

# liberator

## *Leave campaign reveals vision for Britain*



- 🔥 Taking on the Brexit lies - David Grace and Kiron Reid
- 🔥 Trump not Clinton's only problem - Rebceca Tinsley
- 🔥 Gurling Review: not quite a survival plan - Tony Greaves

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# COMMENTARY

## A FOUL TIDE TO REPEL

The referendum on 23 June on UK membership of the European Union has been called for one reason only - that the Conservative party is prepared to jeopardise the country's future because of its internal problems.

Just as Labour a generation ago called a referendum on EU membership as a sticking plaster over its wounds (not that it kept Labour united for very long after) so the Conservatives nailed themselves to a referendum because promising one was the only way they could fight the last general election as a united party.

Whatever the outcome, it is likely to damage the Conservatives further. Win and the swivel-eyed lunatics who dominate the Tory grassroots will be irrevocably alienated from a Tory government. Lose and it will be the end of David Cameron and George Osborne's efforts to keep the Conservatives at least relatively anchored in modern Britain. It is no coincidence that all the Conservative party's most repellent figures are in the 'out' campaign.

Indeed, all the most repellent figures in British politics are to be found in the 'out' campaign - Liam Fox, Iain Duncan Smith, Nigel Farage, George Galloway and neo-fascists and marxists of one sort or another, with handsome sums flowing in from assorted hedge fund spivs

This is no accident. The 'out' case is based on emotionalism, bigotry and worse, unsupported claims about unexplained trade opportunities elsewhere in the world, and the deluded belief that the UK could somehow dictate terms to an EU it had just abandoned.

Michael Gove has talked vaguely about leaving allowing Britain to "get its mojo back". Nigel Lawson (whose record as instigator of the early 1990s recession ought to disqualify him from giving economic advice) thinks business would 'innovate'. How and why and where is left unexplained.

The 'leave' economic case bills down to a belief that British firms could somehow seek out hitherto unnoticed and unimagined opportunities once excluded from the world's largest trading bloc.

With this disreputable coalition of charlatans and fantasists drawn up against it, the 'remain' campaign ought to be home and dry.

It isn't - or least not certainly enough - partly because of the anti-EU poison spewing forth from the Sun, Mail and Express newspapers, all of which are run by millionaires who have an interest in destroying the EU because only it has the scale to regulate them.

Another reason is that, as Kiron Reid analyses in this issue, the 'remain' campaign is doing some things right but doesn't appear to be directed by people who

have effectively campaigned for anything outside the business world. With a 'leave' campaign centred on emotional appeals to nationalism and isolationism - and to some rather baser instincts - 'remain' need some better tunes and emotional tugging of its own.

The main reason why 'leave' has some traction is resentment at immigration. The EU gets blamed even though this conflates those here because of EU free movement, refugees from Syria and people from across the world who have arrived for reasons unconnected with the EU.

Some of this can be traced back to the Labour government's rash decision not to have a transition period for immigration from the new member states of eastern Europe, when most other countries exercised this option. Little was done to either encourage integration or help what were in some cases disadvantaged host communities cope with rapid changes in population.

This could have better handled at the time, but to imagine it can be undone by leaving the EU is fantasy.

Does anyone seriously suppose that EU nationals legally settled in the UK could be deported if the country left?

Leaving aside that other EU countries would no doubt carrying out retaliatory measures against some two million British citizens living there, where would such an exodus leave the economy?

Like most of western Europe, the UK is an ageing society that will need more people of working age to keep the economy going to support pensioners (including Ukip voters) in the style to which they have become accustomed. Preventing people coming here and expelling those already settled would be economic madness, never mind the moral case.

The 'leave' campaign, while taking care not to spell it out, is letting its supporters think that a 'leave' vote would see borders closed and migrants sent home. In this, as in everything else, it is mendacious and dishonest.

There is more to winning this referendum than keeping the country in the EU, vitally important as that is.

All the most foul elements of British politics are in the 'leave' campaign, For years they have claimed that their 'drawbridge up', mean-spirited, foreigner-hating bile is truly representative of the British people and that only an elite conspiracy prevents them taking over the country.

If they win, they will turn the UK (probably minus Scotland) into an insular, bigoted, unregulated sweatshop of minimal international importance. Win and we humiliate these people and allow the country's better instincts the room they deserve. The stakes are high.

# RADICAL BULLETIN

## FINGER OF GUILT

Many people grimly predicted the Gurling review of the Liberal Democrat 2015 general election campaign would be a whitewash.

Those who saw the original version shown in secrecy to the Federal Executive say though nothing important has been omitted from the published one.

James Gurling and his colleagues have pulled few punches. If their report has a weakness its that it all too well reflects the general election campaign's fundamental mistake of seeing political problems and offering organisational solutions when the problem lay with the politics and could not be changed by any organisational improvement.

They could not, understandably enough, go back before 2010 without the exercise being unmanageable.

The elephant in the room throughout the Gurling report is Nick Clegg himself. Its conclusions painfully reinforce the now clearer view that he lacked the political experience for the job having had one term as an MEP - so semi-detached from UK politics - and only two years as an MP before becoming leader, in both cases parachuted into safe berths.

He might have grown into the role had the Lib Dems stayed a fair-sized opposition party in 2010. But with the formation of the Coalition, Clegg's disinclination to take advice from anyone who knew more than he did about anything (and in particular advice from anyone older than himself) was at the root of much of the damage.

Indeed while he had some people around him whose role was to keep him in touch with the party, few of them were very much rooted in the party and so were of limited effectiveness.

Gurling traces the party's problems from a "critical disjunction between what was on the front page of 2010 manifesto and what the public and media thought was there - tuition fees".

Once the row erupted, trying to slide out of it by saying tuition fees were "not on manifesto front page and so was not a red line" merely made things worse.

Things were not of course all Clegg's fault and the report also notes: "the move into government was not well understood by the public...exacerbated by running hyper local campaigns with differing messages".

A second source of trouble was the misjudgement over the Rose Garden and the tone of the early Coalition period.

"By setting aside the national interest narrative in favour of emphasising that of 'coalitions can work' we unwittingly manoeuvred ourselves into a position of appearing content to be willing appendages of our coalition partners."

It would have been interesting to know how much these catastrophes flowed from advice given by Clegg's clueless first strategy director Richard Reeves, who

whatever his academic prowess had little knowledge of or interest in the party.

"The early political priority of maintaining the appearance of a united government at almost any cost could not have laid a worse foundation for our positioning over the next five years," as the party was "associated with unpopular Conservative policies not with our own", the report says.

Gurling found that no polling activity occurred in first two years of coalition so "those making decisions were flying blind,...consistent messages from committees, members and activists were ignored," By the time polling was reinstated in 2012 it was too late.

The report ventures into the rarely discussed (at least officially) field of party morale, pointing out that the Lib Dems were heavily dependent on having a motivated activist base but its enthusiasm was damaged first by tuition fees, then by the shambles of the pro-AV campaign in the referendum and the party's willingness to accept horrors like the Health and Social Care Act, secret courts and the bedroom tax with minimal objection.

Come the election, the messaging was confused with 'Stronger Economy, Fairer Society' - which was lame enough and which the report condemns as a slogan any party could have used - ditched in favour of the "weak, confused" 'look right, look left then cross' and then 'blukip', then 'head and heart' and finally the execrable 'unity, stability decency'.

The campaign organisation had blurred accountability (indeed Gurling is chair of the Campaigns and Communications Committee, which was allowed nowhere near it)

Activists were lost through demoralisation but the report also finds "a not insignificant section of lassitude in our strategic seats can be traced to the approach of HQ with a 'one size fits all' attitude, a command and control structure and a seeming lack of willingness to listen to the difficulties being faced on the doorstep. Two-way communication had effectively failed." It does not go into who was responsible for headquarters behaving in this counter-productive way, a conclusion that might have proven interesting.

Party staff operated in silos, and not even happy ones, as Gurling says: "The move to command and control by elections and field department undermined mutual trust between some staff and between those staff and some activists. The elections and field department seems to have had a very directive way of managing people and issues. Overzealous party committee members took their frustration with the structure out on staff."

There are some further issues here. Although the published version of the review accords closely with the FE's draft, there are understood to be sections not in either that deal with staffing and management

issues, and recommendations arising from these that may or may not surface in the series of actions plans now promised by party president Sal Brinton.

We now know a large part of what went wrong, and that it includes things that Clegg's critics were routinely attacked for raising in the Coalition years. What's that flapping sound heading towards the roost?

## IT COULD BE YOU

One interesting part of the Gurling report vindicates Liberator's stories a year ago about the slowness in getting candidates into place.

Senior figures involved in the campaign were appalled that by early 2015 very few candidates were in place and the English party failed to see this as a problem, insisting that the complete rigmarole of the candidate selection processes should be undertaken even in the most hopeless seats that simply wanted a name on the ballot paper.

Liberator 370 reported in February 2015 that a paper for the English Council had said there were merely 214 selected candidates in the 533 seats in England, with "a further 140 are in the process of selection [and] we expect to parachute candidates into between 120 and 200 seats. This process will not formally start until mid February 2015."

Gurling is commendably having none of this nonsense from the English party's hopeless bureaucrats, and reveals the position was even worse.

"Late selection of candidates left local parties without a focal point," the report says.

"Lack of retuning officers meant selections were slow. By December 2014 only 200 candidates out of 632 were in place. Work towards selections without the benefit of licensed candidates was time consuming and a distraction."

Given some of those 200 must have been in Scotland and Wales, England therefore had even fewer than 214 in the field.

Licensed candidates were used earlier in previous elections, mainly local worthies permitted to stand in their home seat but not approved generally.

Yet the English party's complacently refused to countenance licensed candidates until mid-February, less than two months from polling day.

The review concluded: "Candidate approval and selection should fall to CCC with federal intervention if required", given the political imperative of having someone to fight every seat, and that licensing of candidates should be restored to the previous practice.

## BACK TO FRONT

Liberator's Gareth Epps asked party president Sal Brinton during the Federal Executive report at York why the FE had signed off on a staff reorganisation before it received the Gurling review.

Since the latter dealt with the general election and staffing and structural matters arising from it, this seemed to say the least an arse about face way of proceeding.

Brinton replied that this was done to avoid having to make large numbers of staff redundant as had happened in 2010 and implied that the financial situation was so bad that a restructuring had to take place before anyone knew Gurling's recommendations.

## FOLLOW THE MONEY

The Liberal Democrat near wipeout in May 2015 is often blamed on the Tories vastly outspending the party, and in particular bombarding marginal seat voters with literature that mentioned everything except the candidate's name, thereby dodging the expenses rules.

Channel 4 News' revelations of questionable interpretation of these regulations by the Tories may lead to calls for action, but it is unlikely that a Tory government will tighten up loopholes from which it benefits.

A presentation to MPs by former party headquarters pollster Tom Smithard suggested that it was simply a matter of money that led to the success of the Conservative campaign, and the failure of the Lib Dems.

However, as some have pointed out, official figures for the last three general election campaigns show that the Conservatives outspent the Lib Dems by a factor of between 4.4:1 (2005) 3.5:1 (2010) and 4.4:1 again (2015).

This is fairly consistent but with very different results for the Lib Dems, with 62, 57 and eight MPs respectively.

And what was the extent of the Tory financial advantage over the Lib Dems, given that they were seriously contesting more than half of seats and the Lib Dems only about 10% of them?

## SQUARING CIRCLES

The York spring conference passed the motion to allow for all-women shortlists, but not until after a lot of manoeuvring over its wording had taken place.

It was originally pretty weak on assistance for other under-represented groups, which had led Ethnic Minority Liberal Democrats to table an amendment that would have deleted most of the motion and called instead for "the party to fully accept, implement and promote all the provisions of the Equality Act 2010, to encourage the practice of positive action as defined by law, especially those sections permitting radical action to correct and compensate for past discrimination".

There would also have been a '2020 Candidate Diversity Task Force', a requirement on local parties to follow the Canadian Liberals' practice of providing "documented evidence of a thorough search for

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potential candidates from under-represented groups before starting their Westminster selection process”, although the difference in resources between local Lib Dem parties and those in Canada might have made that impractical.

Sensing perhaps that starting a fight with EMLD might not be the best way to get all-women shortlists accepted, leader Tim Farron and president Sal Brinton issued a ‘statement to EMLD’ promising further action to encourage ethnic minority candidates.

In return, EMLD duly withdrew its amendment, but who else was in on drafting the main motion?

Brinton told a conference question and answer session that she, Daisy Cooper of the Diversity Engagement Group and Prue Bray of the Joint States Candidates Committee had jointly coordinated the motion and that EMLD, the Liberal Democrat Disability Association and Lib Dem LGBT+ had all been involved.

EMLD figures say it was not involved, or else its original amendment would have been unnecessary. LDDA’s Gemma Ralston said during the main debate that even LDDA’s executive had not seen the motion before it was tabled.

The powers that be were though taking no chances, with both Farron and Brinton taking the unusual step of speaking from the floor in support of all-women shortlists.

## FRACKTURED RELATIONS

The Lib Dem federal conference at York voted for a ban on fracking but not two weeks earlier the Scottish party had done the opposite and voted for the lifting of Scotland’s moratorium on fracking in the light of research reports that judged the technique was safe.

So will the Scottish party be fighting its upcoming parliamentary elections on a pro-fracking platform?

Er, no. Scottish leader Willie Rennie had a fit when the amendment was passed since he had planned to campaign against fracking. A hurriedly convened telephone policy committee meeting decided that a mere vote of conference didn’t matter after all and Rennie could simply ignore it and commit the party to oppose fracking in Scotland.

This all begs the question of why, if Rennie considers this so important, he and his supporters failed to organise effective speeches against the amendment.

But then no doubt the Scottish party still feels able to use the selling point to would-be members that they can help to shape policy.

## WHAT YOU MIGHT HAVE DEBATED

As ever, this year’s spring conference saw fierce competition for the Mitcham and Morden Commemorative Gold Toilet, awarded by Liberator for the worst motion submitted to each conference.

A motion from Calderdale was one contender, stating the UK should be federalised on the basis on English regions with equivalent powers to Scotland and Wales but with an enormous series of caveats that could make such a process go on for ever, including “consideration of the reorganisation of local government”, and a “road-map and/ or consultative

process for the determination of boundaries for the English Regions”.

Having got that little lot out of the way, there would then be “consideration of” the optimum population size for federal units, what to do with the House of Lords and how to accommodate city regions that might inconveniently spring up in the meantime.

Another contender was Chester’s series of unsupported assertions about the public sector’s hostility to start-up businesses.

The winner though was Witney, which appeared to propose an electoral pact with Ukip. It called on the party to form an alliance with “all political parties that have already and may in the future declare their support for a fair voting system”.

This alliance would then “fight the next general election in a manner that allows for all their votes constituency by constituency to be accumulated into one block vote for PR.”

So, er, that would mean an election in which all other parties band together to fight the Tories, agree a complete seat share out (which eluded even the Liberal-SDP alliance in three places) and is conducted only about PR regardless of what the voters might find of interest?

## MISSING IN ACTION

The Liberal Youth stall at York resembled an ill-stocked convenience store, bearing an incongruous mixture of jammy dodger biscuits, condoms, custard creams and tampons. Nor were patrons advised in which order they should use these objects.

Liberal Youth had been expected a consignment of campaign materials to be delivered on the party HQ van travelling to York. When this arrived minus any LY impedimenta, enquires were put in hand, which led to the discovery that no know where any of this stuff was. Rumours that Liberal Youth officers will be scouring motorway verges are believed to be untrue.

## NO SUCH THING AS A FREE DINNER

Having at one time failed to explain itself to conference at all, the Federal Appeals Panel has now gone to the other extreme.

When it ruled the triple lock unconstitutional in 2010 it took 19 months to tell the party (Liberator 351), and as a result of this tardiness became required to make an annual report to conference.

This duly appeared at York and ran to a massive 6,678 words. Information on the rulings given was of course anonymised.

It is, needless to say, quite impossible to guess the subject of a complaint that a candidate for the Federal Executive in 2014 gave a free dinner at Glasgow’s India Quay restaurant where guests’ contact details were obtained and “they were subsequently contacted asking for their votes by members of you team and also by yourself”, as the ruling states.

Panel chair Alan Masters duly investigated under rules that regulate internal candidates’ election spending and which prohibit “activities during the election period, which may be viewed as treating”.

Masters received a reply: “As is common with conference fringes, a buffet of food was provided”, and

which went on to state that the person concerned had for 22 years - during which they had stood 15 times for the Federal Executive - provide similar culinary largesse without complaint.

The response went on: "As far as I'm aware the people I phoned were the people who have supported me in the past and I phoned them to let them know that I was standing (as I did in the past)."

Masters ruling stated: "Your admitted conduct, clearly gave you an advantage over other federal candidates at the election, that it would have been clearly viewed as unfair and not a level playing ground by both other candidates and by any neutral observer. I have no doubt that it gave a clear appearance of treating contrary to Rule 4C.

"I find that any neutral observer would have viewed it in that way. In my judgement, such conduct is unfair and clearly offends against the purpose of the rule."

He also found of candidate concerned "by your own admission you directly or indirectly authorised or cause to be incurred further expenses on campaigning at any time before or after the close of nominations", in breach of the relevant rule.

There had also been a complaint made about data protection concerning how an individual's contact details were obtained, on which Masters felt unable to rule but noted he was "not at all impressed with your lack of candour".

Masters allowed the election result to stand but added a warning: "Should such conduct be repeated by you or by anyone else in the future that I would have no hesitation in declaring any subsequent election void."

A section of the report apologises for its non-appearance last September due to pressures of work.

Possibly that is why even the panel's own members hadn't previously seen it. One member has raised concerns that, apart from an email asking him to agree to Masters as chair, he has had no communication of any kind over four years from the panel nor been asked to assess any cases.

## SUNNY CLIMES

Former Lib Dem leader Nick Clegg was found last autumn to have the worst voting record of any MP and promised in January to improve his attendance rate in parliament

He has though been invited by presidents of Colombia and Mexico to visit both countries in early March, on a fact-finding mission on drugs policy.

No doubt he will learn something valuable but this is slap in the middle of the parliamentary session, two weeks after the February recess, and three weeks before the Easter recess.

## LEFT HAND DOWN A BIT

The enthusiasm for promoting the Liberal Democrats' admirable new policy on drug reform clearly got the better of one staffer. A peer based deep in northern England was startled to receive an email for party headquarters stating: "No other party is endorsing reform and can bring about change. But unlike Welsh Labour who can push their agenda through the media, we rely on volunteers to campaign in communities to bring about change."

## WIT AND WISDOM

Federal Executive member Kavya Kaushik has quit the Lib Dems, joining the list of right-wing libertarians - Mark Littlewood, Sara Scarlett and Zadok Day to name a few - who have realised the party in no way shares their world view.

Kaushik went because she objected to the way in which Liberal Youth conducted campaign outside foreign embassies in support for LGBT rights.

Does this mean an end to her Tweets about the Lib Dems?

Despite being one of the least likely people to be invited to address a Social Liberal Forum conference, she wondered whether this was because "do they just hate Asian women"? It took five days for SLF to get an apology.

Her other bon mots included: "For profit education would greatly improve services for leaners and more corporations should look after schools to improve standards", and "the Tories are right about the NHS. Standards are horrendous and needs privatisation or more charging. I don't support junior doctors."

Funnily enough there is a political party that might suit her.

## JIM GAVE THE LAND TO THE LANDLORDS

Land reform and support for the rights of crofters and tenant farmers has for over a century been a keystone Liberal value; a symbol of what the party has stood for.

The Land song, with its clarion call for reform, is the anthem of Liberalism. Since the days of Gladstone, the party has stood up against landowner vested interests, backed invariably by the Tories.

Until now. In a Scottish Parliament committee on the Land Reform Bill, Jim Hume, a Liberal Democrats MSP, voted with the Tories against enhanced protection for tenant farmers.

With only tentative steps taken towards the reform of Scotland's land laws (the land is in the ownership of fewer people than in any country in the developed world) under the Lib-Lab government in Holyrood from 1999-2007, the Nationalists have moved from inertia to strengthening legislation.

It appears this political territory has been entirely ceded by the Lib Dems, in spite of the party's consistently strong support in rural Scotland through the darkest days of the last century and until the recent SNP landslides.

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# TAKE ON AND EXPOSE THE 'BREXIT' LIARS

## Deceit is at the heart of the Leave campaign, says David Grace

Do you tweet? Just occasionally I do, usually during Question Time and Any Questions. Recently I took issue with some eurosceptic nonsense uttered by a panellist.

Over the following two days I receive many responses from the people we call Brexiters. One of them had posted a picture of Hermann van Rompuy, former President of the European Council, with words in inverted commas he was supposed to have said. The quotation looked unlikely but it took me half an hour to track it to its source, a disreputable right-wing news agency called Breitbart.

The quoted words were never uttered; they formed the opening sentence of Breitbart's misreporting of what he actually said. I tweeted again showing that they were false. No direct response to that, just another 50 retweets of the original lie. Well, you may say, what do you expect on Twitter?

If only the deceit was confined to Brextweeters, who may believe what they post but are careful not to let their immaculate prejudice be corrupted by any inconvenient facts.

No, deceit is at the heart of the Leave campaign. In recent weeks I have challenged both Douglas Carswell and Daniel Hannan when they spoke locally. Carswell ignored my comments and responded with the Brexiters' favourite tactic. He cited a problem which we all recognise and blamed it on the EU. He feigned anger that a small shopkeeper in Clacton pays his taxes while multinational companies like Starbucks get away with avoiding them.

"If only", he exclaimed, "we left the European Union we could stop it". He attempted no explanation why it was the EU's problem, because it isn't. The EU has no competence over corporation tax or income tax. Indeed attempts to get international agreement on tax avoidance could only be strengthened if the EU were able to negotiate on the subject. Carswell is no fool, is no Farage, saying whatever pops into his head. He is careful, considered, apparently intelligent, rational. I can only conclude that he knows he is lying.

Ukip and its Tory sympathisers (or should I say Tories running scared of Ukip) also love to parade spurious statistics. We all know that there are lies, damned lies and statistics. If we didn't, Hannan and Carswell prove it. They tour the country declaring that Europe is in decline. They quote statistics showing that the EU's share of world trade is smaller than 20 years ago.

They don't give the reason which is that the economies of countries in the developing world are - well - developing. Isn't that a good thing? They don't mention that the decline is relative not absolute, that the EU remains the biggest trading bloc in the world with surpluses in trade and services. This little rhetorical slide from "relative" to "absolute" panders to old-fashioned mercantilist notions of a zero-sum game

in trade whereas the truth is that freer trade promoted by the EU enlarges the cake.

### RHETORICAL TRICK

The cake is not absolute. We find another common rhetorical trick when Brexiters talk about trade. They argue that out of the EU the UK would easily negotiate new trade arrangements with the EU, so we would not suffer. The trick is the disappearance of a word important to Liberals: "free". Within the European Single Market there is free trade developed carefully over decades by the removal of tariff and non-tariff barriers.

There can be no guarantee that outside the EU Britain would obtain free trade with the 27 countries whose co-operation we have rejected. Even if we were admitted to the European Free Trade Area like Norway is (conditional on free movement and a financial contribution), non-tariff barriers on which we would have no vote could remain.

This raises the next lie - democracy and sovereignty. Farage is very fond of talking about sovereignty and Gove and Boris and all the rest join in. You may remember Eric Idle's character in Monty Python's Life of Brian. Eric played Stan who suddenly announces that he wishes to be a woman called Loretta and have babies. The Judean People's Front - whoops, no - the People's Front of Judea agree that although Stan can't actually have babies, he has the right to have babies as a symbol of their struggle against the Roman oppressor. Substitute "the right to pass any law we want" and "the European oppressor" and there you have the argument for national sovereignty. What matters in the real world is the power to do things not the theoretical right to. Britain has more power because it shares sovereignty in the EU. There is however a catch. You have to let foreigners vote as well. This is what the Brexiters really can't stand.

"Laws which govern citizens in this country are decided by politicians from other nations who we never elected and can't throw out." wrote Michael Gove in the Telegraph (as a well-known pedant he should have written "whom"). There is enough truth in this sentence to render it credible but not enough to make it true.

Most law in the UK is made by our great democratic parliament in Westminster, consisting of a lower house with a majority of MPs elected by 36% of the voters and an upper house elected by no-one. You can't actually throw the buggers out very easily.

Some law is made by the EU. Farage has claimed many different figures up to 85% of all law. The House of Commons library calculates that from 1997 to 2009 6.8% of primary legislation (statutes) and 14.1% of secondary legislation (statutory instruments) had a role in implementing EU obligations, although the degree of involvement varied from passing reference



to explicit implementation. While we are all equal before the law, not all laws are equal. The Brexiter's absurd figures are based on counting EU regulations on methods of olive oil analysis as of equal importance to an Act of Parliament restructuring the NHS.

The Brexiter's carry on to say all these European laws are imposed by Brussels bureaucrats because of course the EU is undemocratic.

In fact most European law is adopted by the "normal legislative process" which means a majority vote of the European Parliament elected by the people (yes, I know some of them are foreigners) and a qualified majority vote of the Council of Ministers, composed of national ministers (some of whom are British of course). They ignore this and point out that MEPs cannot initiate laws, only the European Commission, which we didn't elect, can.

Have you noticed how widely used and successful is the right of MPs in Westminster to initiate laws? Compare the two processes. In the UK the party with the most MPs (not votes) chooses the prime minister, who appoints ministers who tell civil servants to draft Bills whether or not mentioned in their manifestos (NHS reforms, Tax Credits anyone?) Government MPs shut up and vote, opposition MPs move amendments and lose. Bills generally go through unamended except by the unelected Lords who usually lose too. Then the Queen signs it.

In the EU, member-states voluntarily agree in treaties on areas of co-operation and objectives. The commission, composed of commissioners each appointed by a national prime minister and confirmed in office by a vote of the European Parliament, consult national governments and committees appointed by them and then draft laws to achieve those objectives.

The European Parliament reviews the drafts in specialist committees which propose amendments, then the plenary session debates and amends further. Finally the Council of Ministers discusses and agrees or amends drafts, in which case the parliament has to discuss and agree too before the law is passed. There is no European Queen.

Brexiter's also often say the UK has been outvoted 67 (or whatever number they dreamt up in the pub that day) times. The European Parliament doesn't vote by nations but by political groups. The council rarely votes, preferring to reach compromises. When it does vote the UK is usually on the winning side. But I do have to admit that foreigners get a vote too. The Brexiter world is like a football league in which only the British team makes up the rules. We still wouldn't win.

The other great Brexiter demand is control of our borders, which history back to the Romans suggest has never been very good. They deliberately mix up three kinds of foreigners (well, they're all foreigners, aren't they?): refugees, EU migrant workers and non-EU immigrants. Our duty to refugees is established by international law and is actually reduced by the EU's Dublin Convention and Dublin regulation which says asylum-seekers can be returned to the first safe

*"What matters in the real world is the power to do things not the theoretical right to"*

country they came to. It is breaking down in the current crisis but would not apply to the UK at all if we left the EU. EU citizens have the right to study, to work and to seek work (for a limited time) in other member-states. The numbers of Brits benefitting from this in other EU countries is broadly equivalent to the number of

non-Brits in the UK, about two million each way. I believe it was foolish of the Labour Government with Liberal Democrat support to open the borders to all such migrants the day 10 new countries joined the EU in 2004. The accession arrangements included a period of seven years in which numbers could be gradually increased. Only Britain, Sweden and Ireland ignored this.

## **SPASM OF XENOPHOBIA**

I date the current wave of panic about immigration back to that decision which scared many people. Brexiter's make much of the strain on our public services. The NHS cannot cope with migrants, they cry, when we all know that it could not cope without migrants. They ignore the demographic pressure which means that our working population cannot support our retired and longer-living population. They ignored the well-researched net contribution migrants make to the economy. At heart, this is just another spasm of xenophobia and I will waste no more words on it here, although we will all need to on the doorsteps over the next few months.

I have devoted much of this article to disproving the lies of the Brexiter's because I have already made the positive case for the EU many times in *Liberator*. We cannot entirely blame them for our fellow countrymen's doubts. Pro-Europeans, including our own leadership, over many years have failed to make that case. This referendum which we cannot be complacent about winning will, sadly, not settle the issue for ever. The majority is likely to be less than overwhelming in the range 50-55%. The battle may be won by fear of the unknown or by people who are actually persuaded by Cameron's deal. I have said little about it because it makes so little difference. The task of developing a truly positive climate on European issues can only begin now. We have years of prejudice and lies to overcome and it will take years to do it even if we win in June.

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David Grace is a member of the *Liberator* Collective

# RIGHTS AND WRONGS OF THE IN CAMPAIGN

## Kiron Reid finds campaigners for the UK to stay in the European Union have learnt at least some lessons from the AV and Scottish referendums

The pro-staying in EU campaign has avoided some key mistakes from the alternative vote and Scottish referendums but is still making some significant errors.

### WHAT IT IS DOING RIGHT:

- ☛ It is not fronted by politicians.
- ☛ It is not only talking about economics.
- ☛ It is talking about issues that people care about.
- ☛ It is talking in language that people understand.
- ☛ It appears united.

### WHAT IT IS DOING WRONG.

- ☛ It is not talking about ideas, positive ideals, principles or vision but almost entirely about economics.
- ☛ It is being negative – if thankfully not most of its content.
- ☛ It does not say who they are.
- ☛ It does not say who is funding the campaign or where their money comes from.
- ☛ It is talking mostly about money and cost-benefit, not directly the economy and jobs.

### WORKING THE RIGHT WAY...

So, let's look at what the campaign is doing right. It is not fronted by politicians. This was a blunder of the pro-AV campaign (whether or not you supported it), and a blunder of the Better Together campaign opposing the break up of the United Kingdom.

Britain Stronger in Europe is headed by the former boss of Marks & Spencer, Stuart Rose. A genuine successful businessman who was head of a thoroughly British company (founded by Jewish immigrants). Karen Brady the football manager and business figure is also a key figure. The agent is Will Straw, son of Labour minister Jack Straw and one of the current generation of Labour dynastic scions. But it makes sense to have an experienced campaigner running the campaign. The populist nasty right wing press and politicians will run a nasty populist campaign and Straw's pedigree may help be ready for that.

Rose does look like another old man in a suit, but nothing like as badly as the old Tory chancellor Lawson who is a figurehead for the antis. I value the experience of age but here is where I would have preferred some populist celebrity culture to head up the pro-side. Labour on the pro-side have taken the right tactical decision not to join platforms with David Cameron. It seems partisan but saves winding up Tory haters. The antis on the other hand look like a freak

show of people you wouldn't want as your political allies or probably friends.

It is not only talking about economics. The campaign is also talking about Britain's role in Europe (the visionary part of its message), security, about opportunity and sometimes about the environment, about peace. The website has the headline 'Britain is stronger, safer and better off in Europe than we would be on our own.' Then 'More jobs and opportunities' and these key phrases repeated 'The benefits of being in - a stronger economy, stronger security and stronger leadership on the world stage.' A problem is (as historian / comedian Al Murray has pointed out in pictorial tweets) these are also the same slogans that the Leave campaign are using. The brainwashed recipients of Daily Mail and Daily Express propaganda (including many Labour supporters) are likely to agree with them deployed by the antis because they say what they want to hear.

It is talking about issues that people care about. Jobs, mostly jobs, prices, and security and sometimes the environment. Sir Hugh Orde, the former police chief, argues that the EU is good for security. By contrast, the pro-AV campaign both failed to explain what the proposed reform was for and greatly exaggerated the possible benefits. They sloganised and failed to explain either the detail or get across why a change to the vote system was relevant. (Incidentally Nicholas Whyte has blogged on lessons from previous referendums for this one).

It is talking in language that people understand. The recent newspaper that was distributed around the country was well put together and clearly written, with a variety of stories on different relevant issues affecting people. (The Guardian reports that 10 million newspapers were to be delivered – presumably paid delivery by the Royal Mail).

It appears united. The anti-EU campaign appeared to be arguing among itself over who or which faction is top dog. They've now put that behind them with the grotesque Farrage and Galloway show, and a bank of mostly unpalatable Tory ministers showing common front for Out. I don't believe in unity being needed for the sake of unity. The press, party leaders, and opponents are obsessed with that – genuine disagreement and debate is normal in any group. The antis however are likely to fight among themselves as, apart from hating the EU, they are such a coalition of people with completely different ideas about what they believe in, and only agree on what they are against. The In campaign must put a positive vision of a modern, pluralist, tolerant, thriving country that plays a key part in Europe and on the World stage. The best

of Britain, not the best of mythical 1950s Britain.

## ...AND THE WRONG ONE

The In campaign is not talking about ideas, positive ideals, principles or vision but almost entirely about economics. It is almost entirely talking about jobs - rational arguments about the cost to people of leaving the EU and the financial benefits of being in. But making almost the same mistake that the Better Together campaign made of leaving the idealistic, principled, visionary side to the breakaway campaign. True it is hard to make creating a pro-reformed European Union a romantic vision, unlike the wilful nostalgia and rose tinted glasses of the antis, but for some of us the vision of a peaceful united Europe is a romantic vision we would like to see.

Stronger In fails to adequately promote the successes, and extreme present necessity of European countries to work together in a grown up way. We can't solve the migration and refugee crisis without working together on a post-WWII rebuilding scale. Further it fails to promote reform or the need for reform. I entirely agree with the changes that David Cameron was trying to negotiate and want a more cost effective, less nit-picking EU. The Yes side should push for more. There are awful myths but some of the criticism is fair. There is nothing on the In website answering lies about the EU. Where can people look to fact check? - there aren't even links here. Yet the campaign is already failing to be completely truthful, by over-egging the pudding. The newspaper and website cite the EU abolishing mobile phone roaming charges but it hasn't abolished them yet, as customers obviously know if they travel abroad. Why on Earth didn't they just tell the very good truth that the EU has massively cut mobile phone roaming costs and is going to abolish them. There is a Mythbusters page in the newspaper, but it is a list of simplistic generalisations. Far better is the page on Labour MEP Richard Corbett's website.

It is being negative - if thankfully not in most of its content. The advert on Facebook is negative - immediately apt to be designated as 'scaremongering' by the antis. "What would leaving Europe mean for YOU and YOUR family?" "There will be pain". It exposes the negative possible consequences identified by leading Leave EU figures, but it simply seems negative. Negative arguably worked for anti-AV, and in the final days of the Scottish vote, but it is unlikely to convince the stuck-in-a-1950s-idealised-Britain older generation, and ignorant anti-difference younger people, that there is something good to vote for.

It welcome that in the last couple of weeks the emails from the Stronger In have generally promoted positive messages. I'm no fan of NUS but it is good to see the NUS president there as the EU has been great for generations of students having more opportunity to widen their horizons than ever before. Facebook, blogs, and Lib Dem Voice are full of people wishing Stronger In would run a principled positive campaign.

*"It is hard to make creating a pro-reformed European Union a romantic vision, unlike the wilful nostalgia and rose tinted glasses of the antis"*

It does not say who they are. The campaign newspaper does not say who the people behind the campaign are - to that extent, a glossy newspaper, it looks like party political or marketing PR. They miss a trick by failing to mention prominent supporters, although some business people and ordinary people are included. There is nothing about who set up the campaign (because presumably it was mostly lead by party political, and a few pro-Europe activists).

Worse, the website fails to include this information where there is no excuse for a lack of information. The Facebook group under 'about' is a blank.

It does not say who is funding the campaign or where their money comes from. Neither the newspaper or the website includes this information. Sure, failure of the anti-electoral reform funders to out themselves as rich Tory donors, corporate raiders and newspapers barons didn't harm the campaign because the public believed the drivel they spouted. But the pro-EU campaign has to be totally above board - because of the bad reputation of the EU, and because the antis will show their nasty anti-social tendencies. Articles in the Financial Times, on the BBC, and on Sky inform us that it has received large amounts of money from big financial institutions and banks.

It is talking mostly about money and cost-benefit, if not the directly the economy and jobs. A case about economics is not going to win people over in hearts and minds. If people feel after the referendum that they've not had a fair vote - like in Scotland or in the previous referendum on membership of the European Economic Community, people feel somehow cheated - then there will be limited acceptance of the result and regular renewed calls for a new referendum leading to more instability in our national political debate of the kind that undermined John Major's government and has bubbled as a hot and cold war in the Tory party ever since. People need to feel they are making a well informed positive choice. Stronger In needs to present a positive message and vision.

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Kiron Reid is a member of the Liberator Collective. A version of this piece first appeared on the Liberator blog: [liberator-magazine.blogspot.co.uk](http://liberator-magazine.blogspot.co.uk)  
Britain Stronger In Europe: [www.stronger.in.co.uk](http://www.stronger.in.co.uk)

# BEYOND HILLARY AND BERNIE:

## Whoever is the candidate, the Democrats face tough choices about their future, says Rebecca Tinsley

We have been here before in American politics: in an earlier ‘culture war’ election, in 1972, a Democrat campaign button boasted, “McGovern: acid, amnesty, abortion.”

The public responded by giving Nixon 61% of the popular vote, with McGovern losing his own state of South Dakota. The democratic socialist Bernie Sanders has been compared to McGovern. But another painful historic parallel springs to mind: that Hillary Clinton is the Hubert Humphrey of 2016.

In 1968 the Democrats picked Humphrey, Lyndon Johnson’s vice-president, in the wake of Robert Kennedy’s assassination. Activists saw Humphrey as a stale, tone-deaf, inauthentic, insincere, party establishment figure. Humphrey defended the Vietnam War, as Hillary defends her Iraq vote.

Hillary is also fighting a previous gender war: with her refusal to apologise for the email scandal, she tries to look tough. By shunning idealism she avoids seeming emotional. Until the Nevada caucus she spoke of “I” and “me,” rather than Sanders’s “we,” because she wanted to display leadership.

Older American women tell me they understand her need to over-compensate because they recall being told women’s passions disqualified them for office. But for the younger generation I meet in the classroom, this does not resonate; they find her untrustworthy and without vision. What’s all the fuss about her being a woman, they ask?

Does the surge in Democrat foot soldiers, attracted by Sanders, signify a longer term leftward shift in the party? In 1968 there was a chasm between Democratic activists (“acid, amnesty, abortion,” rioting at the Chicago convention) and the moderate, mainstream public (Nixon’s silent majority).

Will Bernie’s ideologically pure supporters get involved in the party, learning the rule book, or will they fade away if Sanders and/or the party face defeat later this year? Does the lurch leftward mean the final eclipse of the union and blue collar Democrats who were in such conflict with the McGovern people in 1968? If this sounds familiar, it is because some of the same questions apply to Britain’s Corbynistas.

Many younger voters are ahistorical. Very few know anything about Vietnam, Reagan or even Bill Clinton’s presidency. Yet, according to my unscientific survey, many are sincere, concerned, engaged, and angry. Bernie’s utopian message resonates, whereas Hillary’s dull caution frustrates them. Tom Perez, Obama’s secretary of labor, recently gave this warning to Sanders supporters: “When you insist on the perfect, you get nothing done.”

In contrast, Hillary relies on her purported ability to get incremental change through a Republican Congress, as opposed to the likelihood that any bill

sent to ‘the Hill’ by President Sanders would be dead on arrival. But is there any reason to suppose Congressional Republicans will be any more willing to work with Hillary than they were with Obama?

### OBSTRUCTIONIST GRIP

Where does the obstructionist Republican grip of Congress leave the Democrats in the long term? As a Bernie supporter explained to me, “We might as well have Sanders because he asks for 100% and might get 40% from Congress, whereas Hillary asks for 65% and will get 20%.

“Anyway,” the young voter added, “Republicans already think Hillary is a socialist, so why not pick a real one? At least Bernie is a white male, and more acceptable to them than a black or a woman.”

Surprisingly, a recent Pew poll indicates 49% of Americans younger than 30 years of age look on socialism favourably. This remarkable shift is attributed to the residual fury following the 2007-08 Recession. In addition, Republicans can no longer sabre-rattle about the USSR, as they habitually did during the Cold War. Yet, is American really ready to embrace socialism, as Sanders supporters seem to think?

Whoever gets the Democratic nomination, fundamental challenges face the party. Democrats must either choose a utopian vision of government as the solver of problems and bringer of programmes, or a more circumscribed view of what the state can achieve.

Bill Clinton and Barack Obama (both election winners), encouraged behavioural change through incentives, nudges or financial penalties, widening opportunity, without expanding bureaucracy: hence the echoes of Corbyn utopianism versus the chastened, tinkering of the Blair/Brown years.

Bernie is a New Deal FDR Democrat. His analysis of the financial deregulation that occurred under Reagan and Bill Clinton, the crushing of the middle class dream, and growing equality is widely accepted across the Democratic Party and beyond.

But Sanders’ solutions assume government is the most appropriate way to deliver change. He also articulates a top-down view of the world, implying Washington DC decides on programmes and the federal government implements them. This challenges the ‘states rights orthodoxy of the Republicans and their voters.

The Sanders Democrats will face electoral defeat if Americans have lost confidence in the capacity of government to do anything but give them a headache. The Republicans have successfully embedded suspicion and dislike of the federal government as an article of faith for many Americans. This may make it easy for Republicans to lambast Sanders, if nominated.

According to his own estimate, Bernie's plans will increase the federal budget by 40%. Imagine what the Republican machine might make of that during the election.

The Republican narrative –“government is bad” – started with Reagan (Nixon was a big government guy). Yet, paradoxically under most Republican presidencies the federal budget has ballooned, not least because government procurement often rewards Republican donors. While Republicans rail about bureaucracy, few beyond Ron and Rand Paul believe in trimming military or security spending.

Yet, at least a third of Republicans -Trump's supporters - aren't concerned with the sanctity of the ideological conservative label flaunted by Cruz and Rubio. Trump's folk are angry, but want their benefits (Medicare, Medicaid) protected. They don't subscribe to the establishment Republican narrative that demands slashing government so the wealthy can have tax cuts.

The Democrats believe their future is guaranteed by America's demographic changes. Yet, is it not patronising when Democrats speak of “the black community” (12% of the population), when a successful middle class African American family in Baldwin Hills, Los Angeles, has little in common with a struggling African American single mother in Baltimore or Louisiana? And to only speak of African Americans when linked to incarceration or methamphetamine (as has happened in several Democratic debates) is to insult millions of Americans of colour.

It may also be unwise to assume Hispanic/Latino voters (16% of the population) are a monolithic bloc, although the Democrats are not alone in this. It is crass to believe people of Mexican and Central American extraction will embrace a candidate of Cuban parents (Cruz and Rubio). There has been years of Latino antipathy toward the Cuban Americans who are perceived as having unfairly exploited anti-Communist sentiment for decades, leveraging their numbers (1.2m) in the swing state of Florida.

Added to this, the evangelical ‘prosperity ministries’ have made inroads among Catholic Hispanics. Will they continue to vote Democrat if the Republicans dump their racist rhetoric, offering instead ‘family values’ and free enterprise narratives?

On current showing the leading Republican candidates are going out of their way to alienate the very minority groups the party establishment figures spent years cultivating, trying to detoxify their brand. If the Republicans lose in November will they reject the current xenophobia, swinging back to a more tolerant, Jeb Bush-flavoured narrative, bringing economic opportunity to aspirational and conservative minorities? If so, will it shake the Democrats out of their complacency?

Finally, in the words of an 86-year-old Democrat stalwart in California, “The real power has shifted to the governors' mansions and the Supreme Court. Whoever occupies the White House is just decoration.” He wants his party to match the Republicans' investment of time and money to get a firm grip on state-wide government.

There has been a decades-long effort by Republicans to put ‘their people’ in each post in every state, from

## *“Whoever gets the Democratic nomination, fundamental challenges face the party”*

school board to attorney general. In only seven out of 50 states can a Democrat governor get bills through a Democrat-controlled legislature. The rest face constant obstruction from partisan and bloody-minded

Republicans.

Grabbing power at state level is important because local legislators can dictate what can and cannot be taught in schools (discouraging critical thinking or questioning authority, forbidding the teaching of evolution or sex education).

Controlling state legislatures also matters because they have the capacity to:

- ☛ gerrymander districts to their advantage;
- ☛ purge voter rolls;
- ☛ restrict voter registration drives;
- ☛ hamper the ability of likely Democratic voters (particularly minorities) to register to vote by closing voter registration bureaux in their area;
- ☛ require voters to present ID at the polling place, deterring minority voters;
- ☛ surround voting places with police, (as happened with devastating results in Florida in 2000), scaring off minorities who have poor relations with the police;
- ☛ propose multiple ballot initiatives so ballot papers sometimes run to twelve pages, meaning there are long lines at polling places;
- ☛ eliminating early voting (favoured by minorities) and reducing the number of polling places in minority areas, meaning people stand in line for six hours. But as Senator Marco Rubio said recently, “That's only on election day.”

Finally, the frenzy following the death of Justice Scalia reinforces the importance of Supreme Court appointments. The court has become increasingly political, moving beyond interpreting the constitution and laws. Their Citizens United decision alone radically transformed the face of American elections in the Republican's favour. Since nominees must get congressional approval, state-wide congressional elections really matter.

Meanwhile, back at the circus, the Democrats and their media sympathisers dutifully counter Republican lies with facts. In other words, they still misunderstand how Republicans and their infinitely more powerful media surrogates motivate voters.

Opinion polls suggest that America is increasingly a belief-based society, not a fact-based one. Providing an optimistic big picture, rather than a 10-point plan, might serve the Democrats better in the short term.

However, when the electoral dust has settled Democrats will have to confront how they view the role of government, what they can offer ambitious minority voters, and how hard they fight at state level.

Right now, though, the Democrats should be terrified that so many young Americans I have met recently won't be bothering to vote because, “Trump's already won it.”

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Rebecca Tinsley is a Liberal Democrat involve in international charity work and lives part-time in California

# NOT QUITE A SURVIVAL PLAN

## The general election review has a sound analysis of what went wrong but offers only managerial 'solutions' says Tony Greaves

The Liberal Democrat Campaigns and Communications Committee has published its 23 page report from its review panel into last May's dreadful general election, which it claims an amazing 7,500 people responded to.

The introduction by its chair James Gurling tells us that the purpose of the review was "not to apportion blame or airbrush reality" but to identify root causes and "most importantly of all" to recommend actions that the party can take to "minimise the chances of a similar result in elections up to and including 2020".

There are 65 'key recommendations', which vary from common sense to fence-sitting to a few that will cause bother. The Federal Executive has agreed the lot and they are going to be "regularly and closely monitored for action and implementation in the months and years ahead." Hmmm.

The problem is that taken as a whole this mechanistic recipe does not begin to describe what the party now needs to do to survive. T

his is pity because the analysis of what went wrong is quite good. While the panel have been careful not to be overtly critical about the previous party leader and his coterie, you don't have to read very deeply between the lines. The executive summary itself says bluntly that: "We singularly failed at using our new position to garner support, retain and communicate our vision, or maintain a unique offer."

### STARK FAILURE

The analysis is of stark political failure. Of a party that lost its way from the start and carried on the same way for five years of Coalition, accepting and indeed (at the top) promoting Tory measures such as tuition fees, the health bill, the bedroom tax and so much more.

An early warning was the Academies Act, dumped into the system by Michael Gove and thought at the time to be mainly about free schools, though now it's the academy transfers that are steadily destroying the whole system of democratic local schooling. But in retrospect the biggest disaster was the commitment that Tory levels of austerity would over-ride everything else.

As we abandoned our policies and our principles, the core voters we had been building up abandoned us. First we had two years of Rose Garden mush - "two parties working together in coalition is a good thing: we are proving it can work." The country fell out with that idea after a few weeks. Then 'differentiation' was promoted as a means to survival in the second half of the Parliament but it was too late - we had nothing distinctive left to differentiate ourselves from the Tory Coalition.

The review team correctly point out that by that time

the people at HQ had adopted a command and control ethos which was never going to succeed in a party which was losing its local workforce at a frightening rate - councillors, MSPs, MEPs, members all cast to the winds as local parties were hollowed out.

At the same time the national campaign leadership was a shambles with no-one clearly in charge. For more than two years we promoted the meaningless slogan 'Stronger Economy Fairer Society', then abandoned it for even worse rubbish including the derisory 'Look Left, Look Right, Then Cross' and the facile and vaguely sub-fascist 'unity, stability, decency'.

Much of the report is about the failures of the party institutions and activists to come to terms with Coalition, and the other side of the coin - the way that Liberal Democrats in government and inside Parliament failed to relate effectively to the party outside. When the democratic institutions of the party and local campaigners reacted against Coalition policies they were seen as a problem to be fixed rather than a resource to be used to put pressure on the Tories.

What the review does not do is describe the dysfunction of the processes within Westminster, which in spite of the heroic efforts of some people were central to the failure to establish a clear Liberal agenda and to communicate to the party and the wider world our many achievements within the Coalition.

Serious problems included the top-down control by the deputy prime minister following stitch-ups on major issues in the Quad and between himself and Cameron, the unsuitability of many of the special advisers - who tried to control the party at Westminster - a leader with little knowledge or understanding of the party, the split between the government and Liberal Democrat backbenchers and peers, hard-working ministers achieving much that was unknown or not understood outside - and the chasm between the party at Westminster and the party in the country.

Differentiation did indeed come at the end when the Conservatives lost all sense of Coalition unity or even decency and went all out on a right-wing Tory fling to sweep up their maximum core vote and sweep away the Liberals.

In spite of all the prior polling efforts led by the over-promoted Ryan Coetzee with his '20% target Liberal vote' the Liberal Democrats, left with no clear message, ended up as little more than the defenders of the compromises and trade-offs of Coalition. (At one of his presentations to the LD peers I pointed out that even if we got over half of his target voters, a real achievement, we would still be only just in double figures.)

## LARGELY USELESS

So where do we go from here? This is where the review is largely useless. The description and analysis of what went wrong are discreet but pretty accurate. Above all it's essentially a political account and verdict. The result of five years of Coalition was that no-one knew what the party stood for, and neither did the party. Much of our volunteer resource had walked away, and when the election came we had nothing to say. (The report itself says that in the election "the Campaign Grid did not loop sufficiently in with ground campaigners" whatever that may mean.)

The 65 'key' recommendations are almost all organisational, managerial, technocratic – and they all have a sense of generals fighting the last battle. (We can ignore the unrealistic stuff about how to do Coalition next time!)

They are also mainly top-down as if the report has not understood its own lessons about command and control. On media and messaging we learn that last May we did not even have an effective system of monitoring the media, but the emphasis on a new priority for opinion polling to produce a new message that will work now is clearly not right. First of all the party has to re-establish what it stands for.

When we get to campaigning, it's all about "campaign management" (which just means centralised electioneering). There's no strategy for turning the Liberal Democrats back into a campaigning party. There is one mention of "rebuilding...capacity at every level, including on issue-based campaigning" but that's it. And then we are told the 'key' is to "improve strategic discipline in our communications". Dream on, folks! And how is this to be done? Of course... "An expanded CCC...should be the main vehicle through which the party's campaigns are co-ordinated." As Mandy Rice-Davies once said...

It's not all garbage. There are some useful proposals which if implemented would clear out some of the institutional rubble in the party. For instance, allowing the federal party to get to grips with candidate approval and selection, one of the most serious problems in the largely useless English Party. But much is just blather – such as saying "the federal party should develop an ongoing campaign plan incorporating all levels of elections on a rolling basis, with clear targets for each round..." Or "continue to develop high net worth donors". And I love "Compulsory training on how to work with staff...should be put in place for all members of party committees".

Then they want a "proper career structure for... campaign staff with open and transparent pay grades"; and an "individual learning plan" for everyone!

My point is this. If someone is going to "closely and regularly" monitor these 65 'key' recommendations "for action and implementation in the months and years ahead" they will be wasting their time.

Most will just have no effect other than taking

*"The result of five years of Coalition was that no-one knew what the party stood for, and neither did the party"*

up time and efforts of the shrinking number of paid party staff, and of volunteers. The world has changed since May 2015 and the position of the party has changed with it. At national level the party is reported to be almost bankrupt. It is no longer a government party with lots of ministers with freebie political advisers. The Short money has been cut and

anyway we only have eight MPs. The MEPs' staff have almost all gone. Party HQ is a shrinking shell. Paid agents out in the field are in most places a memory. The national press with their obsession with the Commons regard the party as an irrelevance. And our huge number of peers (108 as I write) get no resources usable for party purposes.

The fundamental is that the party's very existence is under threat. The Tories are already looking at the remaining Liberal Democrat seats and with the help of boundary changes before 2020 (under rules allowed through by Lib Dem weakness in Coalition) will be looking for a wipe-out. If eight seems a few, imagine three or four.

And at local level, we are no longer a countrywide party. In many areas we are back to the job of building and lighting Liberal beacons. We have been here before. It can be done. But it's not done by building a bureaucracy in London, polishing protocols and honing messages derived from lots of expensive polling.

It's done by rebuilding a Liberal party based upon a Liberal movement of people who know why they are Liberals, resilient in its diversity and internal party democracy, not a streamlined top-down managerial machine. It's not done by creating sophisticated career structures for the smooth-suited sons and daughters of rich parents, fresh from their Oxbridge colleges and ready to move through leadership programmes and the like before taking on safe seats...because there aren't any. It's done by people of all kinds getting stuck into their local communities, fighting for local services and for what they believe in.

We need to rebuild a Liberal party in which Liberals with political ambitions work with colleagues within the democratic processes for the kind of party they want to see. There are no career paths in the party now for people who want to be trained, told what to think and say, and smoothed into positions that they have never had to struggle to achieve. There is instead the glorious route of campaigning with friends, fighting with neighbours against the manipulators and the bureaucrats, winning elections with your own bootstraps. But first of all we need to put the campaigning back in Liberalism. And, as Roger Hayes wrote in a recent *Liberator*, we have got once again to make it fun. Sadly, there's none of this in this report.

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

# BACK FROM THE BRINK IN SCOTLAND

The Coalition laid waste to the Liberal Democrats in Scotland but the party has found its radicalism once more, says Caron Lindsay

Last time we were building up to a Holyrood election, we had a suspicion things might not go well.

Not only were we in the first throes of coalition with the Toxic Tories, but we were facing an SNP government that most people thought was reasonably competent. Despite that, polls suggested that the election was Labour's for the taking.

However, a disastrous campaign symbolised by their then leader taking refuge in a Glasgow fast-food restaurant meant heavy Labour losses. For the Liberal Democrats, the results were beyond our worst nightmares. We lost two thirds of our MSPs and the SNP won their majority.

Independence dominated the first three years of the SNP's term. They might have lost the referendum, but they won that campaign. In the 2015 general election, on less than half the vote, they won 95% of the seats. Labour, the Tories and ourselves were reduced to one seat each. They still have the most popular political leader in the UK in first minister Nicola Sturgeon.

Meanwhile, Liberal Democrats have endured a succession of horrendous results, losing half our councillors in 2012 and our MEP in 2014. However, our recent conference found us in fighting mood, heading to the doorsteps with more confidence than we've had for some time. We are no longer constrained by coalition and voters are starting to realise that we did hold the Tories back in all sorts of ways.

Despite Nicola Sturgeon's personal popularity, support for the SNP Government is definitely softening. School standards are plummeting, NHS services are under huge pressure and the police service is failing.

Liberal Democrat canvassers across the country detect buyers' remorse from voters who switched to the SNP. This is not yet reflected in the opinion polls, which suggest that the SNP is on course for another overall majority. They only have to lose four seats, however, to lose that majority and their increasing grip on power.

Labour, despite having a competent and engaging new leader, has lost about a third of its support compared to 2011. They are hampered by the turmoil in their Westminster party.

## DREADFUL THINGS

The Tories are piling money into Scotland with a seven-figure direct mail campaign. However, this has yet to have an effect, with polls showing them at around the same 14% level they achieved four years ago. However compassionate their leader Ruth Davidson seems, she still has to contend with the

dreadful things her party's UK government is visiting on us.

There is intermittent encouragement for the Liberal Democrats, with figures as high as 10%, well up on our 2011 result, but this is not sustained enough to give much comfort. There is no doubt that we have a challenging fight ahead of us but we have realistic chances of making gains.

One of the most bizarre things about politics at the moment is the way that the SNP and the Tories, who are supposed to hate each other, are using very much the same playbook. It suited the SNP for the Tories to stoke up fears of a Labour/SNP coalition south of the border during the 2015 election. In fact, Salmond helped them by winding up Middle England at every opportunity. It suited the Tories for the SNP to win every seat in Scotland. They piled direct mail into seats like Edinburgh West and West Aberdeenshire and Eastwood that they knew they had no chance of winning. The result was that we and Labour found it more difficult to squeeze their vote.

The Tories are trying that tactic again, sending out direct mail informing people that the Liberal Democrats and Labour had "dropped their opposition to independence" when nothing could be further from the truth.

Both parties of government have good cause to keep the debate focused on the constitution and not their records and they appear to be helping each other do that.

New borrowing and taxation powers mean that tax is on the political agenda for the first time in a Holyrood campaign.

Our policies have taken a bit too long to come together, but are more radical than we have brought to the last two elections. In 2007, despite a brilliant pre-manifesto, with climate change targets that were way ahead of their time, we emphasised our plans for an extra hour of physical education a week. In 2011, we led with a complex plan for demutualisation of Scottish Water. This time, we're on the money with a plan for a 1p rise in income tax to bring in £475m for education - nursery places, college places, a reversal to the savage cuts to local authorities and the Pupil Premium that we've been responsible for in England and Wales that is already helping to close the attainment gap. In addition, we propose a zero rate of tax for the lowest paid workers, paid for by increasing taxes on the richest.

Labour followed suit with a proposal so complex that everyone is talking about the tax rather than the investment they propose.

The SNP attack both plans and proclaim themselves



the champions of low paid workers. However, the Liberal Democrat plans are progressive, with nobody earning less than £19,000 paying more and those on largest incomes paying most. The SNP has not yet said what they intend to do with radical new powers, but you get the impression that they've been given a Ferrari that they will never get out of second gear.

The Tories, of course, are talking about tax cuts, but hiding the £140m of stealth tax rises such as reintroducing prescription charges and abolishing free university tuition.

## RETURN TO RADICALISM

Tax aside, the Liberal Democrats' return to radicalism is marked by a call for a ban on prison sentences of less than a year and effective decriminalisation of drug use following the successful Portuguese model.

However, an unhelpful conference vote to end the moratorium on fracking could hold us back on green issues despite leader Willie Rennie's personal opposition to the practice. It's been a while since the floor of conference was less radical than the leadership.

The SNP's record will be a key factor. Voters are finding it difficult to see their GPs, the effects of cuts to schools and colleges are clear and they know that the police service is failing. Their liberal minded voters, concerned about the SNP's cavalier attitude to civil liberties, may choose us for a Holyrood election. It's worth highlighting their desire to bring the BBC under the control of a Scottish Parliament Committee. You can imagine the sinister impact on coverage that would have.

Its on 24 March 2016 that the SNP said Scotland would become independent had we chosen that option in the referendum. Oil prices, on which their figures depended, are currently at about 20% of their estimates. Independence in the current circumstances would have been disastrous yet there is not a huge sense of a bullet being dodged. Whether that will change during the campaign remains to be seen.

With just five MSPs, the Liberal Democrats have punched well above their weight and have a clear record of forcing through policy changes, more than any other party including the official Labour opposition.

Rennie badgered the SNP relentlessly until they increased nursery education for two year olds. He successfully ensured more investment for colleges. It's on civil liberties, though, that we have particularly excelled. Alison McInnes has led the charge against excessive use of stop and search (which has now been regulated by law), she successfully fought against armed police being put on routine duties and she stood up against flawed SNP plans to abolish a key protection of the Scottish legal system without adequate safeguards against miscarriages of justice.

More recently, she fought for the rights of rape victims to claim Legal Aid to fight applications to

*“One of the most bizarre things about politics at the moment is the way that the SNP and the Tories, who are supposed to hate each other, are using very much the same playbook”*

access their medical records. SNP ministers refused but were forced by the courts to change their plans. Conveniently, the SNP has postponed until after the election a decision on a super ID database that puts Labour's to shame. Voters need to be reminded that they postponed their decision on the centralised police force until after the 2011 election, suggesting that they'd think again on their plan for a single force - and then pushed it through relentlessly when they were re-elected.

Our devastating Westminster election result was better than Labour's, who saw their huge majorities swept away and replaced by massive SNP majorities. We are in contention in our areas of strength and our ground war has never stopped.

One of our best prospects is Alex Cole-Hamilton in Edinburgh Western or the Lothians list. The area's SNP MP remains suspended from their party following a police enquiry into her property deals. SNP members have deselected their current MSP. Alex and his SNP opponent have neighbouring offices on a main route into Edinburgh, each with massive pictures of themselves in the windows. With over 20,000 doors knocked since May, Alex is putting up a spirited fight and has a strong chance of victory.

The loss of our Highland strongholds in 2011 was a massive psychological blow. A gain on the Highlands and Islands list would be possible with a small increase in support. That would see the return of Jamie Stone who represented Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross for 12 years from 1999.

The party was stunned in 2014 when members in the north east replaced popular MSP Alison McInnes at the top of the list with former MSP Mike Rumbles. The affection for Alison was evident at conference. Mentions of her name sparked spontaneous applause. Her re-election is not impossible on a good day, but she faces a significant challenge.

Katy Gordon is a campaigner out of the Jo Swinson mould. Her energetic campaign for the West of Scotland list seat represents our strongest chance of avoiding an all-male parliamentary group.

The SNP and Tories are both fighting to take Jim Hume's south of Scotland seat. However, the strong Liberal Democrat councillor base and his work across the region should face down that challenge.

There are opportunities for Liberal Democrats in this election. We have good ideas, we have a leader on the form of his life and face an under-performing, authoritarian, centralising government. However, the SNP and Tories are well-funded and well-organised. At Holyrood, though, with a proportional system, the SNP may find it difficult to keep that 45% vote to itself. We will be trying to attract the liberal minded, RISE (a socialist movement) and the Greens will be after the left. It's going to be a nailbiter. Liberal voices are needed more than ever. We have to succeed.

# TWO FINGERS RAISED IN WALES

## It's tough and only a handful of votes in it, but Energlyn Churchill sees cause for hope for the Welsh Liberal Democrats

The opinion polls and the Welsh commentariat are predicting the worst for the Welsh Liberal Democrats in the forthcoming Welsh general election. Even the more optimistic among them are predicting that we will emerge from May's electoral battle with no more than a single seat. Should we pack up and go home now?

Not bloody likely. Welsh Liberal Democrats are a resilient bunch and over the years we have developed a good habit of defying the odds. We faced a similar predicament in 2012 with the baggage of coalition and the tuition fee u-turn weighing us down, yet we clung on in five seats, albeit by the tiniest of margins. The line between electoral oblivion and survival was the finest it is possible to imagine.

So, we go into the 2016 campaign with the same two fingers raised to the face of those who are quick to dismiss us in the hope of a similar salvation. But this time we face a new threat from Ukip which, in spite of its many internal schisms, scandals and scraps, continues to ride stubbornly high in the polls. Throw an EU referendum into the mix for good measure and you have one of the most uncertain and unpredictable Welsh Elections that Welsh Liberal Democrats have faced to date.

Our usurpation by Ukip as the third force in British politics has left us polling at about 5% in Wales, trailing badly behind Welsh Labour, the Tories, Ukip and Plaid Cymru. We find ourselves in an ongoing battle with the Green Party of Wales for fifth position. We've always struggled to get our message heard, but our current status means that we will have no more than a cameo role in the election coverage. While our vote seems to have 'bottomed out', our historic failure to build a credible core vote has left us very exposed since the arrival of the new kid on the block.

We need a core vote of at least double that in Wales that we can fall back upon in hard times. To achieve the status quo in May we are going to need a hell of a lot more than 5%. The Assembly's hybrid electoral system has always meant that we rely heavily on winning seats in the five regional 'top up' lists. With Ukip polling at 13-19%, winning lists seats is already

beginning to look like a tall order. You can begin to see why the Welsh commentariat and the psephologists are gloomy about our prospects.

Much hinges on how Welsh Labour performs against Ukip. If it claws back some of the Valleys vote that it has lost to them in the past couple of years it may mean that the mountain that we have to climb to gain those precious list seats becomes smaller, provided that Welsh Labour isn't also taking support from us, too. Labour usually tops the list vote, but it generally doesn't get any list seats. The Welsh electoral system deliberately penalises those parties that perform well in the first past the post constituencies to make the result more proportional. Even if Labour was to lose a

few constituencies to Plaid and the Tories its constituency dominance is such that it is unlikely to have a big presence among those assembly members representing the regions.

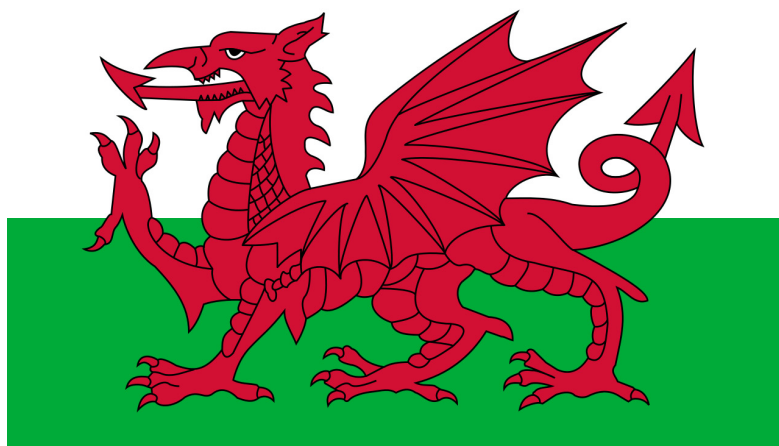
Plaid and the Tories winning constituencies also reduces their list presence, but if Ukip's vote share is anywhere near their poll rating this is better for them rather than us, unless we can start to win back significant support.

It isn't exactly rocket science; we need to get as many votes as we can in every part of Wales. The pitch that we make to those voters, the core messages we deploy and the electoral tactics we use are very much within our control.

Welsh Liberal Democrats should go into this campaign with two key objectives: to ensure our survival in the Welsh Senedd and to begin the long term project of building a credible core vote. To do that we need a campaign message to appeal to all liberally-minded voters that offers something different to the mantras of our rivals. We have always been more successful at getting noticed when we have a popular message that resonates and stands us aside from the others. The penny on income tax for education of Paddy Ashdown's era is a prime example, as is the more recent Pupil Premium.

### UNASHAMED FOCUS

Education is the theme that we should look to make our own in this campaign. Health is the issue that



will dominate, and while Kirsty Williams is one of the most authoritative voices on health in the Senedd, our message will struggle to be heard. Education has not enjoyed prominence in any of the other party's messaging, and an unashamed focus on education tied into a distinctive policy pledge would give us a distinctive Liberal issue that will get us heard.

Tying to squeeze the Welsh Green vote may appear daft at first, but the margins between winning a seat and not will be as slim as they were in 2012. Redirecting a good chunk of the 3-4% contemplating voting Green to our cause could be vital. Our campaign needs a strong environmental message and we should play the 'vote Green, get Ukip' message repeatedly. It is no lie to say that we are better placed than the Greens to keep Ukip at bay. In the longer term, we must look to acquire the environmental vote as part of our own core support. Our strong track record on green issues should offer it a natural home.

Calling the EU referendum for June changes the game, but does it galvanise Ukip voters and consign us to doom, or does it help expose their vacuous anti-EU rhetoric and give pro-EU voices like ours a much needed boost?

I honestly think it could be the latter. The referendum campaign will polarise the electorate, and we are at a distinct advantage by being the most united and vocal political party championing EU membership. The divisions in Labour and the Conservatives, and Plaid's inability to get coverage in the UK media, will play to our advantage. As we get closer to June, Tim Farron's greater visibility in the media as part of the pro-EU camp will raise the Liberal Democrats profile during the Welsh campaign, too.

Europe really matters to Wales. As well as EU support for agriculture in mid-Wales, we continue to receive hundreds of millions of pounds in EU structural funding to help the struggling Welsh economy, particularly in West Wales and the Valleys. It's in these areas where the threat from Ukip is at its most dangerous. Some stark reminders of the consequences of Brexit on these valleys communities should also be an important part of our Welsh Senedd campaign.

On Europe, the Welsh Conservatives have already presented us with a golden goose when their leader, Andrew RT Davies, came out in favour of Brexit. In the crucial electoral battleground of Mid and West Wales where we fight it out with the Tories, EU money distributed through the Rural Development Plan is vital to the fragile rural economy. It is a stick with which we can repeatedly beat our Tory challengers and it is no coincidence that the current Montgomeryshire MP, Glyn Davies, has been conspicuously silent on the issue.

We have got to channel our precious campaigning resource into those areas where we do have a concentrated core vote. That implies four constituencies: Brecon and Radnorshire, Cardiff Central, Ceredigion and Montgomeryshire. Three of the four lie in Mid and West Wales. We should hold Brecon and Radnorshire, and on a good day we

*“Our historic failure to build a credible core vote has left us very exposed”*

could take Montgomeryshire. Ceredigion may well be beyond our grasp as Plaid's Elin Jones is fairly entrenched, but a decent second place in the list vote may make all the difference. By targeting here we should at least be assured

of two mid Wales assembly members, constituency or otherwise.

## OASIS OF HOPE

Cardiff Central is an oasis of hope in the otherwise barren region of South Wales Central. We lost it by 12 in 2012 having lost the student vote to Labour. It's the sort of diverse metropolitan area that may come back to us if we have a message that resonates, and there are enough of the fiscally conservative but socially liberal middle classes who may find Corbyn a bit too much to stomach who could be persuaded. Backed up with a clear core message and a gentle reminder of Welsh Labour's appalling record, we may be onto a winner. A decent second place may also be okay if it is matched in list votes, but would the residual vote in the other parts of the region be enough to grab us a list seat? For me, the jury is still out.

We face an uphill battle in South Wales West and in North Wales, but we at least have two well known candidates in each, Peter Black and Aled Roberts. Peter is a veritable one man publicity machine who gets decent coverage and, against the odds, we've had two very good council by election wins in Wrexham and Flintshire in the north. It offers some hope.

In his Intelligent Person's Guide to Liberalism, the late Conrad Russell makes reference to the empty hearse, the metaphorical undertaker who turns up at an election to take away the Liberal corpse only to find that it still has a pulse.

That encapsulates how I think 2016 will pan out. Dismissed by the press and written off by our opponents, we will confound the odds and maintain a presence in the Senedd. The strength of that presence depends significantly on how we fight the campaign and that at least, is within very much within our control.

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*'Energlyn Churchill' is a Welsh Liberal Democrat who works in a politically-restricted post*

# LONDON VOTES FOR A TALKING SHOP

The Liberal Democrats should devise a better idea than all-powerful mayor and powerless assembly to govern London, and should learn lessons for the next borough elections, says Mark Smulian

To anyone who remembers the declining, depopulating London of the 1970s, the capital's burgeoning growth will surely be a welcome contrast.

London's recovery has in some respects it has gone too far the other way with rocketing property prices and towers full of homes left empty by investing spivs who intend neither to live there nor rent them out, but London's economic weight is real - as much as anywhere dodged the recession, we did.

One of the abiding myths believed outside the south east (including by some Liberal Democrats) is that everyone in London is stinking rich - that we all weight our carpets down with sackfuls of cash and set light to £50 notes to cook designer food.

In fact there are plenty of poor people in London but the range of wealth disguises this in the statistics, and there is plenty of substandard housing too. A night's door-knocking in Simon Hughes' former constituency of Bermondsey ought to disabuse anyone of the idea that most Londoners are rolling in money.

What London does have is an unusually low average population age, high diversity (only 45% white British from the 2011 census) and a randomness that sees rich and poor people live in closer proximity than in other cities.

For those with the time, money and inclination you can eat the cuisine of pretty much every foreign country and see anything from classical orchestras to punk bands any night of the week.

We're also the county's greatest users of public transport, have the lowest car ownership and enjoy an unusual amount of green space for a large capital.

True, the inhabitants can be insular - my late mother viewed anywhere north of Potters Bar with some misgivings - but there is a broadly live and let live attitude. Londoners are accustomed to seeing people from throughout the world, and won't turn a hair at outlandish fashions.

I'm not saying that nowhere else does any of these things, just briefly describing a place where the Liberal Democrats ought to do a great deal better than they do, or did even before last May's disaster.

This May's mayor and assembly election is a curious beast. London is so vast that campaigning is pretty much all 'air war'. The party was more or less derelict in entire boroughs even before the Coalition and has gone down the tubes in more since, so outside a few strongholds visible activity will be limited.

London has a sort of half-devolution, and stands as a warning to other conurbations that may be about to

strike devolved power deals with the Treasury.

The powers exercised in London are nothing like as extensive as those in Scotland and Wales and London's mayor is essentially a glorified transport and police commissioner, the creator of a strategic land use plan and meddler in assorted other fields where there is a duty to "create plans and policies" ranging from regeneration to the arts.

This system of local government quite frankly stinks. Once elected a mayor enjoys a job security unmatched by anyone except the monarch (even the Archbishop of Canterbury can in theory be sacked) and can do whatever they please in the certain knowledge that within their powers no one can stop them.

Both mayors to date have done some good - Ken Livingstone's innovations with subsidised buses and the congestion charge and Boris Johnson's continuation of these and development of his predecessor's cycling policy.

In office though a mayor can despoil the skyline with towers (both), prevent boroughs from building affordable homes (Johnson), give public subsidy to a garden bridge because it is a personal friend's whim (Johnson) or run public agencies as job creation schemes for cronies (Livingstone).

Faced with this sort of nonsense in any normal local authority there would be a revolt in the ruling group and the mayor would be invited to spend more time gardening.

The London mayor though is unchallengeable. But, I hear you say, what about the London Assembly?

That must be the most supremely pointless public body short of the wardenship of the Cinque Ports.

Its annual report shows the assembly cost £7m a year to accommodate 25 full time politicians whose role, when shorn of flummery about 'holding the mayor to account', is to ask questions and make comments just as any member of the public could.

The assembly's sole power is to reject the mayor's budget on a two-thirds majority. Since it is vanishingly unlikely that any mayor will be supported by fewer than one-third of the assembly this power is unusable.

## DRIVING GOATS

What are we left with? Assembly members can question the mayor, they can take evidence and publish reports and for all I know may be entitled to drive goats across London Bridge on quarter days. What do they actually do that justifies £7m a year?

Within the bounds of what is possible the Liberal Democrats elected have made the most of it and scored

some points. I don't doubt there are diligent assembly members from other parties too.

What I do doubt is the point of it. Anyone who has ever talked privately to a senior civil servant will know that parliamentary select committee scrutiny reports, no matter how well researched and argued, are routinely ignored before a politely worded government response is sent involving sex and travel.

One of the privileges of the mayor of London is the power to tell 25 full-time politicians to sod off without them having any recourse. The unlikely budget power apart, the whole lot of them could reject a mayoral policy without having the slightest effect.

The assembly can 'investigate matters of importance to Londoners'. Apart from a few high profile things like the 2011 riots or the Olympics, these reports largely gather the electronic equivalent of dust.

Their conclusions can be ignored by the mayor and unless they gain a few lines in the Evening Standard or a few seconds on regional television news few except specialists ever know they exist. Assembly scrutiny forms one of those self-contained processes in which everyone thinks they have done something but affect nothing external.

This is roughly the mechanism that George Osborne wishes to visit upon other conurbations that accept elected mayors in return for devolved powers. You have been warned.

As long as this system exists, I wish mayoral candidate Caroline Pidgeon and assembly candidate Lib Dems well within it.

But surely the Liberal Democrats of all parties should not just accept an elected dictatorship but be pressing for something better.

There is a debate needed about what that might look like and its relationship to the 32 boroughs - and indeed whether those should remain as they are - but it should at least take place once these elections are done with.

## DELAYED MASSACRE

What of the boroughs? The Lib Dems were lucky in that their first regular elections under the Coalition came only in 2014 and so London councillors were spared until then the massacres flowing elsewhere from Nick Clegg's disasters.

One corner of London has even pulled off the elusive trick of securing a Lib Dem core vote.

These are the south-western suburbs of Richmond, Kingston and Sutton. Tom Brake of course held his seat, the others are in the 'near miss' category, Sutton council is still controlled and there are substantial councillor groups even now. If the party recovers at all, south west London should be the least of its worries.

What about the rest of London? The south west is a wealthy area with minimal Labour presence and decades of party activity, but other past Lib Dem strength has come in entirely different places. Indeed it's striking how patchily the party has done in other outer suburbs. Croydon, Enfield, Bexley, anyone?

Only Hornsey & Wood Green to an extent also fitted the prosperous suburb category, but its poorer eastern half and huge Labour vote makes it more like the inner

*"Surely the Liberal Democrats of all parties should not just accept an elected dictatorship"*

city places where Lib Dems have previously done one well.

From 1986 until 2010 the total of Lib Dem and predecessor party councillors across London was a shade over 300 - some places up and some down, but it never varied much.

This fell to 250-odd in 2010, a setback explicable by the

simultaneous general election. In 2014 it fell to 117, and 79 of those are in the three south western boroughs.

By contrast, the formerly strong presence in east London is now down to three councillors in outer suburban Redbridge and three in inner city Hackney.

Islington, Lewisham, Lambeth, Bromley and Waltham Forest were wiped out in 2014, Camden and Brent very nearly so. Southwark creditably held 13 seats but benefitted from the Hughes factor.

Let's take two examples that offer lessons. I've never lived in Islington or Tower Hamlets but saw both close up. It's that old core vote problem.

Tower Hamlets depended on a heroic model of super activists and even with 30 councillors had barely more than 100 members. Even if its troubles with Paddy Ashdown had never happened this would have been a recipe for burnouts, and having almost all your activists as councillors can now be seen as an unsustainable approach.

Islington certainly did not suffer that problem - it's a large and well resourced local party, but got above itself in 2006 assuming most of its own wards were safe while hurling resources into even safer Labour ones and duly losing most of the former while failing to gain the latter.

Its second administration was thus obliged to struggle by on a razor thin majority. More seats fell in 2010 and when public resentment at the Coalition later struck the party lacked the strength to respond.

In both cases the Lib Dems had done well against complacent and incompetent Labour administrations, well enough indeed to win twice. But when Labour got its act together and responded - by associating itself with 'fairness' in Islington and by painting the Lib Dems as racists in Tower Hamlets - the Lib Dem vote proved soft indeed.

The party had won on dissatisfaction with someone else, not by itself winning more than the temporary allegiance of voters.

Next time, assuming there is one, remember its all very well engaging with voters off the back of another party's errors but if you are prising away someone else's core vote it has to be made into part of yours. It's now obvious that relying on another party to obligingly give perpetual offence to its normal supporters is no long term route.

Despite all this, the Lib Dem cause in London doesn't look in too bad shape compared with recent wipe-outs in some other big cities.

But with that young, diverse population it ought to be better - and that can only come from the party's own messages, not from what others unwittingly gift it through their errors.

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Mark Smulian is a member of the Liberator Collective

# OBITUARY: RALPH BANCROFT

Catherine Furlong remembers Ralph Bancroft, who has died aged 64

Ralph and my paths first crossed at the Easter Young Liberal Movement conference in Scarborough in 1975 but it wasn't until in 1978 when I moved to London to work at Liberal Party Headquarters that I saw him on a more regular basis as Ralph was by then employed by the Liberal Whips' Office. This was during the heady times of the Lib-Lab Pact and we had 12 MPs.

Ralph spent his early years in Bedford before moving to Harrow where he joined the Young Liberals. He then went to the University of Sussex to study physics with computing.

Following his time in Sussex he worked in the travel industry before joining the Liberal Whips Office in 1975 as a parliamentary assistant. Following the 1979 general election he went on to edit the Green Alliance's fortnightly newsletter before moving on to be an assistant editor with Environmental Data Services. This led to a period of self-employment as a researcher and writer on industrial, environmental and political matters.

The 1980s saw the growth personal computers industry - Ralph was an early adopter of this emerging technology and worked on a number of industry-related publications from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, including Personal Computer News and as editor of PC Business World.

Politically during this time he became involved in the publication Radical Bulletin (which subsequently was incorporated into Liberator as 'RB' and becoming a member of the Liberator Collective in the process) and between 1981-86 served as councillor on Harrow Council. In addition he stood as the Liberal candidate for London North-East in the first ever European Parliament direct elections in 1979.

The 1990s saw a return to self-employment as a computer journalist and consultant as well assisting with the organisation of the party leader rallies in the 1992 general election. He also worked as the campaign co-ordinator for Harrow Liberal Democrats before and after the 1994 local elections.

The mid-1990s saw Ralph working as head of secretariat for the Liberal Democrat group office, in Harrow administrations led by Chris Noyce and Andrew Wiseman. From the late 1990s onwards Ralph worked in various capacities in other local government Liberal Democrat groups including Tower Hamlets and Brent.



Ralph was also a champion of online engagement and of the CIX online – the original party social network - that was an integral part of party activity at that time, becoming one of the team moderators who maintained the Liberal Democrats' private conferences.

As a writer, Ralph's finest hour was probably the 'Runners & Riders' piece featured in the Liberator conference edition in 1984, in which David Steel's leadership came under scrutiny and the rest of the Parliamentary Party's chances of replacing him in a leadership election were rated.

As well as writing, Ralph was a regular performer in the Liberal Revue, and indeed was the first

person to perform that Glee Club favourite 'Staircase', having spent the whole of the first revue (again in Bournemouth at 1984) sitting in the audience, leaping into action at the end of the final sketch to berate 'armchair activists'.

For many years Ralph and his ever-present pipe, together with his good friend the late Liz Rorison, were the lynchpin of the Glee Club as it transformed from an informal gathering around a hotel piano to the unique event it is today.

In recent years Ralph had suffered from ill health and in particular severe visual impairment. Friends and colleagues had asked: 'How is Ralph?' The answer was that he was spending time listening to Radio 4 and keeping pace with current events. Thanks to Liberator colleague John Bryant, Ralph had been able to join Liberator Collective members from time to time at social events and relished talking about politics with friends over a pint of ale. The most recent occasion at the beginning of February.

In his last years Ralph showed a remarkable stoicism towards his blindness and ill health, and embraced the best from his much curtailed life. He made new friendships at the day centre he attended, and took a great interest in the world through the medium of Radio 4. Always in the forefront of computing skills and an avid reader of newsprint, these pleasures had disappeared when his sight left him.

He did not complain. He came to possess the old fashioned virtues of patience and quiet courage.

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Catherine Furlong is a member of the Liberator Collective

# OBITUARY: LORD AVEBURY

## Jonathan Fryer pays tribute to the former Liberal MP and human rights campaigner

Eric Lubbock secured his position in the annals of British electoral history with a sensational 1962 by-election win in the London commuter dormitory of Orpington, but his greatest legacy is undoubtedly his sterling work for human rights over half a century. Though he lost his Commons seat in 1970, he inherited a barony the following year, enabling him to retain a parliamentary platform. That position was reaffirmed by his election as one of the hereditary peers who kept their seats following reform of the House of Lords.

Eric Reginald Lubbock came from a family deeply rooted in north-west Kent. He was the only son of Wing Commander Maurice Fox Pitt Lubbock, sixth son of the first Baron Avebury (the Liberal MP, Sir John Lubbock), and the Hon Katherine Stanley, daughter of Baron Stanley of Alderley.

The family estate at High Elms on the North Downs, now a public park, was an idyllic place for a young boy to grow up, but the Second World War saw him evacuated to Canada. Returning, he went to Balliol College, Oxford, where he studied engineering and won a Blue in boxing. His national service was spent in the Welsh Guards, after which he followed his father into employment at Rolls Royce.

Despite this trajectory through several privileged layers of the British establishment, Eric shared the deep Liberal convictions of his grandfather. Moreover, he took an interest in local affairs and won a seat on Orpington District Council in 1961. However, his selection as the parliamentary by-election candidate the following year was almost accidental. The sitting Conservative MP, Donald Sumner, resigned when he was appointed a county court judge. The Liberals initially selected Jack Galloway, who had fought the seat in 1959, coming third with just 9,092 votes. But it transpired that he had technically committed bigamy and was about to be exposed.

At the eleventh hour, the local association in desperation turned to young councillor Eric Lubbock, squeaky clean and with a vivacious and politically dynamic (first) wife, Kina Maria O'Kelly de Gallagher. The Tories had parachuted in Peter Goldman, head of the Conservative Political Centre, whom the Liberal by-election team (whose leading lights included Pratap Chitnis and Michael Meadowcroft) caricatured mercilessly as an outsider. As a candidate, Eric was an awful speaker but the campaign struck a chord with an electorate that had become disenchanted with the government of Harold Macmillan, who represented neighbouring Bromley. On 14 March 1962, a Tory majority of 14,760 was turned into a Liberal majority of 7,855. Fleet Street

- many of whose journalists and printers lived in Orpington because of its excellent rail link to London Blackfriars - hailed the emergence of a new political animal: 'Orpington Man'.

Deeply rattled, Macmillan sacked several leading members of his Cabinet in the Night of the Long Knives, but that was insufficient to prevent his own demise soon after.

Eric hung on to his seat through the next two general elections and during his eight years as an MP carved out a niche as a campaigner for human rights. He petitioned for incitement to racial hatred to be made a criminal offence and fought for the provision by local authorities of travellers' caravan sites. He denounced the 1967 colonels' coup in Greece as well as the dictatorships in Spain and Portugal, and was active in the Anti-Apartheid Movement and the United Nations Association.

Jo Grimond made Eric chief whip of the small band of Liberal MPs and when Jeremy Thorpe was elected leader in 1967 the two men developed a close friendship. When Thorpe years later became embroiled in a scandal relating to the male model Norman Scott and an associated charge of conspiracy to murder, Eric remained loyal and even stood bail for him.

Eric was aware that he was next in line to inherit the Avebury barony from his cousin, who had no male heir, and had planned to renounce his peerage when that happened.

However, having lost Orpington in 1970, he was persuaded by Jeremy Thorpe to take his seat in the Lords where he became one of its most active participants. In particular, he was a champion for oppressed peoples, whether they were the subjects of Ethiopia's nasty Marxist regime, or the Kurds in Turkey or Kashmiris living under Indian rule.

He travelled widely - succeeding in getting himself expelled from Sri Lanka and banned from Bahrain - and he was heavily in demand as a speaker at events. The nervousness of his youth had long since gone and he was able to orate with both passion and eloquence.

Deceptively slight in build, Eric was as tenacious as a terrier when fighting for a cause close to his heart. This included many issues relating to public health. A teetotaler, he was one of the first parliamentarians to argue for a ban on cigarette advertising. He converted to Theravada Buddhism and caused great amusement in the tabloids by stating that he wished his body after death to be recycled as food for Battersea Dogs Home. The Home politely declined.

Jonathan Fryer is a writer and broadcaster who fought Orpington in 1987

# DEFENDING WHAT?

Liberal democracies rarely fight each other and increasing their number could be the best way to cut defence spending, argues David Green

*“Britain is a third rate power nursing illusions of grandeur of its colonial past”*

IK Gujral, Prime Minister of India, 1997

A visitor from outer space might be forgiven for asking why a tiny country such as ours with under 1% of the world's population is the sixth highest spender on defence and maintains armed forces which include a nuclear deterrent, a blue water navy, state of the art fighter aircraft and the means of deploying a versatile army of 145,000.

History plays a part. Until relatively recently, we were responsible for a global empire and for protecting the maritime trade routes that linked our territories. While the Union Jack no longer flutters over countless government buildings worldwide, our global responsibilities endure.

We also spend more because we earn more. We are still a rich nation, ranked fifth in the world. While we will soon be overhauled by a host of other nations, this is not as the result of our becoming poorer but of other nations becoming richer.

Mr Gujral's acerbic remark might have been justified a few decades ago when the political establishment was desperate to retain a place at the top table of the UN. Today, I don't think anybody is bothered anymore. We seem comfortable with our place in the world as we slide slowly and gracefully down the various global league tables monitoring wealth and influence - perhaps not a Manchester United any more, but certainly not an Accrington Stanley.

From now on, we should see British military spending as a matter of shared global responsibility of the world's rich nations. Our above-average defence expenditure is our contribution as a privileged nation to global welfare, on a par with our aid to developing countries.

If we were simply defending ourselves, we would need nothing more than a few coastal patrol boats, some hand-me-down US jet fighters and a Swiss style militia. Swiss defence costs only 0.7% of GDP. Ours is 2.1%. We could opt for Irish-style neutrality which consumes an even smaller amount - 0.5%, because the Irish no longer have the means to protect their air space.

And this is the crux of the matter. It is not that we are paying too much for our defence of ourselves and others, it is more a case of other countries not spending enough. Germany's defence spending, for example, is a pathetic 1.2% of GDP. What can, or should, we do about it? Moreover, what should we be defending?

We need defence for the same reason we need a police force – it provides protection against the darker side of human nature. However, while there will always be human depravity, there are measures that can be taken to contain crime and reduce the level of

enforcement necessary. The rule of fair law, freedom of thought and action and equality of opportunity to access wealth, welfare, education and to participate in government are arguably all factors which minimise domestic criminal activity and constitute a Liberal democracy.

Aside from domestic benefits, Liberal democracy has advantages on an international scale. Liberal democracies tend not to let disagreements with each other degenerate into war and are able to co-operate because their systems of government and aspirations of their peoples are similar. So it makes defence sense that as many as possible enjoy the benefits of Liberal democracy.

It follows therefore that, in addition to our national interests, we need to defend liberal democracy, especially since individual freedom is currently on the defensive. After the collapse of Communism in eastern Europe, the march of liberty seemed unstoppable. It was argued that a liberal democracy incorporating individual freedom and the rule of law was necessary to create the conditions for wealth generation.

Unfortunately, Communist China has since proved that this is not the case and that, provided the mass of people can be bought off with a better standard of living, or at least the prospect of one, they will submit to authoritarian rule and forgo democracy and individual rights.

The 2014 Economist Intelligence Unit Index of Democracy makes depressing reading. This index ranks 167 nations according to their performance under five categories; process and pluralism, civil liberties, functioning of government, political participation and culture. Barely one eighth of the world's population enjoys the freedoms we take for granted, requiring action from the nations whose democracies pass muster. Even those in the premier league, such as the UK (ranked 16th) need to keep their democratic fabric in constant repair before they can start lecturing others about flaws in their systems of government, never mind the rest.

There is a pressing need for a global body to champion Liberal Democracy. Does it already exist, or must it be created?

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David Green is a member of the Liberal Party. His full paper on defence can be seen at: [www.knackered.org.uk](http://www.knackered.org.uk)



# CHOOSE YOUR TAX

## Multinationals dodging UK taxes should have a choice of how they pay, but no option not to, says John Bryant

There is a great deal of doom and gloom in the markets and there is plenty of evidence that another recession is around the corner.

The deliberate move by the Saudis to increase oil production to stop the US from muscling into the market with their more costly oil from fracking has a kind of perverted outcome that should please the green lobby, at least in the short term.

With lowering oil prices keeping inflation close to zero across the economy, this should allow for a small business revolution with low interest rates for investment. But sadly this is not recognised by the Government as a significant way of creating jobs, of developing new enterprise and an economy less dependent on consumer spending on goods imported from elsewhere.

The moving tectonic plates of international capitalism that can impact so badly on the British economy, are not challenged by any meaningful measure by a Government which is still in thrall to the Chinese, thinking that cosyng-up to yet another regime with a poor human rights record and no meaningful democracy is the right way to go.

The scandal of Google's pitiful tax settlement with HMRC, heralded by George Osborne as a success, demonstrates yet again the Tories just don't get it.

Multi-nationals will continue to move their profits wherever they can to avoid paying business taxes. Indeed companies are obliged to do everything in their power to satisfy the needs of their shareholders, and so why is anyone surprised?

A new approach to taxing business is required, and being a Liberal I would give multi-nationals a choice on how they pay their business taxes. The first option would be to ask Google, Amazon, Starbucks and all their multinational mates operating in this country to register a wholly-owned subsidiary with Companies House through which all the profits generated by their UK activities should be declared to pay traditional corporation tax.

The second would be to ask them to pay a turnover tax based on the value of their activities in the country. The level payable I would leave to better brains than me to work out, but given the aim of many companies is to secure a 10% margin on their activities (which would normally attract a profit tax of 20%) then the starting rate of a turnover tax could be around 2% to generate the same kind of revenue.

Offering a choice of taxes for the multinational companies perhaps shows what a soft Liberal I am, but the sting in the tail would be any company that failed to submit a return for either tax would be prevented from trading in the UK, with its factories, warehouses, and offices closed and websites blocked.

Why? I think if we are to reclaim power over the multi-nationals, on behalf of the people, we need to be prepared to tell these corporations they lose all rights

to trade unless they pay their taxes. Go into any pub or community centre, or set up a street stall and argue this case and I think you would have an overwhelming tide of support. So why don't any of our political parties start arguing for something like this? Why are we scared of powerful companies?

Part of the problem is the insidious lobbying industry. A party that is ready to tax the corporations that are getting away with it must also be prepared to limit the role of lobbying in our parliament.

Another part of the equation for rebalancing the tax regime (which should go hand in hand with rebalancing the economy), is to find ways of taxing the top 1% of individuals who are massively distorting the ownership of wealth here and elsewhere. They are just as likely as the multi-national corporations to be avoiding paying their taxes.

Wealth taxes, especially on property - which is by its very nature the most illiquid of assets - would be the first way to start bringing in the tax revenues we need to provide public services. But I would not stop at property. I would require everyone who live in this country for even 20% of the year (no hiding place for non-doms), whose wealth exceeded £5m, to register their UK-based assets, including bank accounts, shareholdings, property and other valuables, so that they could be charged a wealth tax.

Those who shudder at the prospect of a Big Brother state delving into the personal finances of rich people need to remember the pervasive nature of the tax regime that applies to ordinary people already, with the sinister warnings attached at the end of all tax returns about the consequences of false declarations.

If the Liberal Democrats are to become the champions for the 99%, including championing small business, then we need to play the role of David against the multi-national Goliaths. We have no vested interests in the status quo, so let's smash it and grab back the power for the people.

Let's proclaim a Liberal revolution.

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John Bryant, as William Tranby, is a member of the Liberator Collective and was a Liberal democrat councillor in Camden 2002-14

# LOOKING FOR THE NEXT VINCE

## The Liberal Democrats need a figure who will challenge prevailing wisdom on negative interest rates, says David Thorpe

With a predictability as mundane as rain on a bank holiday, the decision of the US Federal Reserve to lift its interest rates last December spooked markets, prompting an exit of capital from the emerging markets, and the clarion cry of Cassandras' proclaiming the next recession, inevitably destined to be more ferocious than the last.

Because so much of the capital that sloshes around the globe is in dollars, higher US rates increases the cost of capital of most assets, and so reduces the volume of economic activity, which ultimately feeds through to have an impact of the level of economic growth.

This slowdown of the pace at which liquidity flows through the system is beneficial if an economy is growing robustly, as it restricts the desire of market participants to spend new capital, preventing asset prices and other costs from rising too fast and restricting the ability of businesses to grow.

So there are times when it is smart policy to raise rates and times when it is dumb policy. The fund manager Neil Woodford believes that the Federal Reserve lifting rates in December will in time be shown to be a 'grave error', while the economist Andrew Hunt takes the view that moving rates up from such a desperately low level has helped the US economy, and will be shown to have been a smart move.

But outside of the US, the narrative from policy makers is more about cutting rates, and in the eurozone, Japan, Switzerland, having negative rates.

The idea of depositing your money with a bank and having them, rather than pay you some interest for your trouble, take some of the money away, may seem absurd to the man in the street, but what actually happens is that commercial banks who place cash on deposit with the central bank get a negative interest rate, consumers depositing with a commercial bank still get a meagre, but at least positive, rate of interest on their cash.

Negative interest rates place commercial banks in something of a funk, regulators require them to keep a substantial percentage of their cash in liquid assets, so they have no choice but to do so, even if they lose money on it.

### UNDER THE MATTRESS

At the same time, they cannot reasonably pass the negative interest rate onto their customers, those customers do not have to leave cash at the bank, and if they are to be charged for doing it, they will likely take the money out, and place it firmly under the mattress.

This would be a disaster, banks don't keep everyone's cash at hand everyday, and would have a funding crisis if they had to find even a substantial amount

of depositors cash in short order, and queues outside bank branches would likely spark a deep fear among the public, and lead to a credit crisis.

Switzerland's banks have been able to pass the negative rates onto some customers, presumably a function of the secrecy of the banks in that country meaning many folk with Swiss bank accounts have different priorities to the typical current account customer.

So with commercial banks essentially forced to lose money on a part of their balance sheet, it probably wasn't a surprise that bank shares in most of the globe fell markedly in the days after Japan moved into negative interest rates.

So why do policy makers introduce negative interest rates?

There are two reasons, very distinct from each other.

Switzerland and Sweden were among the first out of the blocks with negative interest rates. Policy makers in those countries are eager to prevent their currencies getting too strong relative to the euro and dollar. As economic uncertainty swept through the eurozone, and interest rates on cash tumbled, savers and investors in that area placed cash into the banks of those countries, eager to access a real rate of interest in economies that are relatively healthy.

While such flows on cash are optically very positive for a country, particularly in the short term, the Swiss or Swedish currency rising significantly would serve to make the exports of those nations more expensive, and damage the economy in the long-term. Interest rates that are actually negative are not usually required to dampen the value of a currency, but with the eurozone and many other economies on earth deploying quantitative easing to weaken their currencies, the usual rules of engagement appear not to apply.

The negative rates of Sweden and Switzerland are thus as much a function of the monetary policy follies of the rest of the world as the conditions of their own economies. Though it should probably be a signal about the level of aggregate demand in the world that countries are prepared to dramatically debase their currencies in an attempt to cobble together a share of diminishing world trade.

Stephanie Flanders, the former BBC economics editor who is now chief market strategist for Europe at JP Morgan, sees sufficient futility in this strategy to declare that the countries which prosper in the coming years will be those that can generate their own domestic economic demand, rather than being export focused economies.

The second set of countries that are deploying negative interest rates right now are doing so for reasons that appear to resemble more a 'last throw of the dice' than the reasoned, if somewhat downbeat,

approach of the Swiss and the Swedes.

The logic behind the decisions of the eurozone and Japanese central banks deploying negative rates is they hope that, rather than leaving the cash they have sitting on deposit in the central bank, they will lend it out to businesses and consumers, generating economic growth and inflation.

Hunt is sceptical that this approach will work. Regulators still require commercial banks to hold a portion of their assets in cash or bonds with a negative yield, Hunt takes the view that that banks will struggle to make a decent return if they are losing money on one side of their balance sheet, denting their ability to increase loans.

He added negative interest rates, contrary to the theory which underpins them, are actually deflationary, rather than inflationary, and could lead to demand falling in the areas in which they are deployed.

Hunt cited the example of Japan, where very low interest rates have over recent decades caused people to save more of their income to make up for the interest they did not receive on their deposits.

## **DEFLATIONARY DRAG**

This deflationary drag extends to companies that have final salary pension schemes, those schemes will have less cash if they are not earning interest on cash or bonds, requiring the companies to put more money into the pension scheme, leaving less cash for the investment, expansion and wage growth that is needed for economic expansion.

With the volume of global trade in retreat, those dampeners on domestic growth are unlikely to be compensated for by a rise in exports for any country.

The problem central banks have is that they have been assigned an inflation target, and none of the major economies looking like hitting theirs, in the economic textbooks policy makers read, it typically says that very low or negative interest rates should cause inflation.

Bank of England governor Mark Carney has been swift to distance himself from the idea that the UK could embrace negative rates, although inflation is well below target GDP growth remains consistent, and a cocktail of worries mean that sterling is unlikely to rise in the manner of the Swiss Franc, so Carney's call looks rather justified.

Let's hope the Bank of England governor, once nicknamed the 'unreliable boyfriend' for the erratic nature of his predictions, can maintain a steady course on this one.

Of course despite the prognostications of Jeremy Corbyn and others, the UK economy is not actually in recession and with growth at 2 per cent, inflation rising and some wage growth, there not be a need for emergency measures to resuscitate the economy.

But given the remarkable scale and scope of the monetary policy deployed across the world since the

*“The problem central banks have is that they have been assigned an inflation target, and none of the major economies looking like hitting theirs”*

financial crisis, the public are justified in asking whether the morsels of growth we have now are ample reward for efforts undertaken, and as monetary conditions tighten globally, could that growth be strangled before the greater part of the population has really seen the rewards?

If the UK were to slip towards a recession, the Liberal Democrats should follow in the footsteps of the great John Maynard Keynes and scorn those whose response to a failed monetary policy is to have another go at more of the same, and instead advocate the much more conventional solution of

a fiscal stimulus to ensure that the UK can generate the domestic demand as Flanders describes, that will power an economic recovery.

Perhaps the biggest failing of elected politicians of every tradition this century has been the eagerness with which they have effectively contracted out economic policy, first to the big banks and banking regulators, and since the crash, to the central bankers.

The Liberal Democrats are presently struggling for an anchor policy on economics, Vince Cable cast such a significant figure for the party that his shadow still looms: Cable carved his reputation out of his resitence to the consensus view pre-crisis, the party can restore some of that reputation by casting ourselves against the status quo on negative interest rates and yet more extraordinary monetary actions.

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

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**Equal Ever After: The Fight for Same Sex Marriage - and How I Made it Happen**  
by Lynne Featherstone  
Biteback 2016.

This is a book which can be judged by its cover. The subtitle tells you what it is, Lynne's documentation of her personal crusade to get this Liberal Democrat policy through the coalition government in the Commons. It is not a detailed explanation of the campaign for LGBT equality, led for decades by Liberals and Liberal Democrats, which moved social and electoral opinion to the point where Tories would agree to do the right thing.

It is not a full account of the Liberal Democrat campaign for same sex marriage. That remains a treat in store. This is a snapshot of a Liberal Democrat minister's time in government. As such it is interesting to see what features in the book and ponder what doesn't.

The first thing which stands out is the extent to which Pink News acted as catalyst, questioning party leaders during the 2010 election about their commitment to same sex marriage. That Liberal Democrats were first to adopt this commitment is to our great credit; that Stonewall, a charity founded to campaign for LGB equality, actively opposed same sex marriage until the Labour party changed its stance is to its eternal shame.

Same sex marriage was not in the coalition agreement yet, remarkably, it got through. Why? Well the answer lies not in this book but in the party's review of the 2015 election. From 2010 we had no money to do polls. The Tories did and must have known that supporting this would not only detoxify them, but help them win target seats - ours. The detail of how strategists like Cameron and Osborne positioned the Tories as social liberals, strong enough to withstand Ukip, is textbook stuff.

In stark contrast even Featherstone, whose loyalty to Nick Clegg is evident throughout the book, cannot hide how ineffectual the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was. To be skewered by the then Archbishop of Canterbury, no Machiavelli even by Church of England standards, is incompetence indeed.

The book is most interesting as



# REVIEWS

it details the desperate efforts of some faith organisations to present same sex marriage as an assault on religious freedom. Simultaneously Liberal Jews, Unitarians and Quakers, argued cogently for the right to permit religious marriages provided that members agreed this would be an acceptable profession of their faith. The truth is that for the Tories the default setting on this Bill was to give concessions to its religious opponents. So it is truly remarkable that Liberal Democrats like Julian Huppert who saw this as a matter of principle and social justice, managed to use it to hasten humanist marriages in England.

This book is on one level a campaign manual. A classic text which sets out how issues emerge, campaigns arise and government responds. In one chapter Lynne sets out the main lines of attack and the rebuttals she deployed. Any successful campaigner, on any subject, needs to do just that well before battle commences. Lynne devotes a chapter to excerpts from her postbag. She omits the most disgusting stuff so as not to dignify it but, as an out parliamentarian who is on the receiving end of this, I can confirm that it is all true.

The style is crisp, witty and direct. It was produced quickly to ensure that Liberal Democrats get due credit for our work. Since the day the Act was passed Stonewall and Cameron have airbrushed us out of the picture and, as the Tories have weaponised equalities in their strategy to annihilate the Liberal Democrats in 2020 we need to amplify our achievements.

There is much debate about how the party could recover from the carnage of Clegg. Some think that using the lack of diversity in our MPs as cudgel with which to beat ourselves up is the way forward. Others think we can come back

by building ourselves from what remains of our local base. Well yes, but we will need strategic campaigns, full of strong messages which resonate with diverse electors. For inspiration, read this story of how one woman, building on successful Liberal campaigns from earlier days, with clear vision and tactical nous, achieved a result few thought possible. Similar works from Ed Davey and Norman Baker would be similarly welcome.

Liz Barker

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**Comrade Corbyn**  
by Rosa Prince  
Biteback 2016 £20.00

Reading the preface, I almost though I knew all that I needed to know about Jeremy Corbyn after a few paragraphs. "Corbyn believes that the personal is irrelevant; the political is everything", seems to say it all. Reading on, we have a middle class Trot, immersed in the detail of politics, almost two-dimensionally. I've bumped into Corbyn a few times, mostly at Middle East focussed events. The main thing that struck me was that he seemed at a slight distance from George Galloway - the main cheer-leader of the Labour left at these meetings.

The subtitle of the book 'A very unlikely coup: how Jeremy Corbyn stormed to the Labour leadership' is the meat of what, for the time being, must be an open sandwich, but we have an ample illustration of how Corbyn positioned himself for this, and to an extent how he will proceed. I find the trivial character assassination of the man in the press unpalatable, and have by and large stopped reading it.

Prince writes for the Daily Telegraph as her day job - you may recall her more potted biography of Tim Farron in the run up to the Liberal Democrat's

leadership election.

In the 1980s and 1990s I was at the coalface of the class war; it was Liberals who were fighting for the working class, and still are. Corbyn and his ilk were, and remain, the enemy. Their socialism is alien to the British experience. Corbyn and I might say the same, or very similar things - as an internationalist, this is very likely; we are likely to mean something entirely different. Know your enemy.

Stewart Rayment

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## Hillary Rising by James D Boys Biteback 2016 £14.99

Hillary Clinton is a polarising figure: decades of character assassination have taken their toll. Now a majority of voters, even Democrats, question her honesty, although few can explain why. Still she is what currently stands between Americans and a Republican presidency: a preposterous Donald Trump, a much-disliked Ted Cruz, or a Marco Rubio, the 'boy in the bubble'. All of these candidates oppose a woman's right to a legal abortion, claim to favour quick military solutions in the Middle East, proclaim the Obama presidency a disaster, and promise to repeal the Affordable Care Act, commonly known as Obamacare. All favour what they call 'Second Amendment rights' - easy access to guns. All have a xenophobic attitude towards immigrants, particularly refugees from the Middle East.

James Boys has given us a well-organised and very readable book that provides an up-to-date if not particularly impartial or balanced study of Hillary Clinton for British readers.

Beginning with Hillary's early appointment to head up a task force drawing up a plan for health care that would cover the well over 10% of the population without health insurance, Boys states that the process by which she and her team devised the plan, the scale of the bill and her refusal to consider alternative approaches helped doom the effort. He criticises her for secrecy during the planning, for not making the American Medical Association (AMA) and other opposition groups part of the process, and for rejecting a weaker

plan proposed by Representative Jim Cooper of Tennessee. Yet the whole point of universal health insurance was to insure the people whom insurance companies had refused to cover.

The nadir of Hillary's career as secretary of state was the attack on the US consulate in Benghazi on 11 September 2012. The ambassador and three other Americans died in the attack, and ever since Republicans have tried to hold Hillary responsible. As Boys mentions, eight congressional investigations have failed to find any evidence of criminal wrongdoing. A more recent 11-hour grilling worked more to Hillary's advantage than to her accusers'. In fact, Republican house leader Kevin McCarthy told Fox News that the committee had achieved its goal of damaging Clinton's poll numbers.

At least the Republicans have taken Hillary seriously. Boys trivialises Hillary's contributions. In recent debates she has referred to the work she did as secretary of state which led up to the resumption of diplomatic ties with Cuba and the nuclear agreement with Iran, yet oBoys states that it was only Hillary's 'celebrity status' that got her both positions: secretary of state and previously, senator for New York. His clear implication is that a mere celebrity would not have much to offer.

In *Hillary Rising*, a main criticism levelled at the Clintons is their raising large sums of money by accepting high speaking fees and lucrative book contracts. The US system rewards people with fame and influence, and members of both political parties have capitalised on it. It's worth remembering that special investigator Kenneth Starr spent close to \$40m of taxpayers' money investigating the Clintons and managed to come up with little more than Monica Lewinsky. Of course no taxpayer money was available to cover the Clintons' legal fees.

The Clintons' focus on raising money could also be a realistic understanding of what's needed to win US elections these days. Nowhere in *Hillary Rising* does Boys discuss the overwhelming influence of multi-billionaires like the Koch brothers (who are also climate change deniers), casino mogul Sheldon Adelson and many others who use their vast fortunes

to affect public opinion and win elections. The 2010 Supreme Court decision 'Citizens United' allows individuals or corporations to give unlimited money to political campaigns. So the "vast right wing conspiracy" Hillary Clinton spoke of in 1998 is now better funded than ever.

Recently, after the Iowa caucuses, former President Jimmy Carter commented on BBC 4 about what has happened to American democracy and how elections have changed since he was president:

"I didn't have any money. Now there is a massive infusion of hundreds of millions of dollars into campaigns for all the candidates. Some candidates like Trump can put in his own money but others have to be able to raise \$100m to \$200m just to get the Republican or Democratic nomination. That's the biggest change in America." And that's a change that Hillary Clinton has to deal with.

Boys describes the changes since her failed campaign of 2008, her greater efforts to engage with people in small groups, to convey to them that she is the candidate who has the potential to bring about real change and that this election will determine the future of the American middle class.

As Boys puts it, she will face "many obstacles: her age, her gender, her past, her critics, the changing nature of American politics, her party, her husband, her role in the Obama administration, her 2008 campaign, and her own personal weaknesses." Many people would consider these her strengths. That Boys considers all of these aspects of what make up a candidate to be obstacles in Hillary's case, that he categorises her as a celebrity who has not accomplished very much and goes further to compare her to Nixon for her lack of transparency puts *Hillary Rising* in an ever-increasing collection of anti-Hillary literature.

Christine Graf

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## Spotlight [film] Tom McCarthy (dir) 2016

This is the carefully crafted story of how the Spotlight team of journalists from the Boston Globe took on the Catholic Church when they exposed how it covered up child abuse by over 100 priests in

that city.

Directed by Tom McCarthy it details the sheer hard slog of investigative journalism – painstakingly going through files, methodically following up leads, making connections, trying to get hold of key papers and interviewees.

Spotlight is not a showy film. Most of the action takes place in basement offices and coffee bars. The pace is slow. This makes the testimony of the survivors of abuse all the more powerful as they carefully and painfully set out how they were groomed by people they trusted. The mafia-like power that the Catholic Church had in Boston is hinted at rather than ever been fully exposed.

There are strong performances from Michael Keaton (playing Walter ‘Robby’ Robinson the editor of the Spotlight team) and Mark Ruffalo (the team’s doggedly persistent reporter Mike Rezendes). They are ably supported by Rachel McAdams and Brian d’Arcy James - who play the other two team members. Initially reluctant to take on the investigation, which was gently pushed by their new editor Marty Baron, who is a Boston outsider (with a beautiful understated performance from Leiv Schreiber), the team become totally engrossed in it and perhaps uncover more than they really wanted to know.

The Spotlight team won the Pulitzer Prize for their work. The film ends with a chilling list of cases of abuse by priests across the world which were apparently sparked off by this investigation. Over the last couple of years journalism has had suffered from its own bad press. Spotlight, like All the President’s Men, shows investigative journalism at its best.

In a month when we saw the demise of hard copy Independent it is important to remember what journalists have achieved. Similarly the publication of Dame Janet Smith’s investigation into why the BBC failed to address sex abuse carried out by Jimmy Saville and others is a timely reminder of how different parts of the establishment can so easily, intentionally or not, fail to see crimes that are happening around them.

Margaret Lally

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## **Paradoxes of Liberal Democracy, Islam, Western Europe, and the Danish Cartoon Crisis** **by Paul M. Sniderman, Michael Bang Petersen, Rune Slothuus & Rune Stubager** **Princeton University Press 2014**

Paradoxically, in the wake of fundamentalist attacks in Beirut and Paris, and to a lesser degree, Leytonstone and California, it is an appropriate time for this overdue review. In 2005 the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten published a series of cartoons which some said mocked the prophet Mohammed. This led to demands by some Muslims that religious faith should take precedence over freedom of expression and provoked a reaction from the street to government levels; the events are well-known.

What didn’t happen was a backlash against Muslims in Denmark; the proud tradition of tolerance of the ordinary Danish people held strong. The authors sum it up thus:

when it counted most, when the clash was most intense and the outcome uncertain, a decisive majority of ordinary citizens stood behind the civil rights of Muslims; in fact, they gave them fully as much support as they did fellow Danes like born-again Christians.

It so happens that the research that underpins this book had already started when the Cartoon Crisis erupted. This enabled the researchers to refine their tests to the developing scenario. While sociological evidence that the shallowness of voters’ understanding of public affairs and democratic values is said to be ‘unassailable’, the results were surprising and from a Liberal perspective, encouraging.

The surprise is the strength of tolerance in the community. Tolerance has, the authors argue, has lost much of its emphasis as a great political idea over time. The point is to restore the concept to John Locke’s understanding, to support, nourish, maintain, sustain, preserve. This harks back

to earlier, even proto-Liberalism, but echoes, in for example, Morley’s writing on the Whigs. The authors call for an inclusive tolerance.

What does this say to Islam? Muslims in the West can think the unthinkable, so far as, say, their counterparts in Wahhabist Saudi Arabia are able to express. Some of this will be unpalatable to us as Liberals, but out of it was can hope for developments that will blossom in the liberal elements of the religion. Look at the nonsense that was spouted in Christian writings around the Reformation and Counter Reformation, culminating in (but not ended with) the 30 Years War.

The downside of the book is the presentation of the sociological data, which isn’t always easy on the eye. Yet Liberalism claims to be an empirical philosophy, so why complain when the evidence is presented. If this is your bag there is much to be gained from it, otherwise it isn’t difficult to distil the essence of the arguments.

Stewart Rayment

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## **Deutschland 83** **Channel 4** **Anna and Jorg Winger** **(writers)**

East Germany was one of few countries whose rulers were so acutely conscious of their unpopularity that they felt the need to wall their subjects in.

Its thus pretty rare for any work of popular fiction to invite us to view this appalling place through the eyes of it’s ruling class and their supporters.

Deutschland 83 was unusual enough in being seven weeks of subtitled German on prime time television, but more unusual still in presenting the view that the rulers of East Germany in 1983 genuinely believed they faced a western nuclear attack.

They took Ronald Reagan’s bellicose rhetoric at face value and eventually mistook a large western military exercise for the real thing. Whether this is based on actual events or not I don’t know, but it seems horribly plausible.

The plot involved East German intelligence infiltrating an agent into the inner circle of a senior West German general, where he is charged with stealing NATO

documents so his masters can find out what is planned.

Through a series of family tensions and personal dramas he works himself into a position to do this, only to realise that the West Germans and Americans plan no such attack but his masters in the East refuse to believe him and prepare for war.

There is a bit of slack plotting. We never find out why the villainous East German general wants to deceive his superiors into believing an attack is imminent, or get to know what the agent thinks of the west he sees around him. That aside it was gripping stuff.

As we now know, the seemingly solid East Germany had only six years to go, falling like the rest of the Warsaw Pact without a shot fired outside Romania.

The eastern bloc was ruinously indebted to western banks by the 1980s, and could never keep pace with western economies.

How far behind it was is illustrated by scenes where the stolen the NATO plan turns out to be on a floppy disk. The East Germans barely know what this is and no computer in the country can read - this at a time when computers were already fairly commonplace household objects in western Europe.

East Germany died because the realist Gorbachev realised the game was up. Misunderstanding may have brought war closer before that than we like to think.

Mark Smulian

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## **Discontent and its Civilisations** by Mohsin Hamid Penguin 2015 £9.99

The world might be a better place if more people had seen the film *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*; or better still read the book. It is a truism that fiction often opens things up in a way that facts cannot. Here we have a collection of essays, mostly journalism, though some may be read as stories. A gentle and thought stimulating style, it will give you much pleasure as it enlightens you. I particularly commend *Down the Tube* in the context of Paris.

Stewart Rayment

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## **Keepers of the Golden Shore** by Michael Quentin Morton Reaktion Books, 2016

The transformation of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) from impoverished sheikhdoms along the Trucial Coast to a dynamic post-modern society with one of the fastest rates of economic and population growths in the world is surely one of the most remarkable development trajectories of the second half of the 20th century.

As a country, the UAE has only existed since 1971; previously, the seven emirates had survived with often indistinct borders between them drawn in the sand, all under the tutelage of Great Britain as the protecting power. It was largely the UK's cost-cutting decision to withdraw from east of Suez that concentrated the minds of the local rulers that they would do better in an uncertain world as a single identity rather than as seven, though Ras Al Khaimah dragged its heels for a while.

Bahrain and Qatar could have been part of the new enterprise but decided to go their own way. Subsequently, oil revenues helped Abu Dhabi become the strongest kid on the block, though Dubai's embracing of economic diversification and in-your-face self promotion has made it the one emirate of which that everyone has heard.

It would be tempting to think that the above is all the really matters when one considers the history of the UAE, but as Quentin Morton recounts, archaeological findings show significant human activity in this region at a time when the climate was more benign than it is now.

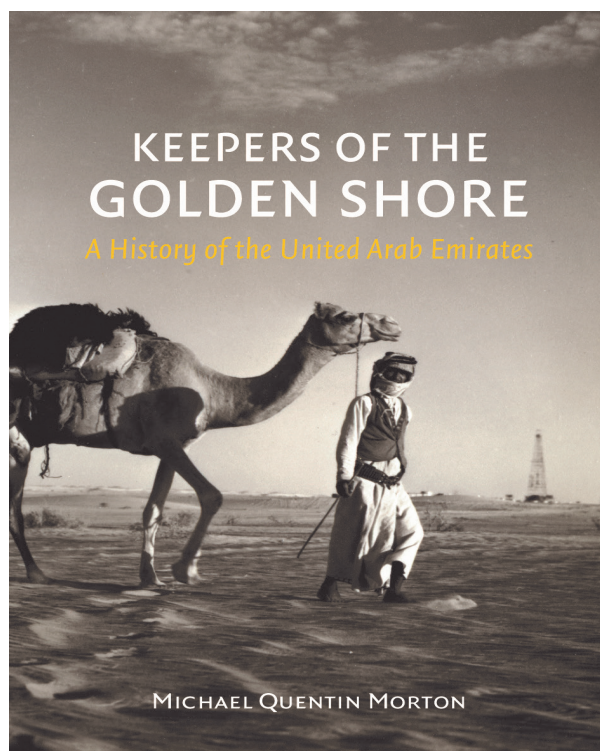
Moreover, pearl fishing brought periods of prosperity to Gulf communities, albeit unevenly distributed, for several centuries. But the bottom fell out of the pearl market around 1930 in the face of competition from Japanese cultured

pearls and the impact of the Great Depression. The following two decades, including the Second World War, were a period of great hardship for Gulf Arabs, including widespread malnutrition, causing some local people to leave. The subsequent exploitation of oil dramatically changed that situation so that now the UAE's hunger is for overseas migrant labour and the newest and flashiest of everything.

Quentin Morton, who grew up in the Gulf, writes with calm authority and rational judgment about the often passionate rivalry between the various emirates and their ruling families, several of which engaged in fratricide and other dastardly acts.

He rightly underlines the particular significance of Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al Nahyan (1918-2004), ruler of Abu Dhabi and president of the UAE, without fully explaining his charisma. I was in Bahrain when Zayed died and the public mourning even there was dramatic and sincerely felt. Perhaps because he does not want to get his book banned in the UAE and neighbouring countries, the author is a little circumspect in his treatment of the bloody suppression of the Pearl roundabout protests in Bahrain in 2011. But for anyone who wants to understand from where what is now the UAE emerged and how that happened this is a most useful and readable account.

Jonathan Fryer



I sit in one of the dives on 52nd Street writing this diary before I take a yellow cab to JFK and a jet to Oakham International Airport. I was a regular visitor to New York as a young man, the more so after I was given a Manhattan penthouse by a grateful President for rendering services to the American nation that I had better keep under my hat even today. You will have seen what the locals call the 'Bonkers Tower' – perhaps because of the moustache-like structure that protrudes from either side of the 34th floor.

The purpose of this visit has been to observe the contest for the Democrat and Republican nominations at close quarters – the New Rutland primaries in particular.

Do you know New Rutland? No doubt you have heard the tale of how, after a painful schism in the Church of Rutland following an attempt to reform the LBW law, a party of settlers sailed from Oakham Quay. After many vicissitudes they reached New England, before trekking into the interior until they reached unclaimed land.

What became New Rutland was bought from Red Indians and proved to be difficult to farm. (Foolishly, the settlers failed to keep the receipt, with the result that the Indians refused to take it back. Some urged legal action, but the majority felt it unwise to sue the Sioux.)

Nevertheless, the settlers tilled the soil and raised their animals to build an economy based on the production of Stilton cheese and pork pies. Why, to make themselves feel even more at home they even dug a vast artificial reservoir and named it New Rutland Water!

I travelled there last week, receiving something of a cool welcome when I disembarked at a wayside station. There were three fellows hanging about, and not one of them had thought to bring me a horse! Well, I soon put them right, I assure you, and also told the stationmaster to oil his wind-pump.

It seems the Red Indian influence remains strong in New Rutland to this day. Who should I meet when I arrived in Gladstone, the state capital, but my old friend Rising Star, at one time the Liberal Democrat MP for Winchester? We went for a firewater and he told me that he had given up politics and returned to the trade of his forefathers: he is dealing in animal skins ("Um nice little earner.") When I asked him what he had made from afar of the travails of our party he replied with characteristic sagacity: "Heap big trouble."

By now you will have heard the results of the New Rutland primaries, but I placed my bets as follows. In the Republican contest I put my money on a fellow who rejoiced in the name of 'Trump'. He goes around in a Boris Johnson fright wig and is the sort of Fascist who would long ago have been debagged and thrown in a stream in the original Rutland, but he is all the rage with the Republicans over here.

# Lord Bonkers' Diary

My choice on the Democrat side was Hilary Clinton. She is the wife of the former President Clinton and, as such, has had A Lot To Put Up With. Her only rival for the Democrat nomination is one Bernie Sanders, who came bounding up to me at the Gladstone hustings. Did I know his brother, who used to be a Green councillor in Oxford?

It happens that I do know him. I once made the mistake of sitting opposite

him at Paddington and was treated to a lecture on how methane generated by cows was causing the atmosphere to warm with the result that subsistence farmers in the Nazca Desert could not make a living and were turning to asparagus farming with the result that the polar ice caps were melting which meant the fishermen of Ullapool were unable to... At this point I bribed the guard to stop the train and put me off at Didcot.

My own address to the Democrat event went tolerably well and when I left town the next day aboard the 3.10 to Yuma, a little fellow called "Come back, Bonkers!" after me.

So here I sit in the VIP departure lounge at JFK, fighting off all attempts to put ice in my Auld Johnston. Before they call the flight to Oakham International, let me share with you my hopes for the months ahead in Britain.

First, the Conservative Party. Cameron has made that the fatal error of announcing that he will go before the next election, with the result that the his potential successors have been running wild. Let me list them...

George Osborne, whose political philosophy does not extend beyond the demand that he should have all the sweets and have them now.

Theresa May, who reminds me of a Matron I once employed at the Home for Well-Behaved Orphans. Whilst Terribly Efficient, she was unwilling to take the broad view on bedtimes and muddy knees providing the first XI won its fixtures and her charges showed promise at committee room theory and practice.

Boris Johnson, who wears a Donald Trump fright wig.

I also heard Dr Liam Fox refuse to rule himself out as a future Tory leader. My dear, I screamed!

Then there is the Labour Party, as the New Party is calling itself these days. They need to dump Jeremy Corbyn, Christopher Robin Milne, Chairman Mao and all that crew and find themselves someone who can connect with the workers, as they flatter themselves they used to do. Frank Byers' granddaughter is Terribly Keen, some military fellow called Jarvis has the skills you need in a closely fought by-election, but I am not holding my breath.

As for we Liberal Democrats, we need an ingenious new plan that will see us returned to the front rank of politics. What we should do is...

Dash it all! My flight has just been called.

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