

liberator



- 🔦 Help for the young 'missing middle' - Claire Tyler
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London N4 2LF
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Liberator is printed by Lithosphere
Studio 1, 146 Seven Sisters Road, LONDON N7 7PL

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

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

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COMMENTARY

CAMPAIGNS CAME FROM BELOW BEFORE

Well, 45 council seats up is better than 45 down, but the election results from May still show the Liberal Democrats with a mountain to climb.

They showed that it was possible for good local campaigns to do better than the national trend - something that was usually impossible during the Coalition - but also that this was largely confined to wards and councils very recently held.

In the English council elections, broadly places that hadn't done too badly under the Coalition were able to modestly improve their position while a few that had suffered badly like Liverpool and Hull were able to significantly improve through effective campaigning.

At least at local government level the Lib Dems broadly know what to do to have a chance to win, and it should be possible to continue to improve if the political environment nationally grows more favourable for the party as memories of Nick Clegg and tuition fees recede.

However, as is pointed out in Radical Bulletin in this issue, a party that was once hugely innovative in campaigning now isn't - indeed innovation is discouraged in favour of repeating centrally produced messages and follow centrally dictated campaign methods.

Maybe the new regime in the campaigns departments - appointments widely welcomed - will change this, but its worth remembering that no-one sat down in any headquarters, invented the Focus leaflet and year-round campaigning and then - in the hideous management-speak phrase - rolled it out nationally.

The techniques of community politics were developed in Liverpool, Rugby, Southend and other places now forgotten by activists who were not normally in touch with each other and who just found out what worked for their patch, and others later copied them.

No-one can be certain, but it seems reasonable to suppose that any next great leap forward in campaigning will arise from the coalface of local politics and not from someone trying to impose a central way of doing things.

It's a different matter with the elections to devolved administrations, where the Lib Dems once again showed they find it hard to prosper in proportional representation elections, despite being committed to electoral reform.

In this issue Gareth Epps suggests the Scottish Lib Dems failed to move beyond the five seats they held (if in a different configuration) because they have nothing to say to the 45% of the country that supported independence, and cannot offer anything sufficiently different from other unionist parties to the remainder of voters.

Wales saw the party struggle with Plaid Cymru parked on its traditional turf and from its lack of any very distinctive vision. Ukip's arrival mopped any of the old protest vote that might have been around.

There have been complaints in London that its new mayor, Labour's Sadiq Khan, rapidly implemented a policy very similar to Lib Dem candidate Caroline Pidgeon's policy of bus tickets staying valid for an hour.

This may seem arcane to people outside London, but bus use is huge in the capital and the ability to change routes without a further fare will be valued by many.

Pidgeon fought an energetic campaign and got her profile as high as could reasonably be expected. The problem was that anyone from George Galloway to Britain First could favour a one hour bus ticket. It's a worthwhile policy but not necessarily a Lib Dem one, as Khan's immediate borrowing of it has shown.

In this respect the campaign was like its predecessors for London mayor - a series of bright ideas with few links with each other and nothing to obviously connect them to the Lib Dems.

The Gurling Review of the 2015 general election (Liberator 377) noted that among the party's problems had been that, "the move into government was not well understood by the public exacerbated by running hyper local campaigns with differing messages".

Its always tempting to run such campaigns where some local controversy or cock-up by another party offers easy pickings but the party will never develop the core vote it needs by campaigning with messages that are different, even contradictory, in different places.

In addition to developing new campaigning techniques there may be some unlearning needed about how to fight elections too.

Meanwhile the referendum on European Union membership impends.

There has been concern expressed in Lib Dem circles that the Remain campaign is concentrating on segments identified as swing voters while neglecting to energise its base.

The choice of business leaders to run it, whatever their expertise in their own fields, was an error when what it needs is a few street fighter campaigners to ensure that voters turn out in a poll where the other side has emotionally charged themes of bigotry, hatred and nationalism (though nothing else) that it can push.

For once the message that every vote counts, even in the most normally barren territory for Lib Dems, is true - there are no constituencies to target here, though there may be some demographics more promising than others and there is every vote to fight for.

RADICAL BULLETIN

FIXING A BROKEN MACHINE

The assembly of the great and good appointing a new campaigns director for the Liberal Democrats have caused some surprise by getting the answer right.

The appointments of new head of campaigns Shaun Roberts and his deputy Dave McCobb have been widely welcomed as both have strong track records in successful elections.

Roberts has something else in his favour - he signed the petition calling on Nick Clegg to go after the electoral catastrophe of May 2014, when he said: "I have been a Nick supporter for many years but I think the Farage debates and the disaster that was last week mean we need to change. I think it will be significantly easier for a new leader to reconnect with voters than it will be for Nick. I would also say that changing leaders is not enough - got to have the policies that will fire up activists and potential voters too." Quite.

Roberts and McCobb though face a mighty task. From possibly the day Chris Rennard was given responsibilities that took his full attention away from campaigns, the party once feared and renowned campaigning machine started to go backwards. The Gurling review (Liberator 377) roundly criticised the effects of a top-down, command-and-control campaign structure obsessed by numerical targets and bland, vacuous literature.

It was widely expected that campaigns head Hilary Stephenson would retire after the election. So when chief executive Tim Gordon unveiled an HQ organisation chart without her on it, few people were surprised except, it is understood, Stephenson herself.

She waited until after the restructuring was in place before leaving, during which time Victoria Marsom and Stephen Jolly, either of whom might have applied for the post, both instead left.

They were not the only departures in a restructuring that saw HQ declare campaigning in future would be 'digital first', whatever that means. Meanwhile Gordon squabbled with the English Party over control of the remaining regional staff, with the latter wanting to remove all national control.

Roberts and McCobb can though only work with what they are given and the campaigning infrastructure has been shot to pieces as though, after decades of building up experience of fighting elections, the party is learning to walk again after a gruesome road accident.

Each year it feels like an ever dwindling number of seasoned campaigners exist at the coalface, and fewer people who know what good looks like. Is that something the new team at HQ can change?

There needs to be a renewed sense that campaigners can innovate. This used to be the role of the Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors but its profile within the party is now non-existent, having

presumably been told to be silent. There has been no real sign that anyone is prepared or indeed permitted to do things differently. By-election wins, where they have come, have been 'traditional ALDC campaigns' in Tory shire areas. There is no sign of campaigning in Parliament being linked to wider campaigns, other than dull generic literature templates being emailed around.

Many of the new members the party accumulated after May 2015 who have suggested the party may want to do new things have been frustrated at being rebuffed or ignored. This is partly down to wider issues but is particularly true in campaigning. The greater worry is that so little of the party sees campaigning as the only way to rebuild.

FOLLY OF YOUTH

What is going among the youth and student wing of the Liberal Democrats?

They voted to change their name to the Young Liberals - mainly on the grounds that their old name of Liberal Youth was too reminiscent of the Hitler Youth.

This rebranding exercise is particularly odd given the rather more serious problems in the organisation, which has two self-proclaimed 'Classical Liberals' as co-chairs and has lost communications and finance officers, which puts them onto their fourth finance officer in the space of a year.

Other delights have included more than one officer disappearing into radio silence and control-freakery such as events officers being forbidden to access the website to post details of events (instead being told to ask one of the co-chairs to do it for them).

Their Facebook group, called Chatbox, descended into chaos and been shut down by moderators due to their inability to cope.

The trouble apparently stems from by a very loud right-wing minority who joined the party after Nick Clegg's resignation speech under the mistaken impression that slogans like "taxation is theft" are welcome in the Lib Dems.

Coupled with a toothless moderation policy that allowed offensive material to be posted with little comeback for perpetrators, several hundred members left chatbox this year alone.

The moderators then went on strike in protest at the pressure they were under and some of the worst behaved in the group took this as an excuse to spend a night throwing insults around and trolling. The upshot was so many complaints that the group was closed pending a new set of rules.

All of this distracts from the rather more serious grievances many members of the Young Liberals have around their experiences of ageism and treatment at the party's spring conference where every amendment submitted for debate was rejected by the Federal

Conference Committee, including an attempt to ensure that the motion setting out economic policy made at least a passing reference to intergenerational fairness.

Coupled with a persistent problem of young members being used as leaflet delivery fodder but patronised when they attempt to contribute ideas, it is easy to see why many in the Young Liberals feel fed up. Unfortunately, since the Young Liberals seem insistent on shooting themselves in the foot no one is likely to take any notice.

COUP PLOTTER

Since becoming leader Tim Farron has relied on his old team to handle media but now the Liberal Democrats have a new head of press, former Maidstone candidate Jasper Gerrard.

A message from communications director James Holt to staff described Gerrard as having a commitment to the party dating from when he was Paddy Ashdown's researcher in the 1980s and later having been "chief interviewer of the Sunday Times for more than 10 years, and was the Times' leader writer too. We'll try not to hold it against him, but he was also Boris Johnson's associate editor at the Spectator, and he worked alongside Michael Gove at the Times". Gerrard also reviewed food and cars for national newspapers.

Holt's message omitted that Gerrard was also the author of a preposterous book called *The Clegg Coup*, in which he argued that the Coalition arose from a carefully orchestrated 'coup' by Nick Clegg and his supporters, made possible because Clegg "had transformed his party and dragged it to the centre ground".

This specious argument was skewered by the late Simon Titley in a review in *Liberator* 350 in which he wrote: "That the Liberal Democrats have reached sufficient size to participate in a coalition is due to the many thousands of people who have contributed to the revival of the party since the 1950s. But because Jasper Gerard holds an elitist view, he must perpetuate the 'Great Man' theory of politics, in which every success is attributed to the leader and the work of others is ignored."

Titley also noted: "Gerard's book is certainly no serious academic work; there are no footnotes or references, interviews and events are rarely dated, and many quotes are unattributed. This leaves you wondering to what extent the book is the result of author's own research or merely culled from the clippings library." Sounds just the chap for the job.

GETTING THE BUILDERS IN

The words "we're having builders in" are usually enough to strike terror into any home owner, portending dust and disruption.

But for the Liberal Democrats the arrival of people with brushes and power tools will spell a different problem. With a huge deficit still in place, moving out of the costly offices at Great George Street, even if not very far, would save a lot of money.

The problem is that it would deliver these savings only in the second year of the move, not the first.

Moving is in itself not a great expense, but a lot of alterations were made to Great George Street to customise it for the party's purposes, all of which will need to be undone at the end of the party's lease at a very substantial cost.

Liberator understands no money was set aside for restoring these alterations when they were first made, even though it was known that the lease would be up for renewal around now anyway.

BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD

Sources inform the *Liberator* that Liberal Democrat HQ has decided to scrap its arrangement with Nationbuilder at the end of the year.

Nationbuilder is an American company which provides campaign websites for organisations like political parties which include features such as mass emails, event management, volunteer recruitment and online donations. The national Lib Dem website and the SNP national website, for instance, are both built with Nationbuilder.

In place of Nationbuilder, Great George Street (or wherever HQ ends up) apparently intends to build its own in-house replacement with the help of volunteers. How well this goes will remain to be seen - not least given the disastrous experience of previous in-house projects like the membership system.

While this will no doubt come as an annoying disappointment to the local parties and activists who have spent a lot of time and money setting up Nationbuilder websites and learning how to use them, one key upside to an in-house website system is that it will actually be able to talk to the party's Connect election software and its Salesforce membership database. This was one of the big drawbacks of Nationbuilder, which is a rival of the company behind Connect.

Of course, the real reason for this decision might just be cost. The off-the-shelf price of Nationbuilder for an organisation wanting to store and use up to 81,000 email addresses is almost \$1,000 a month - with an additional charge of \$20 a month for every extra 2,000 email addresses. While this is quite steep even for the cash strapped Liberal Democrats with a large national email database it's even steeper considering that this same monthly charge was also applied to every single local party with a Nationbuilder website.

So is this a case of common sense cost-saving coupled with a new willingness to use tools that actually meet the party's need rather than the latest slick, high-price American product?

Perhaps. It's worth noting that the company Prater Raines, which was set up by Liberal Democrats for

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Liberal Democrats in 2002 to provide affordable websites, has long provided a service which, if not quite as slick as Nationbuilder, is significantly cheaper and can do most of the same things that Nationbuilder can and a few it can't, such as checking whether someone is a paid up member of the party or not.

Indeed, it's telling that the party leader, Tim Farron, uses Prater Raines for his constituency website rather than Nationbuilder. Some might wonder if, rather than creating something new from scratch, HQ might be better off working with Prater Raines to improve what's already available.

Nonetheless, scrapping an expensive system far too sophisticated for most local party's needs and replacing it with a system that actually talks to the party's other systems is in itself a promising step. Whether this change of approach will actually last is something which can only remain to be seen.

IT'S BEHIND YOU!

The time honoured advice to never act with children or animals was forgotten by Scottish Lib Dem leader Willie Rennie during the recent elections.

On a visit to a farm he boasted of how conducting such events showed him to be in touch with Scottish life.

Sadly for him, two pigs in the background chose that moment to decide that the world possessed insufficient piglets and it was time to make some more.

As this screen shot from the BBC shows, while Rennie discussed Scottish election prospects he became possibly the first politician to appear in a porcine porn film.



FOLLOW THE MONEY

Yet another of Nick Clegg's cock ups has come home to roost in the shape of the Tories' attempts to financially strangle their opponents.

This has seen the Lib Dem peers voting with Labour to successfully thwart some of the damage that would arise from restrictions both on 'Short' money for opposition parties and trade union funding of parties.

The Tories can rely on wealthy donors while trying to cut Short money and union funding to create an effective one party state with financial resources massively skewed in their favour.

During the Coalition, a deal was negotiated on funding reform, based on the Committee on Standards in Public Life report on party funding in 2011, which Clegg stupidly vetoed. It proved impossible subsequently to reach any agreement as an alternative.

The Coalition agreement provided for 'taking the big money out of politics'. The problem was that it didn't say how and nobody in the Lib Dems understood the huge importance of preventing 'big money' mattering so much in elections - as the Tories use of national funding in Lib Dem marginal seats showed - and the need to have an agreement on how this would be done at the outset.

The committee sensibly proposed there should be a cap on big donations, a change in trade union funding to ensure that contributions to Labour were based on members consciously 'opting in' to make them, and a limited extension of state funding to ensure that political parties could put their case to the electorate.

This was all viewed as generally satisfactory by the party but on the day of publication of their report, Clegg panicked in the face of what he assumed would be an attack from the Daily Mail and vetoed the package as he was scared about the 'public funding' element of it.

This though was an essential element of the three pronged approach of banning big donations, reforming trade union ones and a limited extension of existing state funding. With one 'leg' gone so too went the other two.

The opportunity was there to secure all-party agreement, and any opprobrium from the right wing tabloids would surely have been brief and soon forgotten.

The Conservatives knew what they were doing over party funding issues while the clueless Clegg did not. He was pleased with some of the financial contributions made by newly ennobled Lib Dem peers, without realising the scale of damage to be done to the party by the far larger sums raised by the Conservatives.

The failure to act on party funding was a major factor in the near destruction of the party. But this is unlikely to be recognised in Clegg's memoirs due to be published in September.

LOOK AT ME, PLEASE

Former Hereford MP Paul Keetch's Liberal Leave campaign could be dismissed as attention seeking were anyone paying it attention.

Since leaving parliament in 2010 Keetch has had a spell in business with, of all people, Phil Woolas, the former Labour MP for Oldham East disqualified in 2010 for making untrue statements about his Lib Dem opponent Elwyn Watkins, but has otherwise been little seen.

The Liberal Leave leaflet distributed at York listed only Keetch and five people no-one has heard of it as its supporters.

This campaign has largely confined itself to random Facebook postings, as of mid-May had made little use of Lib Dem Voice, which would have been bound to publish a reasonable number of submissions.

In one posting though Keetch made the curious argument that lack of public knowledge of MEPs was a reason to leave the EU - several people responded that

local authorities could be abolished on the same basis.

In another, he ventured toe-curling references about how he and a Lib Dem baroness could have been “so much more” than friends.

Keetch is said to harbour the belief that he should have been made a peer. Little chance of that now.

BULLY FOR YOU

When someone is an active Lib Dem peer, a councillor and has a publicly known record of party activity stretching back nearly 50 years it might reasonably be assumed that they are a willing volunteer.

Not it seems in party headquarters, from which head of volunteering Jonny Steen emailed Lord Greaves a questionnaire asking him to choose: ‘yes I want to volunteer’; ‘I volunteer already’; or ‘no, I do not want to volunteer’.

Greaves posted in the Alliance of Liberal Democrats Facebook group the observation “I have just had this email from party HQ. Are they really as institutionally incompetent as this?”

Some weeks later he had a missive from Margaret Joachim, chair of the infamous Regional Parties Committee, to say: “A complaint has been received that you have brought the party into disrepute by bullying Jonny Steen, a member of Party staff, in contravention of clause 3.1 of the Federal Party Constitution.”

Greaves, in the midst of volunteering by running his own council election in a marginal ward, might have expressed himself rather directly, but what on earth was the point of Steen’s message?

While it stated that its purpose was to find out which members wished to receive messages from HQ, that is not what it actually said.

People were asked whether they wished to volunteer, not whether they wished to receive messages from HQ. Opting out of messages appeared to mean opting out of volunteering at all.

Whether mass mailing a confusingly worded email (and to send it indiscriminately if peers received it) counts as incompetence is surely simply a matter of opinion.

EVERY LITTLE HELPS

Federal Conference Committee members have been unamused by the campaign waged by Lib Dem Voice editor Caron Lindsay over the early discount for conference registration.

An ‘early bird’ rate of £60 was set for those who registered within one week in April, before it increased to a ‘slightly less early bird’ rate of £73.

Lindsay objected that this was unfair in the middle of elections and before most people got paid at the end of the month.

Reasonable points perhaps but Lindsay is a member not merely of the Federal Executive but the Federal Finance and Administration Committee, which sets the tight budget under which the FCC has to work. Perhaps a bit more budget would allow a bit more time for early registrations.

This stringency has already resulted in conference being further truncated to Saturday to Tuesday (it was a week in the Liberal party before merger, and for a long time Saturday to Thursday after that).

With a mass of internal business there will be precious little time for a party to use the event as

a shop window, and little time for all the meetings, training sessions and networking that go on around conference.

HELP ME RHONDDA

Former Lib Dem activist Leighton Andrews, who defected to Labour in 1999, was the surprise casualty of the Welsh Assembly elections, losing the Labour bastion of Rhondda to Plaid Cymru.

His campaign video borrowed the old Liberal slogan “everybody knows somebody who has been helped by” but could not find room to mention embarrassing information uncovered by Wales Online that Andrews was “ferried back and forth for the short trip between his Cardiff home to the National Assembly for Wales repeatedly by a chauffeur”.

Driver logs released under a Freedom of Information Act request show him chauffeured regularly over the four miles journey and to a Welsh Government building in Cathays Park, though not to his property in his Rhondda, of which he will now presumably have no need.

NIGHT SHIFT

Having decided at Bournemouth last year that it couldn’t make up its mind about Trident, the Lib Dems created, at Tim Farron’s behest, a working group designed to kick the issue further into touch.

The idea is that by the time this body reports, if it does, either the Trident decision will have been irrevocably made, or no one will care what the Lib Dems say about it anyway, or both.

So as to be as un-inclusive as possible, the Nuclear Weapons Working Group has been taking evidence from those deemed experts once a fortnight in Westminster on a weekday evening with members unable to travel there at such an inconvenient time excluded from proceedings.

ANYTHING LUCAN DO

John Thurso was the only one of seven candidates not to have provided a statement or election address saying why he wanted to resume his career in the House of Lords, in a by-election among the Lib Dem hereditaries.

He said he didn’t need to as of the three electors “one was his friend, one was a relative, and he had yet to speak to the third one”. If only winning elections as a Lib Dem was so easy for others.

The recent legal acceptance of the death of Lord Lucan has perhaps also laid to rest the story that Thurso used to carry around a letter from the police confirming that was not the vanished lord - apparently the resemblance confused some

OVERLOOKED AND LEFT BEHIND

A 'missing middle' group of young people is being failed by an incoherent system of post-16 education, says Claire Tyler

The big debates on education almost invariably focus on schools and university. It's usually all about academic success, exam league tables and access to higher education on the one hand, and academisation or a lack of democratic accountability of schools on the other.

On the rare occasions that it's not focused on that, it's on apprenticeships. The attention governments of all hues have paid to these flagship policies have obscured one very important fact: the majority of young people - 53% - do not follow the 'traditional' academic route into work.

Not so the Lords Select Committee on Social Mobility which I proposed over 18 months ago and have had the privilege of sitting on for the last year.

In April the committee published its report 'Overlooked and left behind: improving the transition from school to work for the majority of young people'. Our bald conclusion was that young people not pursuing the traditional path are getting a raw deal.

Consider that there are some three million people in further education colleges on a government budget of £4bn, while the two million people in higher education have a budget of some £30bn—nearly 8 times as much. Or consider that schools and colleges receive between £500 to £1,200 less in funding per student for those aged 16 and above.

The select committee on social mobility heard from a variety of policy makers, practitioners and civic organisations about the challenges faced by our country's young people.

This landscape of growing inequality is especially rough for those who don't go to university. In fact, a study released in April by the Institute for Fiscal Studies found that, while university graduates from high-income households out-earn everyone else, the median male who does not go to university earns less than two-thirds of what a graduate from a low-income family makes.

Factor in the third of men and women without university degrees with little to no earnings to speak of, and it becomes clear that something is amiss.

Individual aspiration is always important, but so too are the systems and guiderails that we create to help young people into the job market.

And the fact of the matter is that on leaving secondary education, 53% of young people face a bewildering and incoherent set of options. For the majority of our youth who do not pursue university, there is no centralised, UCAS-like system to guide them into jobs with the possibility of upward mobility. Instead, they (and the employers who hire them) must face a constantly shifting, incoherent and poorly-funded system of non-traditional qualifications that is consistently given short shrift in favour of the traditional academic route through A-levels and

university.

The select committee made a raft of recommendations to the Government to implement in this parliament. Key among them is the overriding imperative to reduce the unfairness in funding between academic and vocational routes into work. Most people in the sector agree that further education colleges have the potential to be real engines of social mobility. But while government policy has ring-fenced schools and university funding from budget cuts, the same cannot be said for the post-16 institutions that provide for young people moving into vocational education. In fact, the 16-19 year-old budget was cut by 13.6% in real terms from 2010 to 2015.

UNDERFUNDED, OVERWORKED

The individuals affected by these spending cuts are much more likely to come from lower-income households, which further harms their possibility of upward mobility. An underfunded and overworked system inevitably leads to lower quality education, as providers operate in an atmosphere of complete uncertainty about their future. Low quality in turn contributes to tremendous cost - in fact, uncompleted post-16 learning courses cost the public purse a whacking £814m in 2012, amounting to 12% of the funding allocated to 16-18 year-old provision. Clearly, this money could be better spent elsewhere - we can't carry on adopting a penny wise, pound foolish approach to vocational education.

Yet, funding isn't the only problem. We need to make transitions work for this 'missing middle' group of young people. Rather than the national curriculum stopping at age 16, the select committee recommended that it should instead end at 14 to enable a new 14-19 transition stage to be developed so that young people sliding down the wrong path are 'caught' earlier.

One crucial aspect of this transformation would be a robust system of career guidance for young people that is independent, comprehensive, and face-to-face, to help guide them through our current vocational system, which remains pretty incomprehensible even to those working in the sector.

This careers guidance, currently the responsibility of schools with a vested interest - not to mention inbuilt financial incentive - for pupils to carry on the academic route, must instead adequately inform young people of all the options available to them.

Such guidance needs to be implemented alongside a plan to ensure all young people have access to high-quality work experience, and other forms of work tasters and introductions to the world of work, as well as social action opportunities.

Despite the government in 2013 removing the legal requirement for schools to provide work experience for under 16s, many select committee witnesses viewed

this move as a mistake. Work placements - including work experience in social action or volunteering - are vital to developing employability skills such as team working, time management, resilience, flexibility, problem solving and communication skills.

When politicians and commentators do talk about skills and vocational routes, the only policy they tend to focus on is apprenticeships. But the current drive to increase apprenticeships, while welcome, must ensure that apprenticeships benefit the young people the select committee were concerned about. It's a little known fact that just 6% of 16-18 year olds will do an apprenticeship. At the same time, we have to ensure that the drive to boost apprenticeships does not come at the expense of the quality of those apprenticeships.

IMMENSE DIFFICULTY

One of the things I was most surprised by in our committee's year-long investigation was the immense difficulty in consolidating information. Responsibility for this group of young people and their transition into work is scattered across multiple Government departments, with no single person or body held accountable. That lack of accountability can be seen also in the fact that in the past three decades, we have had a staggering 61 secretaries of state responsible for skills and employment policy, compared to 18 for schools policy and 16 for higher education.

To me this statistic speaks volumes. The constant churn of policy and ministers accountable for supporting this overlooked majority of young people – the 53% - mean that an already complicated system is made worse.

Given the extent of flux in the system, the committee deliberately decided not to recommend further churn in administrative structures. Rather it recognised the absence of any real focal point for local labour analysis and action to support young people looking for their first job, while also drawing attention to recent efforts in this arena as part of the devolution agenda, be they in the large conurbations such as London, Manchester or Leeds or in rural areas such as Somerset and Lincolnshire.

Thus the report recommended that Government should act as a facilitator, co-ordinating the efforts of existing players and brokering effective local collaboration between schools, colleges, employers, local authorities, local enterprise partnerships, voluntary organisations and others. It was very clear from the evidence presented to the committee that the lead player would differ from one locality to another and thus a 'one size fits all solution' was unlikely to work.

This, too, is where making new local data analysis available becomes vital. For example, by releasing data on the percentage of free school meal students who go onto find employment within six months, and other forms of progression into and within the workplace from each school, we could spotlight areas where policy is working.

“On leaving secondary education, 53% of young people face a bewildering and incoherent set of options”

As ever, to understand why it is vital we address this 'missing middle' group, it is useful to step back and look at the big picture: the West is living through a period of profound change. Resentment of growing inequality is on the rise, and there has been a

breakdown of the political consensus on both right and left, accompanied by the rise in populism on both sides of the Atlantic.

But to get to the heart of this malaise we need to understand why the typical Briton increasingly feels that our 'political deal' is no longer fair, and that rising tides no longer lift all boats. At the bottom end, 17% of Britons lived in absolute low income households in 2014 (or 23% after housing costs), including 19% of children. At the same time, research made famous by Piketty et al showed that the share of income held by the top 1% rose by some 135% between 1980 and 2007 in both the United States and the United Kingdom. We cannot as a country continue to fail the majority of these children, and the generation to come after them, and ignore the fact that our system serves only a few well.

Taken together, these and the report's other recommendations support the development of a stable, coherent and navigable transition system for those aged 14-24. Ultimately, this system needs to be underpinned by reliable and publicly available data, fully funded, and owned by a single minister who can monitor its success. I hope you will get the chance read it - judging from the extent of media coverage it achieved, our analysis touched a chord with many whose experiences of school had not been very positive, or who worry about their own children.

I'm awaiting the government response and then the subsequent debate in the Lords with much anticipation. But to be honest, I'm not expecting miracles. Many of the recommendations are things that the government either isn't very interested in or frankly doesn't want to hear. That being said, I hope that the spotlight will start to swing a little in the direction of this hitherto underserved and overlooked group who are the lifeblood of our future. I

investing in all our young people today not only has significant long-term economic value, it also speaks loudly to the clamour for greater social justice and liberal values. But none of this will happen unless we get the system right. It's long overdue.

Claire Tyler is Liberal Democrat spokesperson on mental health in the Lords. She was a member of the Lords Select Committee on Social Mobility and is co-chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility

A RETURN TO REASON?

Adrian Slade finds hope for better politics in May's election results

I may be deluding myself but, following the May results, I get the feeling that, after an unbearably long six years of political disillusionment, a breath of fresh air and rationality may finally be re-entering British politics.

At last paranoia and prejudice may be on the turn. My tentative optimism is only marginally attributable to the Liberal Democrat election results. There were some pleasant surprises in the English towns and counties and a few isolated comforts in Scotland and Wales. Otherwise it was a rather disappointing 24 hours, particularly and undeservedly in London where Caroline Pidgeon fought such a good campaign.

However, far more important in the long term is that at last, across England, Scotland and Wales an electoral mindset of reason and relative tolerance seems to be returning in a way that nobody quite predicted.

Take Scotland, for example. Most pundits expected a walkover for the SNP with a virtual wipe out for all the other parties. The Sturgeon effect was supposedly impervious to anything Labour, the Tories or any other party might do to counter it. A resounding victory at the expense of all others, leading to a call for a second referendum on independence for Scotland, was to be the inevitable outcome. But it did not turn out quite like that.

What actually happened? The Nationalists lost six seats even including one to the Liberal Democrats, and, because Labour's left-of-Corbyn agenda got them nowhere and the Ukip fired nothing but blanks, suddenly the Conservatives under a remarkably mid-to-left-of-centre leader, Ruth Davidson, gained 16 seats and became the principal party of opposition for the first time.

Was that because of their exciting programme for Scotland? Almost certainly not. Was it because Ruth Davidson proved to be an acceptably down to earth alternative to the ever neat and plausible Nicola Sturgeon? Possibly, but not enough to shake the absolute certainties of the SNP. No. A much more likely reason was the Tory commitment to Scotland remaining in the UK and Europe rather than the SNP approach of going independent and having to re-join Europe afterwards.

There was always something unrealistic and irrational about the SNP wanting to have it both ways when the most likely outcome would be exit from both the UK and Europe. It might or might not have happened but I suspect that this time around, for a growing number of Scots, radicalism may have become fine up to a point but not to the point of total break up. A little more reason was needed. Hence the need to register unease, in this instance by voting Tory.

Then there was London where, through the mouth of his millionaire candidate Zac Goldsmith, Australia's election whizz kid 'Sir' Lynton Crosby once again

chose to play the paranoia and fear card. He had done so successfully for David Cameron in 2015 when he conjured up the awful spectre of a government combining Ed Miliband's Labour Party with Nicola Sturgeon's dangerous Scottish Nationalists. The difference this time was not fear of other parties but the spectre of a 'radical' Muslim with lots of friends and associates in radical Muslim organisations, including Isis. The alleged devil incarnate was, of course, Sadiq Khan, a long-standing London MP and Labour's mayoral candidate.

Thank goodness for all Londoners it was a tactic that failed spectacularly, an argument that failed to hold the dirty water with which it was filled, a prejudiced and fear-filled campaign approach in which even Zac Goldsmith hardly seemed to believe.

Londoners rejected the Crosby approach overwhelmingly and London is mercifully the better for that. Liberal Democrats may regret, for good reason, that the admirable Caroline Pidgeon did not get the votes her campaign deserved but, if her unfairly modest result has helped to rid London of the tasteless prejudices of an Australian poll fixer and his gold-plated mouthpiece, we are all the better for that.

The results in London, Scotland, Wales and the English councils have one more important feature in common. Even in the prevailing atmosphere of an impending EU referendum the Ukip bandwagon failed to roll at anything approaching the speed the Faragists would have liked. Yes, they picked up seven seats in the Welsh Assembly, but none in Scotland, only two in London and only 58 in the English council elections. An average of 12% of the vote was hardly the breakthrough they were looking for while the Liberal Democrats were winning 15%, four councils and 378 seats.

Here again the electorate had acted more calmly and rationally than at any other time in the last five years. With the significant exception of Khan there were no outright winners in these elections but Khan's victory could be symbolic of a change of attitude in British politics that has also begun to show itself in other parts of the country. Call it reason. Call it tolerance. Call it a bid for calm and common sense rather than fear and prejudice.

There is a good chance that the handsome majority for working class Muslim Khan will preface a lowering of the electoral temperature on immigration and a greater sense of proportion on the Europe issue than the outgoing Mayor of London is currently peddling. That will be to the advantage of the whole UK.

Adrian Slade was the last president of the Liberal Party. His interviews with Liberal Democrat ex-ministers appeared in the September 2015 issue of the *Journal of Liberal History*

BACK FROM THE BRINK IN LIVERPOOL

The Lib Dems were close to being wiped out in a city they ran six years ago, but this year's election have seen a small but crucial revival, says Richard Clein

It was a tweet by a leading councillor and cabinet member for Housing, Frank Hont to a Labour candidate who lost to a Liberal Democrat in the only ward where there was already Lib Dem representation (Church) "No justice / a hard working, committed candidate loses to a clown." – which confirmed the arrogance of a party which believes it has a right to govern in Liverpool.

In fact, had Labour won Church and the Lib Dems not made any gains (which seemed a possibility after last year's meltdown) – the party would have been down to just one councillor out of 90 compared to having a majority of one just six years ago. The gloves are well and truly off again in a city which was in danger of becoming a one party state. Politics just got exciting again.

Having already drafted a fairly downbeat pre-polling day article talking about the above scenario, I'm glad to say the actual results do provide some hope for the future.

I wouldn't go as far as calling it a "Great Liverpool Liberal Democrat Revival", as coined by the city's Lib Dem chair and former Enfield Labour councillor Kris Brown, but a trebling of the mayoral vote and two gains in former strongholds (including one ward where Lib Dems lost by almost 3,000 votes just last year) does now position the party as the main challenger to Labour and confirms the crawl back has begun.

For the last year, thanks largely to veteran campaigner Richard Kemp, the Lib Dems have punched above their weight, with most of the electorate and the media assuming the party was the opposition. They weren't aware that it was actually the Greens with four councillors as opposed to Mr and Mrs Kemp who were the official opposition.

Now, at least, with 21% of the mayoral vote, compared to 6% in 2015 and a 16% share of the vote across the city compared to the Greens 10%, the statistics back up the claims.

Having said all of that, there wasn't a strong independent candidate this time around. In 2012 former BBC political reporter Liam Fogarty came second with an 8.4% vote share and the Liberal Party's Steve Radford also didn't throw his hat in the ring after securing 4.5% last time around.

The current mayor, Labour's Joe Anderson, as seen in *Private Eye*, could not be described as a unifying politician with his policy of selling off green space in the south of the city proving particularly unpopular. This could also explain the increase in LibDem support but whatever the reasoning, the mayor is of course now claiming the result shows support for some of his more unpopular policies.

Watch this space (before the mayor sells it).

What the result does prove, if ever proof was needed, is that scousers, as the saying goes, would "vote for a pig with a red rosette", and makes previous LibDem domination of the city even more remarkable. Incidentally Fogarty is rumoured to be keeping his powder dry for a go at what is being dubbed the 'super-mayor' for Greater Merseyside with elections due next year.

Readers may also be interested to know that the Liberal party is still just about alive in the city with Steve Radford retaining his Tuebrook and Stoneycroft seat with almost 80% of the vote, despite "Steve Radford's candidate" (former Lib Dem cabinet member Berni Turner) losing in 2015. The Liberals hold one of the other seats in the ward so have two on the council.

In the Police and Crime Commissioner election, Wirral councillor Chris Carubia finished third holding onto his deposit, with Liberator collective member Kiron Reid choosing not to stand this time around, after securing more than 11% of the vote beating the Lib Dem in 2012 into fourth place.

Momentum is key in politics, as it is in football, and the Lib Dems will have to wait until 2018 for the next round of local elections. With the possibility of another six gains, the party could be back in double figures. Of course, if a week is a long time in politics, two years is an eternity and who knows how the regional situation (with an unpopular Labour super-mayor) may impact the campaign. Like Leicester City's supporters, we can but dream.

Richard Clein is a member of the Liberator Collective who lives in Liverpool and fought Sefton Central in the 2010 general election

COMMUNITY POLITICS BUT NO COMMUNITY

A new book observing London's population shows a city grappling huge population churns of rich and poor, finds Wendy Kyrle-Pope

Labour's Sadiq Khan is now Mayor of London, The turnout was up from the last election, but still more than half of registered voters did not bother to vote. Is it always like this in London, or are there other factors? We should be worrying about this lack of engagement in the democratic process, because Khan has inherited a London much changed from the one Ken Livingstone won in 2000.

This election, and what started as a book review of Ben Judah's excellent book 'This is London', has become an examination of how much London has changed since the start of this century, the time of the first mayor.

In his book, Judah travelled the length and breadth of the city, sleeping rough with Roma beggars in Hyde Park underpasses, meeting tube cleaners, Filipino slaves, prostitutes, smuggled people from Afghanistan, wannabe gangsters, workmen who sleep 15 to two tiny rooms in a terraced house - a gamut of the underclass of Greater London.

It is a beautifully written tale of such woe, very emotive yes, but, and this is its brilliance, it is underpinned by statistics, academic studies and the Government's own figures.

How many of, even those active in public services, realise the extent, the numbers of souls whose lives are so far removed from our own. A city within a city, of poverty and deprivation, with 600,000 illegal immigrants at the bottom of the pile.

Boris Johnson admitted in an article in the Times in May 2014 that there were half a million illegal immigrants living in London, many of whom, he argued, should be granted legal status through an amnesty. The London School of Economics puts the UK total at 860,000, with 600,000 living in London, the latter being more than the population of Edinburgh. More than 40% have arrived since 2001.

SPEED OF CHANGE

It is the speed in which population changes in London this century, both in terms of numbers and make-up, have come about which has taken everyone by surprise. In 2007, Livingstone was quoted as saying that London was years away from becoming 50/50 ethnically, and when the news of London becoming

a 'majority-minority' city was first announced by the Office for National Statistics at the end of 2012, the Evening Standard tucked the news away on page 10.

With its population at 8.1m in 2011 (growing at roughly 1.0m per decade, due mainly to immigration) London is eight times larger than the next largest city in Britain, a ratio commonly found in the developing world.

David Goodhart, in his 2014 article for Demos, states that in 1971 white British made up 86% of the London population; it was 58% in 2001 and in 2011 it had fallen to 45%, which means 17% of London's white

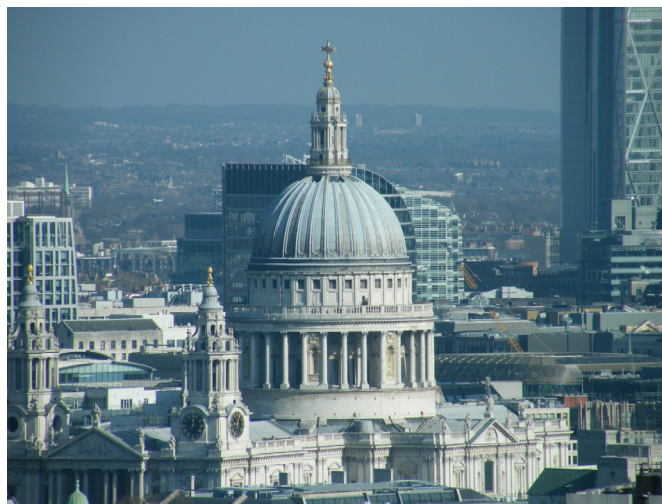
British residents left the city in the decade after 2001.

This exodus, at about half a million per decade, has been fairly constant since the 1970s. These changes, plus the influx of those at the very bottom of the socio-economic scale, have led to a big reduction in the proportion of the middle income/middle status people, who form the core of any country. There are

many reasons for this flight of the middle, but house prices and employment opportunities are probably the most important. From an onion shaped population (in which the vast majority live in the middle socially and economically) we are moving towards a pyramid-shaped population, with the very wealthy people at the top, and an ever growing number of the very poor at the bottom. This is not the shape of even Dickensian London; it is the shape of medieval London.

According to the University College London publication London 2062 (edited by Sarah Bell and James Paskins) London's 'revolving door' saw total inflows/outflows of 6.8m in the period 2002-2011. In around one third of London boroughs the equivalent of half their populations moves in or out every five years. There is churn in all big cities, but not normally on this scale (again, at least in the developed world), and the scale of the churn in population itself which makes stable communities increasingly rare. There are many factors behind the churn - a large number of students, changes to family structure, the cost of living in London and high levels of immigration.

The report also points out that London sucks in



large numbers of people in their twenties and thirties (45% of all advertised graduate jobs are in London) from the rest of Britain and the world (an age group which is mobile and for whom a settled, rooted life is not yet a priority) and tends to expel everyone else. London loses population in all age groups except those aged 20-29. As London 2062 puts it: "London acts primarily as a city for work, where all other aspects of the life-cycle are hard to sustain."

Some areas of London now resemble a transit camp for both the very rich and the very poor, both of whom exhibit the same rootlessness and lack of connection.

Take Kensington and Chelsea for example, the richest borough. Since 2001, the British population has shrunk from 50% to 39%. In it, 40% of residents (the highest in London) describe themselves as having no British identity at all and Judah found that in Chester Row (one of the richest streets in London), 52% were born overseas, and 40% do not have a British passport. In the most luxurious, expensive blocks of flats, only three out of 20 or so have permanent residents; the rest are investments for the international super rich, who may use them a few weeks a year. Judah discovered that there are about 15,000 servants in Mayfair alone, more than were employed in Georgian times.

At the other, much larger end of the spectrum, the displacement story is even clearer (without even considering illegal immigration). Around 20% of low-skill jobs are taken by people born abroad and according to Ian Gordon of the LSE wages in the bottom 20% may have been depressed by as much as 15% in periods of peak inflow.

Until the big immigration surge starting in the late 1990s there were fewer people in London employed at the very bottom end of the labour market than elsewhere in the country, and they were better paid. Mass immigration has expanded the numbers at the bottom and reduced the pay gap. According to Peter Carter, of the Royal College of Nursing, nearly one third of new London nurses have been recruited from abroad in the past year, mainly from Africa and Eastern Europe. Yet over the same period NHS London has axed nearly one quarter of its training places.

BEDS IN SHEDS

Gordon also states that 40% of London immigrants from poor countries in the 2000s have been accommodated through an increase in persons per room. Judah sites many examples in the eastern European communities, and we hear about 'beds in sheds' in Hounslow. Rapid immigration has also impacted social housing, which still makes up about one quarter of London's housing stock. And about one in six of the social housing stock is occupied by foreign nationals, which suggests a much higher proportion of new lets is going to newcomers. As Eric Kaufmann and Gareth Harris put it in *Changing Places*: "Incomers are willing to trade room size and amenities for proximity to co-ethnic networks and employment."

"Is the rate of change, the weight of poverty, the yawning gulf between rich and poor, about to overwhelm us?"

London sells itself as a wealthy, multi-cultural city, the economic, political and cultural hub of the UK, one of the world's great cities. But are we kidding ourselves, believing the hype handed down from City Hall, via the Standard and other media? Believing that our liberal, inclusive values will solve all the problems? Is the rate of change, the weight of poverty, the yawning gulf between rich and poor, about to overwhelm us?

London is a relatively tolerant city – with about 90% of people saying people from different backgrounds get on with one another. That does not mean there is much common life being forged across ethnic boundaries. A recent survey asked people about their friendships and contacts across ethnic boundaries and found that relative to its ethnic minority population London is actually the least integrated region in the United Kingdom.

It also found London to be the least integrated by age and class. It is often pointed out that public housing and expensive private housing nestle next door to each other in many parts of the capital, but that does not mean that the people in the different forms of housing have significant social contact or a shared sense of community and cohesion. And that is the challenge which faces us, not just as political activists, or councillors, but as Londoners, as human beings.

It matters politically. Migration is far and away the biggest issue in the upcoming European Referendum. That Khan is a Remainer may help a bit, if he uses his honeymoon period to endorse the pro-European message. More importantly, our council, health, education, housing and police services are designed for a basically static, resident population; a population which has registered addresses; a population of those who are legally entitled to live in the UK; a population which is prepared to engage in the process of democracy, of being part of the larger community. It is this engagement which we are in danger of losing, this connection to a greater whole.

Judah's book offers no answers, just holds up a mirror. If we are to succeed as political activists, we must do more than just wring our hands and point at the inequalities, lack of housing, inadequate schools, struggling health services.

Without any foreseeable increase in government spending to improve housing standards, schools and medicine, all we can do is to go back to our liberal roots and try to improve encourage better communications and understanding between people, finding common bonds and issues to bind community cohesion, gently encouraging participation in democracy, street by street, ward by ward. And hoping that among the billionaires, one will come forward and become a Peabody, and start to build the affordable, rented accommodation we so desperately need, and the schools and clinics to serve them.

Wendy Kyrle-Pope is a member of the Liberator Collective.
Ben Judah's *This is London* is published by Picador

WHY LIBERALS LOST IN SCOTLAND

The tragedy of the Scottish Liberal Democrats' near-demise in May's elections was so predictable it could be written in advance, writes new arrival in Scotland Gareth Epps

The failure of Liberalism in Scotland now threatens to become terminal or at least long-term. Its support base in the Highlands is seriously eroded. Policy debate is sterile – and stifled. Creativity or innovation is frowned upon; and the party is repositioning itself, wittingly or not, to be a Unionist party. Meanwhile the fresh thinking and debate happens elsewhere.

Many of the seeds for this self-destruction were sown before 2010 or even 2007. Some of them mirror the more spectacular demise of the Scottish Labour Party, which even their charismatic, fresh leader Kezia Dugdale has been unable to halt.

Three months prior to the elections, the eclipse of Labour by Ruth Davidson's resurgent Tories could be seen in the polls. The Better Together fiasco had, of course, given Davidson a chance to raise her profile after a series of dour, near-invisible Tory leaders in Holyrood.

However, for more than a decade the amount of organisational development in Scotland has been far too little. Constituencies held in part due to a lack of effective opposition found visitors surprised at how disorganised they were, both in 2011 and 2015. Hence the number of seats with an effective local Liberal Democrat organisation can be seen all too well from election results.

The policy offer from the Liberal Democrats is a good example of how lessons haven't been learned. Ad hoc initiatives with no common thread or narrative have sprung up, while key policy areas are ignored.

On the face of it, the revival of the Lib Dem call for a penny on income tax to pay for education is populist and good political positioning. However, with Labour copying the initiative barely a week later, it was somewhat buried. Worse, though, it was inauthentic. It is no surprise that a Corbyn-led Labour Party opposing cuts would call for the use of tax-raising powers; but for a Lib Dem party with a leader loyal to the cuts imposed by Clegg and Alexander on the UK, at its politest it reads as a significant shift in direction, not matched by other policies.

Leader Willie Rennie spent much of the autumn and winter either opposing calls to scrap replacement of Trident, or urging all-women shortlists or other gender balance measures.

The former is an unpopular response in a country that remains significantly opposed to nuclear weapons. The latter, whatever the merits of the debate (and the party's record on equality has gone from barely acceptable to utterly shocking) is utterly irrelevant in the run-up to an election where achieving 50% of women MPs is subsumed by the more immediate risk

of having no MSPs at all.

Yes, it is a knee-jerk to the mismanagement that removed the capable Alison McInnes from the top of a regional list leaving no woman realistically likely to get elected even in a good election. The time to call for action in a 2020 Westminster election was not the run-up to an existential fight in 2016.

Contrast that with the surge of political thinking among post-referendum Yes voters. The founding of the Common Weal radical grassroots think tank – producing some excellent pamphlets in a manner radical liberals should welcome – is the most obvious sign of this. It has led to a stronger pro-independence challenge to the SNP Government – for example, on land reform: a subject where Liberals led for decades but Holyrood under successive regimes has prevaricated. The movement includes local groupings, although accounts of these welcoming those less enthusiastic of independence are notably mixed.

FRACKING MESS

Contrast it, too, with the mess Rennie got into on fracking. The Scottish Lib Dems conference voted, by a clear majority, to support fracking – backing an 'evidence-based' amendment, at the same time as Scottish public opinion opposed it. Then (Liberator 377) having been ambushed and not even tried to win the debate, the party leadership used a hastily-constructed veto to sideline the policy, so the manifesto talked about opposing fracking for reasons of tackling climate change.

"Willie's actions serve explicitly to reverse, disregard and dismiss a clear expression of the sovereign will of the Scottish Party membership.... unconstitutional", fulminated one member.

The policy vacuum and existence of the likes of Common Weal, though, only serve to highlight the absence of a strategy. Unless that strategy is to do nothing that is uniquely distinguishable from the Tories, that is.

The party in Holyrood appears to function as a standalone entity. Not only on land reform does it act in a manner that makes Liberals look askance. The Nats' 'named person' initiative gives the state the right to pry into the life of every family in Scotland, through a designated non-family member who can write reports to snoop on any aspect of a child's life. It is opposed by the Tories and a broad coalition of organisations that (worryingly) includes the Christian Institute. Yet the Lib Dems supported it going through Parliament despite a complete absence of evidence that it would protect children from harm, and plenty that it would intrude on children and parents.

This managerial approach seems to cause a wider lack of engagement with the large parts of Scotland that are actively debating policy. Last autumn, a Government-sponsored cross-party commission on local government finance reported. While the Lib Dems held a consultative session on their conference, no firm policy debate has been had. Given the three options on offer included a local income tax and a serious bid to introduce a Land Value Tax as a form of local taxation, it is surprising the engagement has stopped there. But this seems typical.

WIDER MALAISE

It also reflects a wider malaise – of attitude. In recent months it has been striking how many Scottish Lib Dems have described themselves and the party as ‘unionist’, and how many reject the term ‘federalist’ as it appears in the preamble to the party’s constitution.

With understanding of the term ‘federalist’ declining and the (unhelpful) move away from federalism in terms of governance of England, the party’s distinctiveness declines still further. This distinction is particularly pronounced among the distinctly right wing members joining after the 2015 apocalypse, who seem even less willing to tolerate the party’s historic position and welcome its identification with Conservatives.

This is not as striking, though, as the complete absence of a narrative to make Scottish Liberal Democrats appeal to any of the 45% of the electorate who voted YES to independence in 2014.

While Rennie has paid lip service to encourage pro-independence liberals to remain in the Lib Dems, this assurance has remained lukewarm and the drift of members away continues. The new joiners post-May are overwhelmingly opposed to independence – a far cry from the pre-referendum position in which a significant minority of members were in favour.

That minority continues to drift away out of politics or to other parties. Many are engaged in policy debate and discussion, or involved in NGOs or campaign groups. Surprisingly few have joined other parties. The new members appear even more hostile to those they charmingly refer to as ‘closet Nats’; meanwhile, the dearth of new ideas on the No side continues. The party appears to be wanting to paint itself in a reactionary corner. If it is not careful, it will stay there until it shrivels and dies.

The killer question – which no Scottish Lib Dem has been able to answer – is this: what are the positive reasons for a Yes supporter to vote Liberal Democrat? I have attempted to coax an answer from various members. All of their responses begin with the words “The SNP are wrong because...”

The party’s obsessive negativity towards a party winning elections with 50% of the popular vote is a very effective vote-limiting tool. In a country with longstanding historic hostility towards the Conservatives, the strategy of willingly working with

“There is a complete absence of a narrative to make Scottish Liberal Democrats appeal to any of the 45% of the electorate who voted Yes to independence”

them while offering no platform to the successful SNP is testing to destruction the meaning of the word counterintuitive.

Why not constructive opposition? Why not work, in a Parliament that encourages consensus, to improve Scottish laws in a Liberal direction, where there is a broad consensus? The party will at least have plenty of time to reflect.

I drafted all the above in February to make the point that this was all mostly predictable.

As a postscript, I note that in Liberator 377, Caron Lindsay penned a very on-message article expressing optimism for the

party in Scotland. SNP bad, Tories identical, coalition toxic, but all now on the mend. What I struggled to see was the promised radicalism alongside the breezy optimism. While the manifesto had one or two eye-catching policies and was strong on putting education first, it lacked headline-grabbing ideas.

Rennie profited from the Lib Dems being regarded as a ‘major party’ for broadcast purposes, oddly given recent electoral performances. The campaign itself was upbeat, characterised by fresh and different photo-opportunities (the most memorable of which was possibly less well-judged; an appearance at a city farm resulting in live TV footage of an amorous pair of pigs behind an oblivious Rennie).

But that hasn’t stopped members being open, if discreet, about the need for radical change or even wondering if the best channel for Liberalism in Scotland is the Scottish Liberal Democrats any more.

The Scottish political marketplace is crowded. The left has plenty of radical pro-independence groups; the SNP in an effort to be all things to all people appropriates any space it can. We know what Labour and the Tories are.

The Lib Dems’ lack of a strategy is equalled by the continued unpopularity of the Coalition in a country where working with the Tories is toxic. Rennie had countered this, effectively, by pointing out that the success of the SNP and Tories was in each other’s self-interest; a line which more than most caught the public mood.

So when the final TV debate opened with a shouting match between Nicola Sturgeon and Ruth Davidson, Rennie could have turned to camera and said: “I stand for a different kind of politics.” But he chose not to, and his biggest cheer was reserved for the kind of anti-independence rant that could have come from Davidson herself.

That, in essence, is the Scottish Liberal dilemma.

Gareth Epps is a member of the Liberator Collective

SURVIVAL PLAN

The Liberal Democrats could face extinction unless they swap mindless activism for arguing for a liberal society, says Michael Meadowcroft

At the election before I joined the Liberal Party in 1958 we had six MPs and had polled just 2.7% of the vote but, despite what some of the media enjoyed saying, there was never a possibility that the party would disappear.

And of course we recovered to achieve almost 20% of the vote less than 20 years later. Those of us who joined in those far off days, and who surmounted the setbacks of 1970 and 1979 know that today we have again to take the message out to local associations, one by one.

There is, however, a crucial difference today. In the 1950s Liberal activists understood what they believed and knew what the party's aims and purposes were. There was little pavement campaigning and less leafleting, but members were well able to argue the party's case and even to recruit and support members.

Now we have hyper activity, candidates everywhere, a keen understanding of modern campaigning, but little understanding of the nature of the liberal society that all this effort is in theory working towards. As it happens, liberalism - and here I follow Tim Farron's and Nick Clegg's emphasis on the word - is potentially the most attractive of political philosophies. All it lacks is the activists to promote it in literature, in debate and on doorsteps.

Without a philosophy that moves individuals to give up time, energy and money, and a vision of a free, compassionate and vibrant Liberal society which can transform communities and countries, there is now a real possibility that 2020 could see an even worse election result than 2015.

Bear in mind that the Conservatives are determined to cut the number of constituencies and to impose a wholly self-serving alteration to rules for their boundaries which will undermine the benefits of incumbency to the detriment of our standard bearers. Without a healthy 'core' vote there is no future for the party.

There are, of course, electors who join the party because they are attracted by local campaigning or are grateful to a Liberal Democrat councillor. Alas, the experience is that such members do not tend to last, not least because they are not imbued with a burning desire to create a liberal society in our highly illiberal times.

All too often our Focus leaflets have little or no policy content and, frankly, could be put out by any party - including Ukip. Many of our MPs and councillors have been weighed down with casework, struggling to attend meetings and burdened with delivering vast numbers of leaflets themselves.

It amazes me how few do actually burn out and give up, particularly given the perpetual tyranny of Focus, which has to be put out more and more often to make

up for the lack of a dedicated Liberal Democrat vote.

One of my heresies is a belief that the long term obsession with targeting has been a disaster. The concept itself seems self-evidently sensible and effective. Surely it is beneficial to concentrate all the party's resources on the key marginal seats? For a single election it may well be effective and deliver results, but the consequence of continuing it is hugely detrimental. In the present political situation it means concentrating on fewer and fewer wards with an inevitably declining number of activists from non-target wards available to campaign elsewhere, even if they were prepared to move.

ABANDONED PRESENCE

If wards are not contested over a number of years then their activists rapidly wither away. No wonder that we poll badly in European Parliament elections when the constituencies covered huge regions, in most of which we had abandoned the Liberal Democrat presence. We cannot have a healthy core vote and targeting.

I didn't for a moment think in 1958 when I began, almost immediately, to speak and write on Liberalism, that half a century later I would still be trying not just to coax an unevangelised electorate to support Liberal values but more perversely to persuade Liberal colleagues to have confidence in their beliefs. With but few exceptions we have a more illiberal society today than at any time over those 50 years and it is Liberals who must bear the blame. We have manifestly failed to believe in those values and, as a consequence, have lacked the confidence to proselytise and to proclaim the most relevant and attractive political philosophy ever. It is not difficult to win the argument for Liberalism: the arguments are there, and they just need promoting with intellectual rigour and with an awareness of how to apply them in the wider community.

Policy is important and campaigning is essential, but we need an awareness and understanding of the basis for those policies and that campaigning.

I am arguing, as ever, for a values-based politics and for enthusiasm and commitment in the vision of a Liberal society.

MINDLESS ACTIVISM

Manifestly, the party is never again going to flourish primarily based on mindless activism and extra millions of Focus leaflets. Quite apart from the impossibility of maintaining the activity without burn out, or even of permanently out-delivering opponents, Ukip - and, in Scotland, the SNP - have grabbed our anti-politics niche, often in identical wording to countless Liberal leaflets over recent years.

Ukip spouts dangerous nonsense, redolent of 1930s right-wing scapegoating, but it is the Teflon party, and nothing sticks to it. It has no policies, only the two

aspirations of getting out of the EU and stopping immigration. The Ukip mindset can only be defeated by an alternative vision of society - a pluralist, diverse, convivial, attractive and liberal society. We now have just four years to grasp and imbibe this view of society and to carry it to the country. The new document being co-ordinated by Duncan Brack will be the basis for the subsequent policy building blocks.

The responsibility for creating a Liberal society rests with Liberals. There is no point blaming the Conservatives -

today's society is what they believe in and will abuse power to sustain. It is what they are like. Nor is Labour to blame - they are a hegemonic party with no concept of pluralism and of the human values that inspire individuals and which underpin society.

We do not have to accept today's prevailing values. They survive only because there is a vacuum of alternatives. We have to believe passionately that a Liberal society can bit by bit transform how we can live.

Alone of political philosophies, Liberalism puts human values ahead of economics. It believes in "the market where possible, the state where necessary." It does not blindly accept economic determinism but places economics at the pragmatic service of society. It understands that human nature is a mixture of selfishness and altruism and that the aim of politics is to enhance altruism and to diminish selfishness. It understands that we are "spirit, soul and body" and that culture and linkages are vital after food and shelter. It understands that electors want to vote for 'right thinking' views and should not be bribed nor pandered to.

If electors no longer believe electoral promises, the appeal must be on an alternative view of society, - what kind of society would there be under a Liberal Democrat government?

We need to make a co-ordinated case for the revival and entrenchment of community values. We need to espouse real localism and the revival of local democracy. It is uniquely Liberal, necessary for democracy - and parties - to thrive and is urgent that it does so. We must not confuse local government with regional government - both are needed. A whole tranche of services should be returned to local (or regional) government, coupled with a mechanism to equalise financial capacity between local (and regional) authorities. Otherwise these authorities should be legally able to raise income from any source not specifically retained by central government - including land value taxation, the case for which is more valid than ever given housing price inflation and the shortage of building land.

We need to state our belief in the public service and to enhance the role of those who work in government at all levels.

We need to look at bringing relevant services back within direct government responsibility over a set period of time. This would be generally popular. It should include bringing academies back within the

"The UKIP mindset can only be defeated by an alternative vision of society - a pluralist, diverse, convivial, attractive and liberal society"

purview of local authorities, as well as bodies such as the Environment Agency.

We need to have a process for re-examining whether currently privatised services could and should be brought back into the public sphere. It would be easy, and popular, to re-nationalise the railways and it could be accomplished without cost as current franchises end. It was narrow-minded ideology to prevent the publicly owned East Coast company even bidding for a new franchise.

We need to make the persuasive case for internationalism, not least the importance of the European Union and its role in maintaining peace, security and development, as well as dealing with the economic regulations required to deal with globalisation.

We need to have the great courage to explain that it is possible to enhance the public's health at a much lower cost than current NHS expenditure. For instance, it needs to be explained that virtually all mass screening is not cost-effective. Also we need to move progressively to 'limited list' prescribing, which is beneficial both to the exchequer and to health. Also with regional authorities, most of the NHS could be devolved. As Enoch Powell pointed out 40 years ago, unless the power to tax and the power to spend are in the same hands, it is impossible to resolve the problems of the health service.

We need to make the case for the vital role of the arts in a Liberal society.

We need to make the case for the single transferable vote as the means of rescuing British politics and, in particular, changing the style and role of the political parties. All other PR systems, with party lists of one type or another, give more power to parties which is precisely what is not needed at the present time.

All the above are policies and approaches that can only be taken by the Liberal Democrats and constitute the party's unique selling point. There are different levels of challenge inherent in the above points. It is up to the party officers to determine how brave it feels it can be.

When arguing for the Liberal case, each issue can be advocated under the rubric "Why vote for the parties that get it wrong when you can vote for the party that gets it right." This can be a running introduction over the whole campaign, applied in turn to each policy area.

Electors are not fools; on the contrary they are very shrewd, but if we do not make the case they will not have the view of society, and the arguments for it, on which they can exercise a judgement. We must take the case to them.

Michael Meadowcroft was Liberal MP for Leeds West 1983-87. This article is an abridged version of his Viv Bingham Memorial Lecture

OFFSHORE CENTRE

Nothing in European Union membership poses a threat to England's character and patriotism demands a 'remain' vote, says Tom Barney

It has been rightly said that the campaign to remain in the European Union has lacked passion. And one aspect of the case which is not being made, and which would lend it some passion, is the argument that a characteristic Englishness is not only something to take pride in for itself, but something that, placed at full strength in Europe, contributes valuably to a sense of the continent as a whole.

I say 'Englishness' because I believe that Europhobia is essentially an English problem. Scotland and Wales more naturally think of their relations both with the other nations of the UK and directly with the EU, and perceive the tensions and ambiguities of those relations.

Conrad Russell remarked, in his *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Liberalism*: "Our commitment to the European Union... arises from a... pluralist approach to power. Indeed, it is probably not a coincidence that Jo Grimond, the leader who committed us to Europe even before the Treaty of Rome, was a Scot, and one who saw Scottish politics from the ultra-pluralist perspective of the Orkney Islands, to which Edinburgh, not London, is the encroaching centre."

And Kenneth O Morgan has written (*Prospect*, November 2014): "The idea of a regional Europe, within a framework of multi-layered governance, has also caught the imagination of Welsh intellectuals... The 'Motor Scheme', which brings together Baden-Württemberg, Lombardy, Rhône Alps and Catalonia with Wales in joint programmes... has given the European idea real momentum in [Welsh] business and higher education."

The UK government is disinclined to see beyond the borders of England when considering UK interests; and the cause of a large part of England's political problems is that the UK government inflicts policy on all matters from the centre. Yet Europhobes who talk of a loss of British sovereignty are happy to arrogate more power to the centre, and would be encouraged in this if Britain leaves the EU.

Despite this, the process has already begun by which local government in England deals directly with the EU, and directly with local government in other EU countries. This should be emphasised far more, partly for the benefits it has brought, such as regeneration funding, and partly because it promotes a saner view of what England is than we too commonly hear, one which better fits England to be a modern European nation.

The view that it promotes is one of England not as a monolith but as a loose collection of variegated regions. For all their variety these regions cohere as 'England', but they do not do so, I believe, because of a common quality of Englishness.

It is easy to assume that all members of a category such as this belong to it because they all have some attribute in common. But a well-documented alternative model (see, for example, *Linguistic Categorisation* by John R Taylor) is that of prototypes. In this we naturally think of a category in terms of a representative or typical example of it; other examples are more peripheral and less representative. A chair, for example, is a prototypical piece of furniture, a hat stand is more peripheral, and we may argue over whether a television set counts as furniture at all.

ILL-DEFINED AND PERMEABLE

Certain things follow from this. One is that the boundaries of categories are necessarily somewhat ill-defined and permeable. This principle is embodied in the notorious difficulty of defining the boundaries of the English regions. Does Derbyshire belong to the North, or Essex to East Anglia? This has been a problem for advocates of regional government (I do not suggest it is insoluble). But though political boundaries must be fixed, those of allegiance need not be – we can feel the pull of more than one place. And even political boundaries can reflect such ambiguity: Barnsley, for example, belongs to both the Leeds and Sheffield city regions.

Another consequence of the prototype model is that members of one category can resemble those of another. Historically the cloth trade has created and maintained close links between Norfolk and the Low Countries. It is thanks to these centuries-old links that it is today possible to fly direct from Norwich to Amsterdam. This ancient closeness has endured. It and other examples give us a greater affinity with the European mainland than we have sometimes supposed.

A third consequence is that some members of the same category may not have much or even anything in common with each other. Item A may resemble item B, item B item C, item C item D and item D item E; but items A and E may not at all resemble each other. It is the chain of resemblances which makes us regard A and E as members of the same category.

England constitutes just such a chain of resemblances. It is a country of very strikingly different landscapes, peoples and activities. There is great variety even in the ways the English language is used, and many more languages are nowadays spoken here. Still, this association of regions constitutes an entity despite the fluid nature of its parts, the looseness of their association and the haziness of the boundaries between them. That entity can take its place in a UK which is a similarly free and easy association with Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland; and not only can England as a whole do this, but so can any part of it in its own right.

What is more, and this point is critical, the entire UK, any of its constituent nations and, certainly in the case of England, the whole of it or any part of it can take its place in Europe and European affairs. This is not a careful and logical segmentation, or allocation of powers and functions. It is a matter of ambiguities and overlaps of authority and power, and of cross-fertilisation across the permeable boundaries.

As David Cannadine has pointed out in *The Undivided Past*, the claims of nationhood have throughout history been counteracted by the effects of religion; of monarchies which ruled over multiple peoples; of trading empires often established by tiny city states; and by languages spoken across national boundaries, and dialects (itself a question-begging word) spoken within them. And as we know, modern attempts to draw national boundaries, for example in Europe and the Middle East after the first world war and in the process of decolonisation after the second, have often brought disaster.

JB Priestley, in an essay of 1967, gave two reasons for not wanting to join what was then the EEC. One was that those in favour tended to be philistine business people, excited only by the profit-and-loss account. "Most of our practical, hardheaded, no-nonsense men are strongly in favour of it. For thirty-five years now I have been at odds with these men... and it seems to me that I have always been right and they have always been wrong." The other reason was that Britain was not like the countries of the European mainland. "Do I want to find myself living merely on an offshore island? And the trouble is – I do. I am an offshore island man... these Europeans... share certain traditions strange to us... the Common Market isn't going to transform its character just to please us... sooner or later the whole style of our national life will have to be changed".

Priestley was certainly no reactionary or exploiter of docile minds: see his wartime broadcasts. But both his arguments are flawed. On the first point the debate has moved on. We still argue over the economics, but it is the politics which today are the real point of contention: those who hate the EU now do so mainly because they see British sovereignty compromised and the country's identity weakened – and here I am spending a morning at home to argue the contrary.

Priestley's second point, that Britain is an offshore island and should relish the character of one, is true, but he draws the wrong conclusion from it. Yes, we are offshore islanders: so what? This does not mean that unless we have an implacable barrier against the European mainland that character will seep away. The influence has often been in the reverse direction, even across the sea, with other EU nations looking fondly at what they admire in us. And I cannot see why the character of Great Britain as an offshore island is threatened by EU membership when that of Gotland or Sardinia is apparently not.

"We are offshore islanders: so what? This does not mean that unless we have an implacable barrier against the European mainland that character will seep away"

ECCENTRIC ISLANDERS

Oddly enough Priestley provides the answer to his own argument. "How can we go our own way, so many eccentric islanders...? The answer is... not to have our corners rubbed off by chaps from Clermont-Ferrand, Essen or Liège but to turn ourselves into even more eccentric islanders."

Quite so, but we do not have to make the choice. The process of turning ourselves into even more eccentric islanders is not threatened by anyone in Clermont-Ferrand, Essen or Liège – or Coimbra, Göteborg, Debrecen or Plovdiv come to that.

We and all these places can pursue our eccentricities at full strength, delight in them and, through our co-operation in the EU and the opportunities for easy travel it has provided, delight in each other's too.

For all the range and variety of England, and of the whole UK, it is possible to take in that great panorama with a single sweep of the mind's eye; sometimes, as on a long train journey, with a complex but unified sweep of the physical eye. This is the England where "fields were building-plots, and poplars cast long shadows over major roads", the England of amateur enthusiasts and voluntary organisations, of public libraries and public houses, of local campaigns, and with a deep sense that our place in a landscape and a community matters intensely to everyone.

This is an England which can tolerate the relaxed nature of its cohesion and of its external relations; an England which has no need to feel embattled, because its people have a strong sense of who they are. It is an England which contributes its many individualities – indeed eccentricities – to the greater panorama of Europe, which can feel comfortable there and enjoy exploring its differences and similarities with the other cultures it finds there.

Those who see in our membership of the EU a threat to the country and its power to act would prefer a country narrower, drearier, shallower, less cultured, less intelligent and more supine than we have. That is not England speaking from its heart. A vote to remain in the EU is an act of the highest patriotism.

Tom Barney is a member of Lancaster and Morecambe Liberal Democrats. He blogs at" <https://myarchivesblog.wordpress.com>



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**Rethinking gender
in revolutions and
resistance: lessons from
the Arab world**
by Said, Meari and Pratt
Zed Books 2015 £19.99

Five years ago, during the Tahrir Square protests, the Egyptian military stripped and humiliated the young female demonstrator who came to be known as the girl in the blue bra. It is an image few will forget, and it symbolised the fate of the women who were often in the front lines, risking their lives to overthrow corrupt regimes during the Arab Spring. Since then, they have mostly been pushed back into more traditional female roles. These essays examine how women fight for a voice in nations in transition. It challenges the idea that women can either be submissive Muslims or secular feminists.

It opens with a moving account of how Palestinian women have withstood sexualised torture and rape by the Israeli Security Agency, without breaking during interrogation. "I didn't perceive my body as my own body: it was the body of all Palestinian Arabs and all those oppressed," says a 24-year-old 'struggler' against what she sees as Zionist colonialism.

The Israeli interrogators had hoped that Muslim sensitivity would break the young women through the shame and stigma that rape would bring, but the women re-framed the experience as one in which they represented all Palestinians resisting injustice. The author warns us not to subject all Muslim women to Orientalism, casting them as passive and backward. Yet, unfortunately, she does not acknowledge that these women do face stigma and rejection when they return to Palestinian society, despite their bravery. In other words, the West's Orientalist caricature of some Muslim men is depressingly accurate.

Several chapters recount the 2011 Egyptian revolution in which the media and many Egyptians placed the blame on women who were assaulted, rather than the soldiers abusing them.

As a general told CNN: "The arrested women were not like your daughter or mine. These were girls who camped out in tents with male protesters." Women who would not stick to the traditional script



REVIEWS

of female immobility and silence were hauled off for 'virginity tests'. Yet, many of those demonstrating believed the New Egypt would embrace the New Woman. Instead, women are still bearing the burden for their entire family's 'honour', where men decide how women dress, when they leave the home and when they conceive. Let's not forget that Egypt also has one of the world's highest rates of female genital mutilation, although the authors don't mention it.

The most illuminating chapters are about Libya and Tunisia. Gaddafi certainly widened opportunity for women, signing and ratifying numerous international conventions of gender equality, in part to appear modern. Yet, women who had been raped in Gaddafi's Libya could expect to be held responsible, sent for 'social rehabilitation'.

The growing Wahhabist Islamist movement in Libya, funded by the Saudis, cleverly linked women's rights with immoral, alien, un-Islamic Western ways, meaning that when Gaddafi fell, gender equality went with him. Now, Muslim women campaign in favour of repealing their equal rights, and in favour of allowing men to beat them whenever they please. Restrictions on polygamy have been reversed, and women are hounded out of public life. Female members of Parliament, only present because the West insisted their seats were guaranteed in the new constitution, find the microphone is cut when they speak. A female professor being driven by her chauffeur is stopped and attacked for traveling with a man who is not her 'guardian'.

Meanwhile in Tunisia secular feminists and women active in Islamic charities struggle to find common ground in helping economically marginalised women. Again, the Islamists portray the

Westernisation imposed by the previous regime as culturally inauthentic and illegitimate. Women therefore have to decide how far to engage with political Islam so the interpretation of Islam is not left to extremists. Reading these essays, it is clear Tunisia, the only democracy to emerge from the Arab Spring, surely deserves more support from the international community than it receives.

Rebecca Tinsley

**Beyond Religious
Freedom, the new
global politics of
religion**
by Elizabeth Shakman
Hurd
Princeton 2015 £19.95

The causes of religious tolerance and Liberalism walked hand in hand in Britain, and is something we more or less take for granted, notwithstanding the rants of the occasional secularist. By contrast several people have been taken by surprise by the residual anti-Roman Catholicism of many continental Liberal parties, the point being that the Roman church was one of the bastions of high conservatism and tyranny to which they were opposed. For my part, I have found churches to be a part of community cohesion, though frequently crossed swords with red vicars, more on account of their politics than their faith.

On the world stage, so-called radical Islam has held centre-stage for well over a decade, and one sees uses of religion to ferment nationalisms across the Balkans, in Myanmar, and Sri Lanka to cite just a few examples. The particularly dodgy strategy, promoted, typically by American intelligence agencies, is to find

an 'acceptable' strain of a religion and promote it to some dubious end. The Israeli's promotion of Hamas against a secular Palestine Liberation Organisation can give you some idea of how that can go wrong.

Luckily Hurd doesn't seem to be advocating this. She defines three layers - governed religion ("religion as construed by those in positions of political and religious power"), expert religion (religion according to those who "generate policy-relevant knowledge"), and lived religion ("religion as practiced by everyday people and groups"). The first two are somewhat questionable, we have to hope for the best with the third, which is at imperfect vessel for the machinations of state and expert.

I have great hopes for the impact of the west on Islam. In a tolerant secular society, Islamic thinkers are able to think the unthinkable in terms of what they might be able to do in their more theocratically oriented home states. This will take time, much time. At the moment it is hampered by the scenarios of imperialism and poorly conceived western interventions – all of those countries ventured into to 'help'.

Maybe Hurd is amongst the 'experts' that the 'governed' or rather governors are listening to. If not, they might pick up this book.

Stewart Rayment

Blood of the Celts, the new ancestral story by Jean Manco Thames & Hudson 2015

The Celts are something of an enigma, we know where they are today, but little of how they got there and where they came from. Their paths records are archaeological; they left no written records of their own, but classical writers refer to them.

Manco draws together archaeological and linguistic archaeological evidence to map that trail. The Celts notably sacked Rome and Delphi within their movements. The Romans took their revenge, conquering the Celts of Galatia, Gaul, Iberia, indeed all apart from northern Britain (now Scotland) and Ireland.

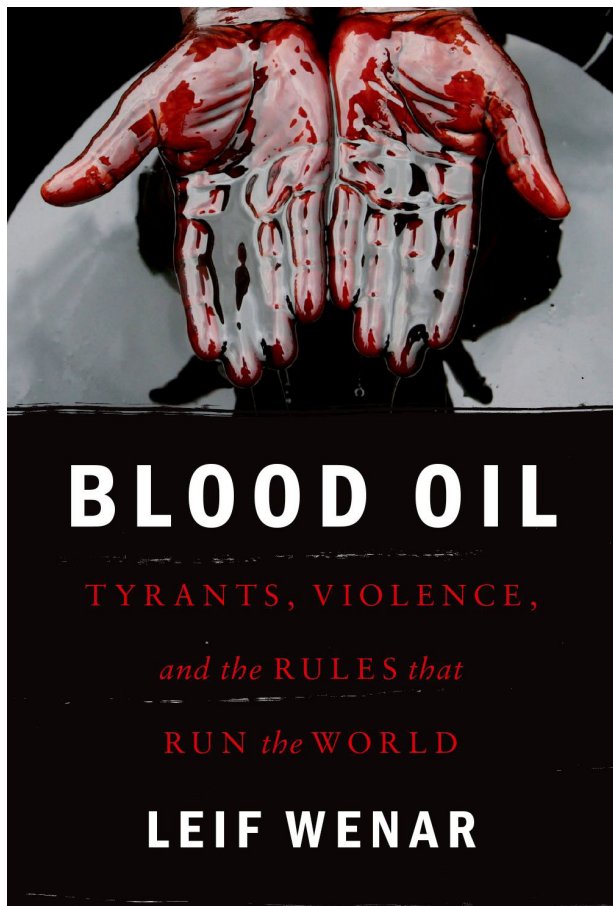
There are a number of issues where this story still resonates.

Scotland obviously; what of Wales if Brexit? More specifically is the story of migration, and in understanding of the phenomena has immediacy today. The answer to the question 'why Celts?' is that they were progressively on the move. A proto-Celtic people move out of Scythia (broadly Ukraine) under pressure from other peoples moving westwards. They follow trade routes that they'd previously established. They become the Hallstatt culture, become the La Tene and familiar. Under pressure from other migrants they move into Gaul and under such pressure again, they will follow their trade routes

into Italy, sacking Rome, the Balkans, Iberia and the British Isles. The descendants of the Germanic peoples behind this will become Saxons, and in turn will cause movements of those who have retained their Celtic tongues (lost under Roman dominance in Europe) in the British Isles, westwards and into Brittany. Manco's account of this greatly enhances our understanding of migration, albeit through the millennia that separate these events from the pressures of war and economic opportunity that motivate the current situation.

Let us not be mistaken, if the wars of Afghanistan/Pakistan and Iraq/Syria weren't there, there would still be a crisis that is not being responded to adequately. Against this, western politicians are reacting hypocritically – when Enoch Powell was making his rivers of blood speech more migrants were leaving Britain than coming here. The less said about the current response the better – get used to it, people are going to move, our economy needs them, and the job of the body politic is to facilitate this without ignoring the needs of indigenous communities.

Stewart Rayment



Blood Oil: Tyrants, violence and the rules that run the world by Leif Wenar OUP

This book is for anyone who has surveyed the world's conflicts, and concluded, reluctantly, that 1) it's all about oil and so 2) there's nothing we can do about it. Rooted in both morality and common sense, Wenar provides practical proposals for how the international community can bring transparency and accountability to the profoundly corrupt places where rulers treat their nation's mineral and oil wealth like a personal bank account.

Wenar illustrates how resource-rich authoritarian regimes use a combination of violence and bribery to control their populations, enabling rulers to sell their nation's wealth to foreigners at will. The buyers treat this stolen property as if the dictator selling it had legal title. In the rare cases when citizens do benefit (Norway, Botswana) strong civil society pre-dated the discovery of resources, enabling people to hold their rulers accountable. In the past 40 years, though, oil states have generally become poorer and

more violent, while their dictators purchase Western real estate and luxury goods. We, as consumers, are complicit in this theft while we buy products made of oil and other resources. Meanwhile, the citizens of Equatorial Guinea, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola etc, struggle to survive. As the UN Rapporteur on Torture said after a visit to Equatorial Guinea, "They don't even hide their torture instruments."

Throughout the book, the author draws parallels with the slave trade and the consumer boycott of slave sugar. He explores the geopolitical and commercial interests at work in appeasing monstrous dictatorships; and the stupidity of propping up Gulf countries where wealthy individuals fund international terrorism. He also explains how regimes use violence and a pyramid of subordination where patronage buys political loyalty from the military and other cronies.

Wenar's catalogue of greedy and corrupt rulers, and their degenerate behaviour, is depressing. Yet, he also shows how the age-old rule, "might is right" has been eroded. The Kimberly Process, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, and Publish What You Pay, all require more responsible behaviour by commodity buyers. Groups like Global Witness, Freedom House and Transparency International shine a light on the kleptomania, human rights abuse and environmental destruction in dismal, resource-cursed nations. And international efforts to stop money-laundering have been given new strength by anti-terrorism initiatives.

The author calls for a combination of incentives for those resource-rich countries adopting more transparent and accountable policies; and personalised targeted smart sanctions on autocrats bleeding their people dry. He also envisages a Clean Trade Act requiring us to stop buying resources from murderous dictators, finding more ethical sources. He provides a shopping list of benchmarks whereby we can measure whether trade is appropriate. Most important, he illustrates how it is in the interests of business and governments (even the Chinese) to abide by a more ethical approach. Layered with examples from history and

philosophical musing, Wenar's argument is convincing and empowering.

Rebecca Tinsley

Round the Horne Museum of Comedy Tim Astley (dir)

"Ooh Mr Horne, how bona to vada your dolly old eek again." I'm not entirely clear whether this show is about to tour further but it's a re-creation of the 1960s radio programme which brought (for the time) outrageous innuendo into the nation's Sunday dining rooms.

For those who don't remember it, Round the Horne scripts were always clean on the page. Listeners' imaginations minds did the rest.

The best remembered characters are Julian and Sandy, probably the first openly gay couple introduced to British audiences in a comedy context at a time when homosexuality was still illegal, who spoke in a gay slang called Polari.

Julian and Sandy are always engaged in different schemes and when the programme's host Kenneth Horne calls on them at solicitors 'Bona Law' he is told: "We've got a criminal practice that takes up most of our time, Jules does the briefs and I've taken silk."

Polari was genuine, but the words used by the programme's 'folk singer' Rambling Syd Rumpo meant nothing at all, though sounded as though they might as he naggered his artefacts and strained his cordwangle.

When the Liberal Revue ran we freely pillaged Round the Horne for inspiration and discovered, as the cast must have done, that audiences would sometimes miss clever satirical points but always got the rude jokes.

Round the Horne was part of Britain loosening its shackles of conformity 50 years ago, but how to bring a radio show alive on stage?

The Apollo Theatre Company solved this by rapid movement between sketch items and by staying faithful to the original characters - whether suave host Kenneth Williams, brought eerily back to life by Colin Elmer. If one line doesn't work, something will be along in seconds to make you laugh.

Items were glued together from different shows to make the equivalent of two 30 minute

programmes that wisely dispensed with purely topical references, though there were a few anachronisms (you needed to know who Eamonn Andrews was, for example). The howls emitting from Liberator's group in the audience showed the material still works.

Even 50 years on you can see how this show must have dragged British comedy out of the drawing room and formed the link between a faded variety style and Monty Python.

And can anyone answer Horne's imaginary quiz questions on completing the following song titles: "Over My Shoulder Goes..." or "I'm Gonna Sit Right Down And..."? Go on, I dare you. As Horne replies: "Well, it's not what you thought, athletic of Chatham."

Mark Smulian

Dragon Tales - The Runaway by Judy Hayman Practical Inspiration 2015 £5.99

Judy Hayman's dragons now enter their fourth and most testing adventure as autumn sets in. Without giving too much away (and in any case, the children will cheat, looking at Caroline Wolfe Murray's illustrations) the rescue is deemed to be the most exciting part. Sibling rivalry and stropmy aunts... all part of childhood's experiences (you might be reading the books to a young dragon yourself).

Judy has stood in the Liberal interest on a number of occasions, notably achieving a second place in East Lothian before ending up as Convenor of the Scottish Liberal Democrats. She has now turned her hand to writing something more substantial than a Focus leaflet. Contact her at: judy@haymana.plus.com

Stewart Rayment

Wednesday

To London and the office of the Remain campaign. (I judge it a little on the poky side and ask if they have thought of moving.) There I find my old friends Freddie and Fiona, late of the deputy prime minister's office, ensconced. I ask how their economic liberal think tank is getting on. "It's going really well." "Did you go to our fringe meeting at the Lib Dem spring conference?" "It was all about Uber." "Do you know it? It's this wonderful app on your phone." "You can call at taxi any time." "And if you don't like the driver you can give him a low score and he loses his livelihood." "We call it 'the sharing economy'."

I ask how the campaign is going. "Will Straw is brilliant!" "He says that, a month before polling day, his father phones his agent and tells him to make sure everyone votes Labour." "So I expect that he will do the same thing with the Remain agent." And what of Ryan Coetzee? "Oh, he's brilliant too!" "Just like he did with the Lib Dems, he is making sure our campaign keeps using the same slogan." "And then we think he will change it twice in the final week."

Thursday

"There are no jellyfish in the Lake District," our own Tim Farron told the prime minister the other day, displaying a strange lack of knowledge of his own constituency. Cameron, you may recall, told everyone to holiday in the North of England following the recent floods, before jetting off to Lanzarote himself. Last time the PM was there he was stung by a jellyfish – I presume it had been reading about his welfare policy. Incidentally, if stung by the feared Rutland Man o' War when swimming in Rutland Water, the consensus is that one should urinate upon the affected area or ask a friend to do so if it proves Hard to Reach. I am not sure if it makes it sting any the less, but it tends to take your mind off it.

Where was I? Oh yes, jellyfish in the Lake District. When the Kendal Mint Cake industry was established in the mid 18th century, its product was a beige colour. However, public taste changed and, by the accession of Victoria, had come to demand the pristine white bars we know today. It was found that the only safe and effective way of bleaching the cake was by the use of an extract of jellyfish, so they were introduced to the area. Ullswater and Thirlmere were soon simply teeming with the things. Other means of whitening the mint cake were later found, which is why these lakes are today mercifully free of jellyfish. By then, however, some had escaped to the fells, where they live to this day. The unwary walker who strays too far from the path may yet find himself suffering a nasty sting.

Friday

A breeze stirs the May blossom, inspiring me to prop open the French windows in the Library. I settle down to review David Laws' memoir of his time in government for the High Leicestershire Radical and am embarrassed by my inability to find the volume. Only after I have led my staff in a systematic search do I find it propping open those windows.

I find the book has three heroes: Nick Clegg, Danny Alexander and, above all, Laws himself. (Poor Huhne and High-Voltage Cable, who must be admitted to know how

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many beans make five, do not get a look in.) Still, one has to admire the mordant wit of Jonny Oates, as quoted by Laws: "Your constituents will be mad if they do not re-elect you, Danny. And if they don't, we should ask for all that money back that has been sprayed around your area – the extra ski lifts and the gold-lined roads." Except that, if you have been to Badenoch lately, you will know that Oates was speaking no more than the truth.

Saturday

Each year the winning crew in the Boat Race is invited – "lured" might be a more honest way of putting it – to Rutland Water to challenge the eight from our own University of Rutland at Belvoir. With its jagged rocks, submerged wrecks and wartime mines, the course offers a challenge all its own. As is customary, Rutland wins. When the surviving Cambridge oarsmen attempt to introduce one of their customs to the event, I tell them shortly to "Take your hands off our cox." You see, the Rutland crew is traditionally coxed by a Well-Behaved Orphan – they may not be that good at steering, but they are all Terribly Light. As I had seen Ruttie (my old friend the Rutland Water Monster) lurking in the deep, and as Ofsted has been asking Awkward Questions lately, I decided that throwing the winning cox into the water might not be such a good idea.

Sunday

To St Asquith's for Divine Service. The Revd Hughes tells us about the Children of Israel, who found themselves in "a great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought". Speaking as a Liberal Democrat, I know exactly how they felt.

Monday

May Day in the village. Morris dancers spill from the doors of the Bonkers' Arms, while youths and maidens dance around the maypole. The Queen of the May is crowned, whereupon the cavorting figure of the Jack-in-the-Green leads us in procession to a conveniently sited stone circle. Then the aforementioned youths and maidens plight their troths in the meadows. (I used to play practical jokes on Roy Jenkins, but I have to admit that it is his reforms that allow them to do it openly.) Above it all, on a green hill, stands the giant wicker figures of a hare with its wretched occupant – well, he was warned against putting it up in the Bonkers Hall ward.

Tuesday

The telephone is brought to me; who should be at the other end of the line than one of those amusing young people at Liberator magazine? I am respectfully asked if I would care to include my predictions for May's various elections in this diary. "By all means, I reply. "When is the copy deadline? The week after polling day, I trust: that makes it so much easier to get one's predictions right." Not a bit of it: it turns out that the copy deadline is tonight. Who do they think I am? The Wise Woman of Wing?

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