records the controversial single “Fuck tha Selectors” as a result. I see from its evening edition that The High Leicestershire Radical (which I happen to own) has given it five stars.

Back in the early 1960s I paid a visit to the Cavern Club in Liverpool to earwig on the opposition to my own Rutbeat bands. It was an enjoyable evening, but as my train pulled out from Lime Street I discovered that the girl looking after the cloakroom had given me back the wrong hat. I had to get off at Edge Hill and return to the club to put things right.

## Wednesday

I recall my excitement after the February 1974 general election when I realised its outcome meant that the Liberal Party once again had enough MPs to put out a rowing eight. I wasted no time in signing us up for Henley, though my decision was not without controversy: I recall the headline “Row Splits Liberal Party” appeared in one of Fleet Street’s more prominent organs. I remain, however, convinced I was right, for a party that pulls together pulls together, what? As to a cox, I generally being a Well-Behaved Orphan along – they tend not to be on the chubby side and can be handy with a catapult if the other crew attempts to take our water.

The result earlier this year was dreadful, but not so bad that we cannot still form an eight, so this morning I had them out on the Thames for training. Seven were doing their best, but I noticed that Clegg had his feet up and was reading the Sheffield Star. “Put your back into it, man,” I call through my megaphone as I cycle along the towpath. “I want to give Tim Farron space to build his team without having to look over his shoulder,” Clegg calls back. “I am sure he would rather you put your back into it,” I reply shortly.

## Thursday

We gather on the village green to pay our respects to the actor Stephen Lewis, who died a few days ago. His passing reminds me of the days when I would drop into the Servants’ Hall to watch ‘On the Buses’ on their moving television. How we roared! What with that and the racing, I spent more time in the servants’ quarters at the Hall than my own – but then I have always prided myself on being a Radical Liberal.

I had already noticed the double-decker parked outside The Bonkers’ Arms before the commencement of the minute’s silence. As soon as the maroon had been fired, the vehicle began bouncing on its springs. This continued for a while, until a voice cried: “Blimey, Stan, we’re ten minutes late!” Then the driver and a young lady, who both showed clear signs of having dressed in a hurry, scrambled down the stairs and the former leapt into cab before revving the engine and disappearing down the lane to Uppingham.

# Lord Bonkers’ Diary

## Friday

A telephone call summons me back from a meeting of the Trustees of the Royal Opera House, Oakham. When I arrive at the Hall I find a ground floor window in the East Wing broken and a number of precious items missing: a signed photograph of Googie Withers (signed by Desmond Banks, I might add); a 1906 Wisden that lists every Liberal victory at that year’s general election including, as it happens my own; an early prototype of the shuttleworth press, which I

have offered to more than one museum; and much else besides (whatever my insurers may later claim).

When I telephone the local constabulary I am asked: “Does your house have an odd or an even number?” “It doesn’t have a number, you booby,” I reply hotly, “it’s the Hall.” It transpires that Leicestershire Police have a policy of investigating burglaries only in houses with an even number. I think this an outrage, but when I raise the subject with my literary secretary (who occasionally helps me prepare these diaries for the press) he says he is “seriously relaxed” about this initiative.

## Saturday

Did you see some fool suggesting that there should be a mandatory retirement age for peers? The very idea! Fortunately, my own peerage is one of the Rutland variety, which is governed by quite different rules – not least because I chair the committee that looks after such matters. However, it cannot be denied that there is a problem with overcrowding in the Upper House: it is hard to get table for tea these days and the I was obliged to give my last speech on the Consolidate Fund Bill while sitting on the lap of the Bishop of Bath and Wells. Comfortable though it was, this is a less than acceptable arrangement.

Moreover, it is only going to get worse. Poor Clegg has rewarded all his advisers (Freddie and Fiona both now have OBEs, for instance), with some of them getting peerages. I have to say that, judging by our results in May, I am not convinced that having advised Clegg is any qualification for a place in the legislature.

## Sunday

All is well again at St Asquith’s. The Revd Hughes is back in the saddle for this morning’s service of Thanksgiving for England’s victory in the Ashes, having returned from his missionary work amongst the tribes of the Upper Welland Valley. Farron, meanwhile, has gone off to London to lead the Liberal Democrats – or what remains of them. The Revd’s suggestion that we all pray for him hits Just the Right Note.

## Monday

Walking by the shore this morning I see that a craft loaded to the gunwales (whatever they are) with people has run aground in the shallows. It turns out that the passengers have made their way from Syria risking gunfire, high explosives and the Rutland Water Monster. Naturally, I give orders for them to be put up at the Hall. As our Lord said (and I think rightly): “And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.”

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